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*Literary Journalism Studies*

Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2009

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# LJS

## *Literary Journalism Studies*

### Inaugural Issue

The Problem and the Promise of  
Literary Journalism Studies *by Norman Sims*

*An exclusive excerpt from the soon-to-be-released narrative  
nonfiction account, published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux*

TEARS IN THE DARKNESS: THE STORY  
OF THE BATAAN DEATH MARCH AND ITS AFTERMATH  
*by Michael and Elizabeth Norman*

Writing Narrative Portraiture  
*by Michael Norman*

*South: Where Travel Meets Literary Journalism* *by Isabel Soares*

"My Story Is Always Escaping into Other People" *by Robert Alexander*

Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible *by Beate Josephi  
and Christine Müller*

Recovering the Peculiar Life and Times of Tom Hedley  
and of Canadian New Journalism *by Bill Reynolds*

*The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies*

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## *On the Cover*

The ghost image in the background of our cover is based on this iconic photo of American prisoners-of-war, hands bound behind their backs, who took part



*Photo is in the collection of the United States National Archives and is in the public domain.*

in the 1942 Bataan Death March. The Death March is the subject of Michael and Elizabeth M. Norman's forthcoming *Tears in the Darkness*, published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux. Excerpts begin on page 33, followed by an essay by Michael Norman on the challenges of writing the book, which required ten years of research, travel, and interviewing American and Filipino survivors of the march, as well as Japanese participants.

# *Literary Journalism Studies*

The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

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## FOR CONTRIBUTORS

**L**ITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES invites submission of scholarly articles on literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, “new journalism,” and the nonfiction novel, as well as literary nonfiction and creative nonfiction that emphasizes cultural revelation. The journal has an international focus and seeks submissions on the theory, history and pedagogy of literary journalism throughout the world. All disciplinary approaches are welcome. Submissions should be informed with an awareness of the existing scholarship and should be between 3,000 and 8,000 words in length, including notes. To encourage international dialogue, the journal is open to publishing one short example or an excerpt of literary journalism per issue accompanied by a scholarly gloss about a writer not widely known outside his or her country. The example or excerpt must be translated into English. The scholarly gloss must be between 1,500 and 2,500 words long and indicate why the example is important in the context of its national culture. Together, both the text and the gloss must not exceed 8,000 words in length. The contributor is responsible for obtaining all copyright permissions, including from the publisher, author and translator as necessary. The journal is also willing to consider publication of exclusive excerpts of narrative literary journalism accepted for publication by major publishers.

E-mail submission (as an MS Word attachment) is mandatory. A cover page indicating the title of the paper, the author’s name, institutional affiliation, and contact information, along with an abstract (50-100 words), should accompany all submissions. The cover page should be sent as a separate attachment from the abstract and submission to facilitate distribution to readers. The author’s name should not appear on the abstract or on the paper. All submissions must be in English Microsoft Word and follow the *CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE* (Humanities endnote style) <[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)>. All submissions will be blind reviewed. Send submissions to the editor at <[literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com](mailto:literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com)>.

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**B**OOK REVIEWS: Book reviews of 1,000-2,000 words on both the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars are invited. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editors based on merit. Reviewers may suggest book review prospects or write the book review editors for suggestions. Usually reviewers will be responsible for obtaining their respective books. Book reviews and/or related queries should be sent to Tom Connery at <[tbconnery@stthomas.edu](mailto:tbconnery@stthomas.edu)> or Susie Eisenhuth at <[susie.eisenhuth@uts.edu.au](mailto:susie.eisenhuth@uts.edu.au)>.

## Note from the editor . . .



Today, there can be little doubt that there is a need for a scholarly journal dedicated to the study of literary journalism (and its variations), a discourse committed to what I like to call the “aesthetics of experience.” For much too long, scholars dedicated to this study have understood that there is a critical and cultural value to this once-neglected genre. The inaugural issue of this journal serves to demonstrate that this scholarship has come of age.

The need for such a journal is especially compelling now. We live in a time of dramatic change, not only at our respective local and national levels, but at the global as well. It is during such times that literary journalism has thrived because of a fundamental human need to try to understand at the more personal level the new complexities that are so much larger than us—and that threaten to overwhelm us. Among other reasons, the appeal of literary journalism derives from the fact that the human mind is wired to engage in inquiry into the world by telling stories in the conventional sense of “storytelling.” At the heart of “storytelling” is the symbiosis of narrative and descriptive modalities. What we’re talking about is a “narra-descriptive journalism” with literary ambition, or the capacity to prompt us imaginatively to consider and negotiate different possibilities of meaning. It is a genre that “tease[s] us out of thought,” to crib from the poet Keats. At the heart of such a genre, then, is cognitive self-efficacy or personal enfranchisement.

Literary journalism insists that we need to confront, however challenging, the phenomenal expression of our world. It needs to be examined by students in order to encourage their own sense of self-efficacy in dealing with the complexities of that world, as well as to understand its power for encouraging personal and social change (whether for better or ill). It also needs to be studied by scholars in order to illuminate aesthetic, critical, cultural, and historical contexts for not only students but society at large. Finally, in the complexities of a postmodern world where the image has come to vie with what was once a print world, literary journalism, because of its inherent appeal, needs to be studied for the sake of print literacy—whether on paper or in electronic form. After all, we now know that reading changes the physiological structure of the brain. And without those changes, we are the poorer in trying to understand and negotiate those shifting complexities we find so daunting, and that literary journalism so much better addresses at the personal level than, say, the abstract tract, the conventional news story, or the escapist illusions of the romance.

Whether we call it literary journalism, narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, literary nonfiction, creative nonfiction, the Chinese *bagao wenxue*, or the Russian *ocherki*—or call it by our personally negotiated terms such as “narra-descriptive journalism”—the reasons above help to account for why we need to engage in a scholarly study of this compelling discourse. Reading further, you will discover others.

—JOHN C. HARTSOCK





## *Essay*

# The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies

by Norman Sims

University of Massachusetts Amherst, U.S.A.

In 1974, the scholar James W. Carey called for a systematic cultural history of journalism. Something similar could be proposed today for literary journalism studies. “Cultural history,” Carey said, “is not concerned merely with events but with the thought within them”—the “study of consciousness in the past.” There’s a significance to Caesar crossing the Rubicon, he said, but we would be well served by reconstructing what Caesar felt as he crossed the Rubicon—“the particular constellation of attitudes, emotions, motive and expectations that were experienced in that act.” He called for historical scholarship that could move beyond a perceived journalistic progress toward factual accuracy and press freedom, and instead recapture the meaning of journalism in its own time.

Today, as a new journal and a new international scholarly organization dedicated to literary journalism begin, we encounter the problem of literary journalism studies. We have a growing interest in the scholarship of literary journalism not only in North America, where its strongest scholarly traditions have arisen, but also around the world. At International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS) conferences, scholars from China, Turkey, Brazil and elsewhere have joined with North American and European researchers. The problem of literary journalism studies involves thinking about the important issues in the field. Bearing Carey’s advice in mind, this essay addresses what I see as some of the pressing issues that could benefit from further study. They include adapting different forms of analysis to the particular qualities of literary journalism, elucidating the form’s international nature and how it relates to different national cultures, placing the form within the context of a broad time frame for its history, recognizing the role that practicing writers of the genre can play in reflexive critique, and the promise of online presentation as a vehicle for the form. Finally, there is the

problem of what I call the “reality boundary,” which I will dwell on because I believe it is central to such scholarship.

While these issues are somewhat different from the ones Carey addressed, perhaps today we need to examine the forms of consciousness that created the form, and the origins of scholarship that we bring to the study of literary journalism. Until recent years in academic studies, little attention was focused on literary journalism. The scholars from the fifties and sixties that Tom Wolfe called “The Literary Gentleman in the Grandstand” considered journalism a lowlife form unworthy of representation alongside the novel and poetry. Returning the favor, literary journalists of the sixties such as Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, and Hunter Thompson expressed disdain for the community of literary scholarship. Wolfe went so far as to offend critics by suggesting that nonfiction might supplant the novel.

Many scholars started with the perception that such journalism was “literary” and based their scholarship of the genre on literary criticism and theory. That poses a potential problem. We must be careful that our scholarship does not just mimic that of one sector of the academy. Given a comparative definition offered by Wolfe that literary journalism reads like a novel or a short story, we run the risk of not examining literary journalism on its own terms. Such a scholarship should emerge from an effort to determine what those terms are.

This is because the literary constellations we see in our night sky have no meaning when viewed from another galaxy. Traditionally, English and American literary scholarship rarely included literary journalism. It didn’t matter how carefully structured, how complex the characters, how realistic or how revelatory of human truths, literary journalism was an invisible arrangement of stars. As Jonathan Raban said about a similar scholarly discrimination against travel writing:

In literature . . . the distinction between realistic fiction and the imaginative recreation of a real journey through life has been maintained with pedantic assiduity. The novel, however autobiographical, is *writing*; the book of travel, however patterned, plotted, symbolized, is just *writing-up*. It is a damnable and silly piece of class discrimination

Today, the situation has changed a little. Literary journalism is taught at a number of universities, both in North America and elsewhere. Master’s degrees are offered, sometimes in English departments under the name of “creative nonfiction,” which avoids use of the term *journalism* because of the ancient bias. International doctoral dissertations on literary journalism are completed almost every year.

But the status of literary journalism in the academy remains tenuous. I

once listened to a literary critic say that fact and fiction don't matter. In his world, the idea that you can't tell fact from fiction made some sense. When we're alone with a text, he said, our reactions are simply based on that text. Reading is reading.

We react differently, however—or I do—depending on what we know. I felt differently about George Orwell when I heard that perhaps he never shot an elephant. It changed my reaction to “Shooting an Elephant,” one of his most celebrated pieces of literary journalism. I felt the same way when I studied Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and learned that he had made up some scenes, particularly at the end of the book. Other critics, and Kenneth Burke was one, say you have to interpret a text using every scrap of evidence you can gather. Don't believe for a minute that you can understand “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” unless you know something about Coleridge's life, Burke said. In studying literary journalism and its relation to the world, I think we need to follow Burke's advice.

This is one reason why we stand to benefit from a cultural approach that goes beyond any one disciplinary perspective (and I would emphasize here that not only are literary studies inadequate to the task at hand, but also journalism and mass communication studies are not solely adequate either). What follows are, I believe, some of the more salient approaches we might take at this time to literary journalism studies. Others will undoubtedly emerge in the future.

### INTERNATIONAL STUDY

We need an international scholarship that recognizes there are different national manifestations. Despite all the North American scholarship on the subject, we should not conclude that literary journalism is only an American phenomenon. It appears in other cultures with variations in form.

For example, China has its own tradition that reflects “the particular constellation of attitudes, emotions, motive and expectations” of that society, to invoke Carey again. Chen Peiqin of Shanghai International Studies University said in her presentation at the 2008 IALJS conference in Lisbon, “Chinese Literary Reportage, *Bao Gao Wen Xue*, designated as a literary genre in the 1930s during the Chinese anti-Japanese war, has been considered by most Chinese literary critics as the best genre to expose social evils, and to call for people to take actions against social evils. Chinese literary reportage has been closely related with social movements since its emergence.” She cited early classics of the form like Xia Yan's *Slave Workers* and contemporary influential works such as Chen Guidi and Wu Chuntao's *A Survey of Chinese Peasants*, which won the Lettre Ulysses Award for the Art of Reportage in 2004. Steve Guo of Hong Kong Baptist University wrote, “As a popular style

of long form journalism, literary reporting has a stand-alone position in the Chinese press, typically written with its own style and evaluated in its own right. Perhaps more true in China than elsewhere, major conjunctions of social transition and policy shift all have their own defining masterpieces of literary reporting.” In Russia, according to John C. Hartsock, the history and development of the equivalent has both native roots and was influenced by the international proletarian writers’ movement, especially the contributions of the German and Czech writer Egon Erwin Kisch in the early twentieth century. The development of the distinctive Russian literary “reportage” continues today in the examples of such contemporary reporters as Svetlana Alexievich and the late Anna Politkovskaya, who also won the Lettre Ulysses Award, in 2003.

Examinations of literary journalism from several countries suggest they follow their own cultural pathways and do not merely imitate the American models. We need to include those international forms of literary journalism, with their variations, as a corrective to the focus on North American literary journalism. We could use more studies of writers such as Edgar Snow in China, V. S. Naipaul, and the latter’s brother Shiva Naipaul, just to name some English-speaking literary journalists. International forms that are akin to what we call literary journalism often put more stress on social usefulness than on artistry, which may be one of many marks that distinguish them from the North American varieties.

In addition, we could use a lot more translations into English of literary journalism published in other countries. The strictly English speakers among us are impoverished by our lack of access to works of literary journalism from China, Russia, Portugal, Brazil and other parts of Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe. It is hard enough to get fiction translated, let alone journalism.

### BROAD HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

**I**n the United States we finally understand that literary journalism has a long history. Moreover, it now has a foundation in scholarly studies because of the efforts of many dedicated scholars over the last couple decades.

I believe we should base the history of literary journalism on a broad time frame—not assuming, for example, that all literary journalism descended from the New Journalism of the sixties. Here, the journalism academy has been as guilty as any other, in part because of what Carey dealt with: a view that the present is our culminating achievement.

We need to connect the works produced to the culture and the context of their time. Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, even though it is a novel, can be

studied as contributing to the literary journalism of its time, especially as the form was navigating through the era of Muckraking journalism in the United States. Similarly, some scholars might deny Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* as literary journalism because he made up a few scenes (or more), but a more nuanced reading would see his reporting, ambitions, literary skill, and innovations as important to the development of the form within the standards of the sixties.

### LEARNING FROM WRITERS

Along the same lines, we might break down the wall that divides scholars from writers, and recognize that writers are just as knowledgeable and skilled in their own ways about their work as are the scholars who view it from a distance. We can learn from each other. Writers triangulate their efforts to achieve accuracy, using their own notes, second opinions, fact-checkers, and multiple perspectives. The writer knows how the work was reported, the meanings that were consciously built in, and the techniques that went into creating it. These are concerns shared with scholars.

### THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF ONLINE

In today's world, many are asking how literary journalism will play out on the Internet. The Internet has already revived documentary video production, which in time may lead to forms of video and multi-platform literary journalism on the Web. Literary journalism requires immersion reporting, accuracy, careful structuring, and a lot of labor, no matter what medium is used. The creators of literary journalism need sustainable revenues if they are to produce professional work. So far, the Web has not brought forth a new economic model that will pay for the production of a labor-intensive form such as literary journalism. Nonetheless, technology makes possible new connections and new discussions, and these topics should attract our scholarly attention.

### THE REALITY BOUNDARY

We often fail to mention, perhaps because it is taken for granted, that literary journalism begins with the reality of the world as we find it. All of its subject matter refers to that world. In trying to understand the centrality of this issue, literary journalism can be seen as a genre surrounded by other related forms of literature. We can imagine literary journalism in the center of a design, say as a ceramic tile connected to other tiles. There are borders between literary journalism and the surrounding forms, which include autobiography, fiction, science writing, conventional journalism, and history. Sometimes a writer can stray over a border without damage—say

into science writing or history. But when the writer crosses the border into fiction, it triggers a hunt by the guardians of journalism. Those guardians have made life miserable for writers like Truman Capote, who crossed the line from literary journalism, and for conventional journalists who became fabricators, such as Jayson Blair of the *New York Times* and Stephen Glass of *The New Republic*. Fiction—and sometimes autobiography and memoir, I might add—is separated from literary journalism by the reality boundary.

Literary journalism that keeps to its side of the reality boundary creates unique problems for readers, critics, and scholars. The American literary journalist Tracy Kidder provides an example. After Kidder published his book *Old Friends*, which was about two residents of a nursing home, a novelist and critic reviewed the book in the press. She said in her experience old people were not as nice as the ones Kidder had portrayed. She seemed to imply that Kidder's characters would be more believable if he had made them more edgy and difficult, in other words, like a crabby and self-centered elderly person that she may have known.

Nothing quite like this had been suggested in Kidder's long career writing literary journalism, including books such as *The Soul of a New Machine*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, *House*, and *Among Schoolchildren*. He spent a year researching the nursing home in *Old Friends*, including many weeks spent in the company of the two old men who were the leading characters. Looking at the review, Kidder shook his head and commented that in journalism you have to deal with the world as you find it. Later he told me, "The beauty of a novel is that evil seems explicable, and you should get the feeling of seeing a character in the round. Life as you encounter it as a journalist is a lot messier than you'd want it in a novel and evil isn't always explicable. It's a little frustrating." Clearly, Kidder would never change the world as he found it to make the story conform to his imagination of how the world should be, or of how a character might be improved to better suit a story line.

Reviewers are not always the same as literary critics. Yet this example strikes me as a case of two smart people, who were both familiar with the issues, facing each other across the reality boundary.

John McPhee, a realist literary journalist who usually avoids taking a first-person role in his many books, told me how he views his own work: "You've got a professional writer whose milieu seems to be real people, real places, factual writing . . ." Some literary journalists emphasize the writer's perspective, but it is nevertheless a perspective on the world as they find it.

Norman Mailer commented on the connection of standard journalism with "fiction" in a much more sophisticated and post-modern way after covering the 1960 Democratic National Convention in the United States.

Mailer compared conventional journalism to fiction (or to literary journalism, take your pick):

Indeed, the real premise of journalism is that the best instrument for measuring history is a faceless, even a mindless, recorder. Whereas the writer of fiction is closer to that moving world of Einstein. There the velocity of the observer is as crucial to the measurement as any object observed. For fiction probably makes the secret assumption that we learn the truth through a comparison of the lies, since we are obliged to receive the majority of our experience at second hand through parents, friends, mates, lovers, enemies, and the journalists who report it to us. So our best chance of improving those private charts of our own most complicated lives, our unadmitted maps of reality, our very comprehension, if you will, of the way existence works—seems to profit most if we can have some little idea, at least, of the warp of the observer who passes on the experience. Fiction, as I use the word, is then that reality which does not cohere to anonymous axes of fact but is breathed in through the swarm of our male and female movements about one another, a novelistic assumption, for don't we perceive the truth of a novel as its events pass through the personality of the writer?

Mailer believed that what he observed gained meaning as it was filtered through his own psyche. And therefore it could have no meaning for the reader outside of that psyche. So why not examine the psyche that had filtered the experience along with the experience itself? Fair enough. But bear in mind that his encounters with real people, such as John F. Kennedy, were at the heart of his report. He knew that the political convention existed and that he could report it accurately—"I would endeavor to get my facts as scrupulously as a reporter. (At least!)" Mailer said—and, supporting his ironic jab at standard reporting, his writing kept to the reality side of the boundary.

"Reality" has taken a hit in academe since the early twentieth century when scholars started to describe differing perspectives and to challenge the validity of terms such as truth, reality, and objectivity. All that was good, even if overdone. The study of literary journalism, however, involves the efforts of skilled writers who speak about the reality of the world as they find it, and who write about people located in time and space with real names and real lives. As Mas'ud Zavarzadeh noted, what takes place in literary journalism "are actual phenomena in the world accessible to ordinary human senses and, unlike the contents of fictive novels, exist outside the cover of books. The subjectivity involved in all acts of human perception of the external world does not deny the phenomenistic status of the experiences transcribed . . ."



We have to acknowledge the efforts of literary journalists to adhere to the reality boundary and not reduce it as just another rhetorical exercise.

James Carey once mentioned that all parents encounter religion at the point when they need to reassure a child crying in the night by saying, "It will be all right." We encounter our fundamental literary interpretations in a similar way when a child, watching a movie on TV, asks, "Is this real?" We should not respond to the problems of literary journalism by ignoring the difficulties presented by the reality boundary. At minimum, we should interpret a work based on the consciousness and culture of its own time, not just that of our own.

Memoir suffered considerable damage most recently when James Frey's book, *A Million Little Pieces*, was exposed as a fraud. Frey strayed over the reality boundary from memoir to fiction, prompting the literary journalist Gay Talese to tell, pointedly and forcefully, a gathering of Goucher College MFA students that "Nonfiction means NO FICTION!" Memoir has been a tool often used productively by literary journalists, but when a memoir steps across the reality boundary, then it is no longer literary journalism. Memoirists such as Madeleine Blais and Walt Harrington have coined the term "reported memoir" to indicate a form that maintains its verifiable contact with the real world. David Beers, editor of *The Tyee*, an independent online magazine (<http://thetyee.ca>), calls it "the personal reported essay." Autobiography has similar difficulties. We can reasonably be skeptical that people will be honest and truthful about themselves. If we discover that an autobiography or memoir—or, heaven forbid, a work of journalism—is embellished or faked, we react negatively. It makes a difference to us. Fundamentally, we feel cheated.

Fiction begins life in a different place on the other side of the reality boundary. To be sure, fiction writers often believe that they are conveying a reality, too. I would not disagree with that. But the reality I'm discussing here is the one Kidder alluded to, that in the phenomenal world—the world of time and space—reality does not always conform to how we believe it might in a conventional fictional model. We assume that we can discover the difference. Fiction creates an imaginary world and seeks emotional truth, but it has no firm requirement for the troubling details of the real world, as does literary journalism. Its nursing-home residents can be mean or nice depending on the writer's narrative needs.

The other surrounding forms—history, science writing, and conventional journalism—are separated more by their intentions and formats, and they share a requirement for factual accuracy.

I would suggest that a cultural approach to literary journalism studies needs a scholarship that can grapple with the issues of reality that I've



examined here. Literary journalism speaks to the nature of our phenomenal reality *in spite* of the fact that our interpretations are inevitably subjective and personal.

### CONCLUSION

As the international scholarship on literary journalism expands, and especially with a new journal, this seems a good time to think about a wide variety of approaches to literary journalism studies similar to the cultural studies that James Carey called for in journalism history.

Can we develop a scholarship that is culturally sensitive to the way the craft is practiced not just in different countries but also in different historical time frames? Can we take into account the artistry of writers, and their relationships with readers? Can our scholarship expand upon analysis derived from the study of fiction and create one that takes account of the reality boundary as I've identified it?

Carey's call for a cultural history of journalism fits well with literary journalism because it is a form of journalism that also seeks to understand feelings, emotions, and expectations—the consciousness behind events and actions that can provide reflexive cultural insights into other times and places. Some scholars are already working in this vineyard. We can only hope that more scholars will study literary journalism on its own distinctive terms.

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*For many, Norman Sims served as their introduction to literary journalism in his 1984 classic anthology, The Literary Journalists, which inspired a generation of both scholars and practitioners. It is appropriate, then, that this inaugural issue of LJS should begin with an essay in which Sims looks to the future of this area of scholarship. Sims is currently professor of journalism at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he teaches the history of journalism, freedom of the press, writing, and literary journalism. He is the editor of two anthologies, his landmark The Literary Journalists (Ballantine, 1984) and Literary Journalism (Ballantine, 1995, edited with Mark Kramer); editor of a groundbreaking collection of scholarly articles by several authors, Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century (Northwestern, 2008); and author of a history, True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism (Northwestern, 2007). He has been studying literary journalism for more than twenty-five years.*



### Note on Sources

James Carey's "The Problem of Journalism History," from which I have borrowed the title, appeared in *Journalism History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1974. Dr. Carey was my dissertation supervisor at the University of Illinois, and a long-time

friend. His article was a beacon of light that showed journalism historians the way for many years.

As a member of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, I have benefited from wide-ranging discussions with colleagues about the directions that literary journalism studies might take. We come from different backgrounds and disciplines, and in many cases I am not familiar with the history and traditions in those areas. These collaborations have been enlightening and I hope we all can benefit from such scholarly interactions. This essay has grown from invigorating conversations with several IALJS members, and I'd especially like to thank John C. Hartsock of SUNY Cortland, John Bak of Université Nancy 2 in France, David Abrahamson of Northwestern University, and Bill Reynolds of Ryerson University in Canada for their comments and suggestions.

My point about Orwell's elephant is not meant to take sides. See Hugh Kenner, "The Politics of the Plain Style" in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (p. 183) for one side, and for another see *Finding George Orwell in Burma* by Emma Larkin (a pseudonym), which quotes Orwell's wife Sonia saying that he did shoot an elephant (p. 225).

The quotation from Tom Wolfe about the literary gentlemen in the grandstand is from "The New Journalism" in a 1973 book by the same name. That essay and its appendix remains one of the most important sources for studies of New Journalism, even though it was self-centered and ignored a great deal of important literary journalism history, perhaps because that history had yet to be written.

Jonathan Raban's comment on travel writing appeared in *For Love and Money: A Writing Life, 1969–1989*, p. 236.

Chen Peiqin's article, "Social Movements and Chinese Literary Reportage," and Steve Guo's "Between the Lines: Literary Reporting and the Margin of Legitimacy in China" were papers prepared for the 2008 conference of the IALJS in Lisbon. John C. Hartsock's comments on Kisch are in "Literary Reportage: The Trans-National Influencings of the 'Other' Literary Journalism," presented in Denmark at the 2008 conference of the European Society for the Study of English, and will also appear in the upcoming University of Massachusetts Press book edited by John Bak, *International Literary Journalism: Historical Traditions and Transnational Influences*.

The representation of literary journalism as a ceramic tile surrounded by other forms originated, I believe, with Mark Kramer, and I would like to credit him for that image. Norman Mailer's comments on the 1960 Democratic National Convention are in *Some Honorable Men* (1976), both in the preface and in his article, "Superman Comes to the Supermarket." The quotation from Mas'ud Zavarzadeh comes from *The Mythopoeic Reality: The Postwar American Nonfiction Novel* (1976), p. 226, and is quoted in John C. Hartsock's *History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (2000), p. 54.

Thanks also to Tracy Kidder for personal comments, some of which are contained in my book, *True Stories*.

# *South: Where Travel Meets Literary Journalism*

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*The work of Portuguese journalist Miguel Sousa Tavares offers an opportunity to explore the rarely examined relationship between literary journalism and travel writing.*

One thing that cannot be denied of Portuguese journalist Miguel Sousa Tavares is that he is a man of many talents. Contributing to such periodicals as *O Expresso*, Portugal's leading weekly paper, and *A Bola*, a sports daily, he also acts as a news pundit in one of the newscasts on national television, being often accused by his detractors of partiality and bias and of not being able to separate his personal opinions from his comments. He is known for the corrosive nature of many of his statements and for not shying away from controversy. Apart from this, he is a successful novelist and an author of children's stories. His first novel *Equator* (2003) sold an astonishing (for Portugal) 300,000 copies in four years, won a distinguished Grinzane Cavour Award, and has been translated and published in the Netherlands, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Greece, the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Brazil. It is awaiting publication by Bloomsbury in Britain.<sup>1</sup> Put simply, Sousa Tavares is a tempestuous journalist, feared opinion maker, and respected novelist.

He is also one of Portugal's leading literary journalists and this finds expression in his many travel accounts.<sup>2</sup> But his is a style that also reflects the broader European characteristics of what is known on this side of the Atlantic as "literary reportage" or "reportage literature."<sup>3</sup>

In this examination we will focus on those travel accounts, published firstly in the press and then later collected as a book, in order to explore how

they intersect with literary journalism. This is because when analyzing both literary journalism and travel writing from a theoretical standpoint, we are confronted with hybrid genres, hybrid because they borrow both from each other as well as from other nonfictional and fictional forms. To support the claim that travel accounts can be interpreted as literary journalism, we need to ground our inference in the notion that, as Mary Louise Pratt discusses, travel writing is defined by “its heterogeneity and its interactions with other kinds of expression.”<sup>4</sup> Yet similar observations have been made of literary journalism, that it is a kind of “epistemological moving object.”<sup>5</sup> Thus both share in common a critical fluidity.

Our examination will focus on Sousa Tavares’s 1998 volume *Sul. Viagens*, or, in a literal English translation, *South. Travels*. From reading *Sul*, what emerges is that Sousa Tavares is not one of those larger than life (and thus not reflecting of true life) swashbuckling travellers like Errol Flynn or Lowell Thomas. Instead, he is the observer of different realities not usually accessible to the reader. Most of all, he is always the literary reporter, the translator of the “feel” of places to his public, or as Thomas B. Connery has characterized it, the “feel” of facts.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Sousa Tavares is the travel writer, the *other* kind of translator of *Other* places, the mediator between his own “point of origin in a culture and the context he is describing.”<sup>7</sup>

For those not familiar with what is generally common knowledge in Portugal, Miguel Sousa Tavares, born in 1952, is the son of one of the most cherished and renowned twentieth century Portuguese poets, Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen, and of former lawyer and journalist Francisco Sousa Tavares, the latter a confessed opponent of the mid-twentieth century Portuguese dictator António de Oliveira Salazar. Like his father, the son, Miguel, also left a career in law to devote himself to journalism. Having worked for the major periodicals, magazines and television channels in the country, he was already very well known to the public before he attained success as a novelist. Mainly he has gained his journalistic reputation as an assertive interviewer, feature story author, and reporter. Reportage, taken here as a literal translation from the Portuguese word *reportagem*, meaning in-depth reporting,<sup>8</sup> is a field in which Sousa Tavares has in particular made a name for himself as a journalist. *Sahara. The Sand Republic*, published in 1983, is an example of this and the result of an assignment to follow the Polisario Front guerrillas in their fight for the independence of Western Sahara. It would prove a cornerstone for future feature stories, news articles, and travel accounts that he would write.<sup>9</sup>

Travelling to southern latitudes, namely to the vast expanses of the Sahara, is indisputably one of the greatest passions of Sousa Tavares and the

inspiration for many of his travel accounts published throughout the years and first compiled in *Sul*. To mark the tenth edition of *Sul* and commemorate the selling of over 75,000 copies, which for Portugal confers best-selling status to the work in question, the editors at *Oficina do Livro*, the publisher, put forward a new 2007 edition to which texts published since the earlier editions have been added. The newest edition encompasses geographical localities from Egypt to the Amazon forest, revisits the Portuguese colonial past—one of Sousa Tavares's favourite themes—in trips to such places as Goa in India and the Cape Verde Islands, and, of course, includes his landscapes of the Sahara. Finally, and not least important, he explores his own country as a traveller on a journey—not as a detached tourist on a recreational trip.

There is, to be sure, an ongoing debate regarding the differences and similarities between tourists, who travel to places for recreation, and travellers for whom the journey is a quest in search of self-discovery and interpretation of the Other, if in fact their journey is not an attempt to merge with the Other.<sup>10</sup> Tourists are the beneficiaries of the advent of mass tourism promoted by such agents as Thomas Cook, whereas travellers on a quest are the heirs of the learned traveller doing the Grand Tour for educational purposes to the ancient sites of European civilization. This dichotomy has created the notion that tourists are not real travellers but instead consumers of the pleasurable experiences afforded by travel. It is true that this assumption has recently been challenged by such authors as sociologist John Urry, who claims that “acting as a tourist is one of the defining characteristics of being ‘modern.’”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the tourist *is* the modern traveller in this particular interpretation. In such a light, even anthropologists can be regarded as “a variant of tourists” since “both are seeking to create symbolic capital from travel and both work by translating foreign experience into domestic categories.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite such efforts to merge the defining concepts of what is the tourist with those that characterize the traveller, we should still acknowledge “the ‘ideal’ traveller as one who in the first place has set out in search of something, definite or indefinite. He may have a concrete aim, or just a vague longing, but his journey is a quest.”<sup>13</sup> It may or may not include tourists in the conventional sense. But there can still be “tourists” who are nevertheless travellers on a quest. Such a traveller is the channel through which the foreign Other is apprehended. Consequently, “writing” the travel story is a complex, if bidirectional process, involving “the familiarization or domestication of the unfamiliar at the same time as the defamiliarization of the familiar or domestic.”<sup>14</sup> The traveller and the travel writer are, hence, the mediators between the world of the familiar Us and the foreign Other in the attempt to somehow either domesticate or translate the strangeness of the latter. The

position that all travellers are, in effect, only tourists, fails to acknowledge the two-way direction of the enterprise, that not only can tourists domesticate the strange, but that travellers can be changed and even be absorbed by the strange, much as traveller and explorer Richard F. Burton often “went native” and even appears to have converted to Sufism in the nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Sousa Tavares, as we will see, there is also a clear connection here between those who have a need to “domesticate” and colonialism—to make “others” be like us. He, on the other hand, seeks to defamiliarize the familiar or domestic that is so much taken for granted.

Relevant to our discussion about how travel accounts and literary journalism intersect is the observation that literary journalism is fundamentally about cultural revelation of the Other.<sup>16</sup> Much of what can be said of the questing traveller above can also be applied to the literary journalist, as will become evident.

Sousa Tavares approaches his travels initially with the eye of the reporter. But he is not just any reporter because his reporting quickly succumbs to the influence of the storyteller as he confesses in the preface to *Sul*: “I am a storyteller. They pay me for it, they pay me to go around the world and tell what I saw.”<sup>17</sup> Thus in the opening to the first pages of *Sul*, the reader is confronted with the explanation he gives that tries to overcome the difficulties in characterizing what he is about to write: stories, reportage, travel accounts? Furthermore, the epigraph of the book is a poem by his mother, entitled “Deriva” or “Drift,” and its inclusion is revealing of the son’s intent. The poem is about the delights of travelling to exotic places, of which only the Kingdom of Prester John remains undiscovered. The end of the poem, which reflects on the nature of Sousa Tavares’s own personal travels, reads: “The orders I took I did not follow/And thus telling everything I saw/I do not know whether I misinterpreted everything or everything I discovered.”<sup>18</sup> In this light, we can assume that, even though Sousa Tavares is a journalist, he does not comply with the conventional requirements of the journalistic assignment. He does not follow the orders of his news organization. He acknowledges he may have misinterpreted. At the same time he may have discovered what was not known before. One detects here in “discovery” a metaphor that goes beyond the mere reporting—as a form of cataloguing—of the obvious. Ultimately, his texts are not the accounts of the conventional journalist and the tourist, both of whom share one trait in common: they both embark on seeing the world not to engage in it at a personal level, but to see it from a safe, objectifying distance, the first posing with the notepad in hand as if its authority provides some kind of protective shield, the other posing *behind* the Nikon with the safety of a return ticket in his back pocket.<sup>19</sup>

Sousa Tavares is the first to declare that his intentions as a conventional journalist were not carried out because, in the contact with the subject he was supposed to observe, he always found a special, undefined something that led him to a different journalism, a distinct way of reporting. It is as if he is on a pilgrimage and he finds he can never be the detached, objectifying journalist. The result is that the journalist is engaged in an immersion, one of the hallmarks of literary journalism method as Norman Sims has noted.<sup>20</sup> The experience is not unlike a baptism that leads him to the ultimate apprehension of the object of his reporting: the subjective and intuitive knowledge of something at the heart of literary journalism.

The collection of texts in *Sul* can be said to be the heir of a long tradition of travel writing, but these are also texts written by a reporter and published in the press as journalism before having been compiled between book covers symbolic of having arrived as a literature, in this case a travel literature. In other words, these are texts that can both fall within the realm of travel writing and literary journalism, those two hybrid forms that come together and whose boundaries fail to be clear and well defined.

Regarding the intersection of travel accounts and literary journalism, it has been observed:

Literary journalism differs from and is similar to such forms as travel . . . narratives . . . . An effort has already been made to separate travelogue from narrative literary journalism as two different forms or genres . . . . No such effort is entirely successful, however. Ultimately . . . both . . . belong to different kinds of forms or genres that are not mutually exclusive. Travel narratives, on their face, belong to a topical genre . . . . Literary journalism . . . , on the other hand, is fundamentally a modal genre, that of narrative. But travelogue clearly can be in the form of narrative as well; thus boundaries can disappear between travelogue and narrative literary journalism.<sup>21</sup>

In the case of the texts in *Sul*, the topic acting as common denominator is the journey south, but it is as a narrative reporter that Sousa Tavares records it. Each text takes the reader somewhere different and in each one the reporter narrates the steps of the journey and his personal impressions and opinions. Consequently, *Sul* can be regarded as representative of the interrelation between travel writing and literary journalism. As Sousa Tavares also explains in the preface to the book:

I have not always travelled south, but I have not seen anything as extraordinary as the south. South is an airplane door that opens and an intense smell of green that drains you, the heat, the dampness sticking to your skin, the laughter of people, the noise . . . , an excess



of everything that swallows you and drags you as an immense wave.  
You feel like closing your eyes . . . and letting go.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Sousa Tavares makes it clear that *he* and not some rhetorically constructed pose of journalistic omniscience will be the narrator to the public of his own travels. As he states: “This is a travel book.”<sup>23</sup> But again we must bear in mind that in Portugal this is viewed as the account of a professional journalist reporting from the foreign place. For example, the text “Amazon, the Last Frontier,” published in 1998, was prompted by the fact that twelve years before Sousa Tavares had been sent to Brazil “to shoot a 52-minute film about the history of Portuguese colonization in the Amazon, from the Marquis of Pombal to the splendour of the rubber era.”<sup>24</sup> His main intention for going was, more than anything else, *not* to see the tourist’s version, one where hired “Indians” would wait to have their photos taken by hordes of tourists in three different variations and prices: “with snake, with crocodile, or just Indian.”<sup>25</sup> Instead, he wanted to immerse himself in the wild and vast jungle, or as he confesses: “My Amazon was the one in *The Jungle*, by Ferreira de Castro, the one in the travels of Alexander von Humboldt, and the one of the tribes that had never seen white men until they were revealed on the pages of *National Geographic Magazine*. If such a thing still existed, that was what I had to see—before it disappeared.”<sup>26</sup> “Amazon, the Last Frontier” is, thus, the intertwining of the reporter’s account commissioned by RTP, the Portuguese national television network, and the traveller mesmerized by his experience. As if to impress the power of that experience, he lets his readers know that of all the documentary tapes his son has seen he always asks the father to show “the Amazon tape” in which he can see his father in a canoe on the river or walking in a Kayapo village. It is as a literary journalist that he concludes his reportage in a somewhat nostalgic tone for what will be lost: “I hope he [his son] will never have to ask me: what happened to the world you saw and that your generation inherited?”<sup>27</sup> The fear of loss, then, is what motivates Sousa Tavares: the loss of a time when things were pristine and safe from the ravages of modernization and development, just as we will discuss below when he travels in his own country. And the nostalgia of loss is what helps to elevate the reportage to what is literary because nostalgia is haunting, and the emotional and psychic ghosts that haunt are memorable, always calling to us from beyond some utilitarian boundary.

Clearly, these texts can also be of an autobiographical nature, the journey south being a journey of the narrator to discover something about himself. Hence, again, the similarity to a personal pilgrimage. Tom Wolfe noted that there was a thin line separating autobiography from travel writing, and another thin line separating both from what he called the New Journalism.



As he suggested: "The sort of reporting that one now finds in the New Journalism probably begins with the travel literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries . . . . Many of the travel writers seem to have been inspired by the success of autobiographies. Their idea was to create some autobiography for themselves by heading off to foreign places in search of color and adventure."<sup>28</sup> In other words, they have, in "creating" some kind of "autobiography for themselves," embarked on a story about a journey that is in part about self-revelation, and of course in part about cultural revelation.

Sousa Tavares is the traveller who lets us see himself immersed in his journey and in his reporting, as he does in the text "Alentejo: On a Landscape of Ruins," originally published in October 1997 and in which he writes about the Alentejo, a southern province of Portugal. It deserves closer examination because it helps us to understand Sousa Tavares's method and intentions as a literary journalist. After his many journeys to other lands, he has returned to his own, now armed with a keenly attuned sensitivity to what is alien in his own country. In other words, he will now defamiliarize the familiar or the domestic that is so taken for granted in Portugal.

Travelling from Lisboa, the Portuguese capital, Sousa Tavares goes by car to rural Alentejo where time seems to stand still in contrast with the urban center he has left. When he gets there he says he is "a journalist in a state of grace, a Lisboner in an intensive process of liberation."<sup>29</sup> What is clear from this sentence is that it is difficult for the reader to identify the factual, objective journalist, notwithstanding Sousa Tavares's self-reflexive observation that he is a "journalist." After all, he is *liberated* from being a conventional journalist. Suggestively, liberation is the goal of any pilgrimage, usually conceptualized as liberation from, or forgiveness for, one's sins and being in the grace of God.

The traveller and the journalist together take turns stepping back and forth into the foreground of the narrative scene, of which the author is very much conscious. This is reflected in the following:

I hit the road, in my moving "office". A car covered in dust, with books, magazines, and brochures of Mértola and Pomarão scattered throughout the seats, camera films lying "provisionally" on the floor, notebooks . . . , pens, tape recorder and camera close at hand, on the passenger seat, bottles of water that rolled to my feet, some empty, others full, packs of chewing-gum and cigarettes, a phone to connect me to the newsroom and the world and, lastly, a road map . . . . It looked like a Camel ad: I even shaved in the rear-view mirror.<sup>30</sup>

As we can see, Sousa Tavares here is surrounded by the trappings of the professional journalist. He needs to stay in touch with the newsroom and

has brought with him the necessary tape recorder, all the notebooks, and the camera so that he can carry out the gathering and recording of information. Simultaneously, much of what he describes about his car could characterize the lone traveller, such as the water bottle, packs of chewing gum and cigarettes, and shaving in the rear-view mirror.

The same applies when he enters some forsaken café to have breakfast, notices the few people there and transcribes what a customer and the lady behind the bar are discussing, the subject this unexpected apparition of a renowned city slicker, this famous polemicist/journalist, meandering like any traveller, in the quiet of their remote backwater:

“Isn’t this Miguel Sousa Tavares? What is he doing here in the village?” And she answers . . . as if Miguel Sousa Tavares, two steps away, was not listening to anything: “I don’t know! Probably he came here to do a reportage . . .”

And the lady has just given me an excellent idea: a reportage. The first idea had been that, in fact, but for the last couple of days I had been walking around . . . , pestering people with silly questions, wasting film, but . . . , I must confess I had not quite figured out what I was doing there, apart from the joy of having a car all to myself and a few blank days . . . . But now I knew: I was there on a reportage. I paid the bill, greeted the lady and the gentleman . . . and went out, dragging Miguel Sousa Tavares to work.<sup>31</sup>

The traveller is now dragging the journalist to his job. In both examples, it is as if his two personae are engaged in a narrative dance with each other, and the synergy that arises between the two helps contribute to the narrative tension as the two attempt to understand the other. So for a few days, Sousa Tavares, the journalist, had been the prey of Sousa Tavares, the traveller.

When the reporter awakes from his traveller’s slumbers by the allusion to the professional reason he had gone to the Alentejo in the first place, Sousa Tavares starts reporting on the manifold problems afflicting that southern province: a decaying land of abandoned farms, mines and villages, the ruins of a part of the country neglected by the central administration. However, as literary journalist, he enjoys the greater freedom of describing the landscape as he perceives it and making his own comments regarding what he sees and understands are the problems of the Alentejo, which derive mainly from the rural exodus of the past few decades resulting in the neglect of farming which was once the basis of the economy of the province: “Just ruins and more ruins, ruins of houses, of barns, of stables, of abandoned farms.”<sup>32</sup>

He then takes the car and drives to the copper mines of São Domingos. On arrival he is confronted with a desolate landscape: The mines have long been deserted. Steel-structure skeletons, old corroding cranes, and red dust

everywhere are all that is left. Sousa Tavares recalls the names of Spielberg and Lucas: "They would find this the perfect setting for one of their movies. It is a surreal landscape, breathtakingly beautiful, but with a silence of tragedy that tells the whole story of the drama that occurred here."<sup>33</sup> The journalist, true to his calling, takes his time to unravel the reasons for the tragedy that occurred in the mines. But his eyes have already impregnated the landscape with his subjectivity, the subjectivity of the literary journalist. Thus the image of uncompromising factual objectivity is further repudiated.

Struggling to briefly characterize literary journalism, Kevin Kerrane notes that: "The eye of the writer is an omnipresent lens, no more and no less intrusive than the mind behind it. The literary journalist enjoys greater freedom in researching a story and greater flexibility in telling it."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, when it comes to theorizing on travel literature, Alison Blunt argues that, "Both travel and travel writing are hermeneutic processes whereby the 'eye/I' of the traveller/travel writer constructs spatial and textual difference."<sup>35</sup> In other words, travel writing is just as much conditioned by the author's self or subjectivity as is the literary journalist's. Again, the boundaries between literary journalism and travel writing are not discrete categories exclusive of one another although we should bear in mind that not all travel writing can be regarded as literary journalism. At their face value, itineraries, guidebooks and other forms of travel writing are pragmatic instances for tourist guidance and consumption with the aim of domesticating—harshly one might add—the unfamiliar, the Other, eviscerating what about it makes it strange and thus threatening or dangerous. The problem with such domestication is that too often the danger is objectified to a safe, sublimated distance. In other words, the "Other" ends up being reinscribed as Other except that the danger has been declawed. It's the equivalent of theme-park pirates dressed up in costume and bearing cutlasses at Disney World.

With his eyes, then, Sousa Tavares sees the mines left to erosion, the abandoned houses of the miners who were forced to leave when there was no more work available, and the trail of a railway that was dismantled long ago and sold as scrap. With his subjective mind's eye he sees scenes of a movie, something like *Out of Alentejo*<sup>36</sup> when he imagines the English that owned the mines four decades before and who, isolated from the rest of civilization, would "wear their white tuxedos for dinner, just as if they were in the All England Cricket Club of Hyderabad, in India."<sup>37</sup> The invocation of an affluent—and colonial—past proves ironic in this, the country that was the first among European colonizers during the fifteenth-century voyages of exploration and discovery: Paradoxically, the colonizers have been colonized. It would be as if Manhattan became the playground of future rich Chinese,

while Americans—of all races—served as servants. We see in the contrast with the allusion to the “All England Cricket Club of Hyderabad” the final results of colonization: The colonizers have exhausted the land, leaving behind the present dusty ruins and desolation. Imagine the Manhattan of the future in such a condition, crumbling stone edifices, rusting iron skeletons, dust devils swirling in the streets.

Nor is there hope for the Alentejo’s future as indicated by the irony which Sousa Tavares uses to allude to the projects of so-called “modern minds.”<sup>38</sup> They want to save the region with golf courses, where German tourists would run after balls and the *alentejanos* after them as caddies in one more symbolic projection of colonial ambition. Sousa Tavares, then, is attempting to exorcize the colonial mentality—whether as colonizer or colonized—of the Portuguese experience.

The reportage continues, and the journalist cannot help but confront the most pressing and most newsworthy issue facing the whole of the Alentejo, the building of the mammoth dam of the Alqueva in the Guadiana river, a colossal project that serves as a kind of metaphor for some biblical promise to save the region through the development of a large irrigation system designed to boost agriculture and a modern power plant able to produce electricity of up to 240 megawatts. For the conventional journalist, it is just one more story of “Progress” to be reported dutifully, as was the case with the infinite numbers of articles that inundated the Portuguese press and promoted endless debate throughout the length of the building of the dam. But for the literary journalist, the dam is yet another unfortunate colonial idea for dominating nature. It represents a major environmental hazard, and it will totally destroy the subsistence agriculture characteristic of the Alentejo, an arid place with a fragile ecosystem unable to support golf courses and intensive farming. But, as usual in Portugal, “the Water Institute—irrespective of its name and functions—supports the project, as it always supports all projects that jeopardise the rational management of hydro resources.”<sup>39</sup>

It is here that Sousa Tavares the polemicist emerges most clearly, unable to contain—or restrain—his dismay. It is also here that he is true to the European origins of “literary reportage” or “reportage literature.” Unlike American literary journalism, the European variation historically has always had more room for polemics. While the polemical journalist chastises the government for conceiving an ill-advised and irresponsible project, the literary journalist and traveller looks with nostalgia at the river running peacefully and slowly, separating the Portuguese village of Alcoutim from the Spanish Sanlúcar and wondering what a future of dams, golf courses and bridges will eventually bring. It is worth noting the author’s tone, which is imbued with that so characteristically Portuguese feeling called *saudade*.

*Saudade* is a uniquely Portuguese word translated as a melancholic feeling of nostalgia and longing for an irredeemably lost past when everything was good and beautiful and that can no longer be replicated in the present. In this context it can be said that *saudade* is an emotional tone that allows us to understand better how the traveller perceives and paints the landscape and how the literary journalist reveals his concerns, one and the other entangled by language as his subjectivity engages in apprehending the outside world:

At the bottom of a valley between majestic mountains lies the beautiful village of Alcoutim. On the other side of the river, just across . . . , is the Spanish village of Sanlúcar de Gadiana. Two twins separated by a liquid umbilical chord, which look at one another, day after day, century after century. If someone calls from Spain, somebody will answer from Portugal. . . . However, “progress” requires a bridge connecting the two separate sisters. May Providence not let the bridge spoil the beauty of the landscape and the harmony, loaded with symbolism, in which, quietly, Sanlúcar and Alcoutim remain looking at one another.<sup>40</sup>

From the perspective of Sousa Tavares there is nothing wrong with progress as long as it is sustainable and well-planned. However, the old dilemma is always: “how to develop without destroying.” As he also adds:

There is a version that says that anything is better than . . . deserted villages, shut down mines, abandoned agriculture. The problem is no one ever shows up defending the obvious alternative: . . . the creation of jobs related to the rural world, the reopening of mines, the recovery of the river. . . . All around, projects only envisage dams, hunting reservations, complexes for tourism and golf courses. But the ruins, those will remain untouched.<sup>41</sup>

So he concludes his article. The allusion to the ruins that will defy time indicates the end of the journey to the Alentejo in which the traveller, who had been lost, has now found himself in a literary reportage that reveals the literary journalist’s disenchantment with Portuguese politics. The traveller’s journey provided him with the *modus* for writing, but literary journalism opened the eyes of the traveller, demystifying the mystery that is at the heart of, and end goal of, any journey.

The conclusion is the more moving today when we reread the article because now, five years after publication, the Alqueva dam, which created the largest artificial lake in Europe with a surface of 250 square kilometres, was finally finished and inaugurated with all pomp and circumstance. But the irrigation system is still a mirage and the Alentejo remains one of the poorest provinces in Portugal.

To conclude, the traveller/travel writer and the literary journalist met not

only in the south of Portugal, but also in the blurred and hybrid interstice that joins travel writing and literary journalism. The polemical note reminds us that these are not just the meandering mutterings of a tourist with the safety of a return ticket in his back pocket, but of someone who has been profoundly moved by what he has discovered.

It is in such revelation, echoing with both personal and cultural interpretations that repudiate the objectifications of conventional journalism, that Sousa Tavares, Portugal's tempestuous journalist, has completed another pilgrimage of the traveller by means of literary journalism. To that, we could add the observation by Jenny Mezciems: "[I]n communicating his experiences the traveller becomes a literary man, or at least a man important in literature."<sup>42</sup> We see here, then, the intersection of where such travel accounts and literary journalism meet, and indeed become indistinguishable.

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#### Endnotes

1. "As Histórias do Miguel e do Zé," *Visão*, 18 October 2007, 121.
2. Indeed, departing from the seminal work of travel writing theorist, Percy G. Adams, Zweder von Martels argues that the genre "seems unlimited in its forms of expression," ranging from "the indisputable examples such as guidebooks, itineraries and routes . . . to the less restricted accounts of journeys," Zweder von Martells, *Travel Fact and Travel Fiction: Studies on Fiction, Literary Tradition, Scholarly Discovery, and Observation in Travel Writing* (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), xi. Recalling his many travels, Sousa Tavares consequently is a writer of travel accounts. Worth mentioning when it comes to singling out the several forms of travel writing, is the fact that there is a difficulty in establishing a clear-cut distinction between what the American academy terms travelogue and its European counterpart named travel account as their contents overlap. For purposes of text cohesion, and because there is no substantiated body of studies regarding this discrepancy, we will be using the expression travel account.
3. The concepts of "literary reportage," "reportage literature," "reportage," and "literary journalism" still lack in studies and consensus that would account for their similarities and distinctions. If, on the one hand, as noted by Norman Sims, "literary journalism and reportage overlapped and tended to refer to the same works," (Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* [Evanston: Northwestern

University Press, 2007], 9), on the other, it is acknowledged that literary journalism is linked to an American tradition whereas literary reportage mostly reflects a European origin of a much more “elastic” form than literary journalism, one and the other bearing, however, “distinct similarities,” see John C. Hartsock, “Tracing the Historical Outlines of ‘Literary Reportage’: The ‘Other’ Literary Journalism”, in John Bak, ed., *International Literary Journalism: Historical Traditions and Transnational Influences* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, forthcoming).

4. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 11.

5. John C. Hartsock, “‘Literary Journalism’ as an Epistemological Moving Object within a Large ‘Quantum’ Narrative,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 23 (October 1999), 432-47.

6. Thomas B. Connery, “A Third Way to Tell the Story: American Literary Journalism at the Turn of the Century,” in Norman Sims, ed., *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6.

7. Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1993), 99.

8. The noun *reportagem* in Portuguese can have both a singular and a plural meaning to stand for individual pieces of in-depth reporting printed in newspapers and magazines or shown as news specials on television. Often these pieces, either because of the polemical nature of their contents or because of their newsworthiness, are published in book form after publication in the printed media or after being aired on television. For lack of a more specific terminology, *reportagem* can be interpreted in the sense of “literary reportage” in the European tradition.

9. Patrícia Fonseca and Sílvia Souto Cunha, “O Aventureiro Solitário,” *Visão*, 18 October 2007, 128.

10. Travelling implies a constant mediation between Self and Other and “ironically enough, it is by turning himself into another falsified other (in imitating the Other) that the traveller succeeds in marking himself off from his falsified other (the tourist),” Trinh T. Minh-ha, “Other than Myself/My Other Self,” in George Robertson, Melinda Mash, Lisa Tickner, Jon Bird, Barry Curtis and Tim Putnam, eds., *Traveller’s Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 23.

11. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 2.

12. Simon Coleman and Mike Crang, “Grounded Tourists, Travelling Theory,” in Simon Coleman and Mike Crang, eds., *Tourism: Between Place and Performance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 9.

13. M. A. Michael, *Traveller’s Quest* (London: William Hodge, 1950), 5.

14. Alison Blunt, *Travel, Genre, and Imperialism: Mary Kingsley and West Africa* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1994), 17.

15. In fact, Burton’s travel accounts and his translation of *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* between 1885 and 1888 had the clear intention of criticizing a society he considered morally decadent and corrupt: his own. By merging with the Other he could, then, chastise the world of the Us as a detached observer. See, Dane Kennedy, “‘Captain Burton’s Oriental Muck Heap’: *The Book of the Thousand Nights* and the Uses of Orientalism,” *The Journal of British Studies* (July 2000), 318.

16. John C. Hartsock, “‘Lettre’ from Berlin,” *DoubleTake/Points of Entry* (Spring/Summer 2007), 109.

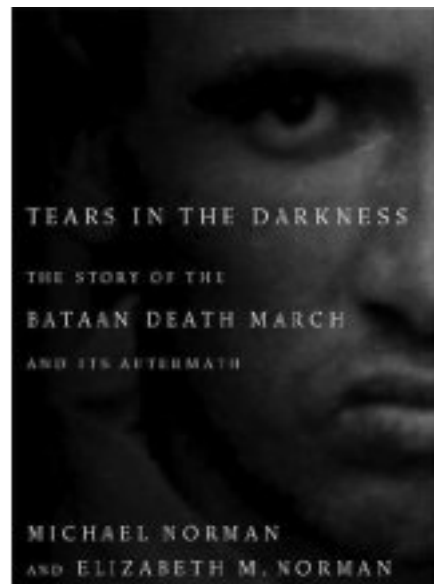


17. Miguel Sousa Tavares, *Sul. Viagens* (Lisbon: Oficina do Livro, 2007), 9.
18. Ibid.
19. Another indicator that we cannot entirely dissociate Sousa Tavares from being also a tourist is that one of the features that characterize tourism presumes "a clear intention to return 'home' within a relatively short period of time," Urry, 3. That is, the tourist and the traveller are two entangled entities in modern times.
20. Norman Sims, "The Literary Journalists," in Norman Sims, ed., *The Literary Journalists* (New York: Ballantine, 1984), 8-12.
21. John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 13.
22. Tavares, 9.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 19.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid., 36.
28. Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, eds., *The New Journalism: With an Anthology* (New York and London: Harper & Row, 1973), 50.
29. Tavares, 75.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., 76.
32. Ibid., 75.
33. Ibid., 76-77.
34. Kevin Kerrane, "Making Facts Dance," in Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds., *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Touchstone, 1998), 20.
35. Blunt, 21.
36. Tavares, 77.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 79.
39. Ibid., 81.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 82.
42. Jenny Mezciems, "'Tis Not to Divert the Reader: Moral and Literary Determinants in Some Early Travel Narratives," in Philip Dodd, ed., *The Art of Travel: Essays on Travel Writing* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 2.



# *Tears in the Darkness* and Writing Narrative Portraiture

In June, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux will release *Tears in the Darkness: The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath*, by Michael and Elizabeth M. Norman. The massive project took ten years to research and write, and because of its sheer scope posed unique problems for the authors. *Literary Journalism Studies* is pleased to publish exclusive excerpts from the volume. An essay, "Writing Narrative Portraiture," by Michael Norman, follows. In it he discusses how they resolved the challenges of writing the volume, especially in structuring so a complex a narrative by means of "narrative portraiture." *Ed.*



Michael Norman, a former reporter for *The New York Times*, is an associate professor in the Literary Reportage program at the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute at New York University. This is his second book. His work for various publications has been nationally syndicated.

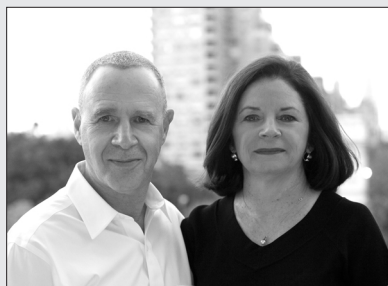


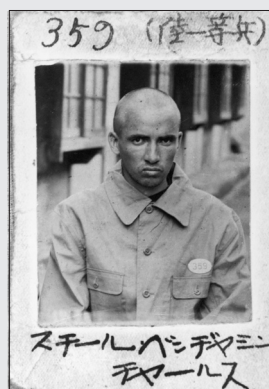
photo by Benjamin Norman

Elizabeth M. Norman, Ph.D., is a Professor of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Professions at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development at New York University. This is her third book. Her work has appeared in a number of journals and national publications.

The Normans have two grown sons and live in Montclair, New Jersey.

Permission from the Normans and Farrar, Straus, and Giroux to reprint the following passages from *Tears in the Darkness* is gratefully acknowledged.

Explanatory footnotes in the original have been eliminated.



Ben Steele, a survivor of the Death March, proved central to providing structure to the book. Here he is as a prisoner of war. The photo provided the basis for the cover design by Aaron Artessa to *Tears in the Darkness*. The picture is reprinted by kind permission of Professor Steele, as is a later sketch taken from his sketchbook. After the war, Steele spent six decades as an artist and teacher of art in Billings, Montana.

# TEARS IN THE DARKNESS

by Michael Norman and Elizabeth M. Norman  
New York University, U.S.A.

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## GHOSTS

THEY WERE stationed far from home when the fighting started—seven thousand miles across the Pacific from San Francisco in a large archipelago that stretches north and south for a thousand miles between Formosa and the Dutch East Indies in the warm tropical waters of the South China Sea.

Compared to some of its neighbors, the Philippines, an American possession since 1898, was a bit of a backwater. None of Singapore's sparkle or the hustle of Hong Kong, but the guidebooks of the day called the place "paradise," and the books were right. Manila was beautiful, palms leaning gently over the seawall along the bay, the night filled with the sweet scent of kamias.

Besides its charms, paradise had the best deepwater port in the southwest Pacific, and in 1941 that port, that strategic transit point, made the Philippines valuable to the Japanese and American generals and admirals who were furiously preparing for war, a war in the Pacific almost everyone in uniform believed was at hand.

On December 8, eight hours after it attacked the American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Japan sent its bombers and fighters against American air, infantry and naval bases in the Philippines. Two weeks later, 43,000 Japanese troops invaded the islands.

Waiting for them was a large force of American and Filipino defenders, more than 130,000 men, untried and ill trained, most of them. The Japanese pushed them back and back again until they were forced to retreat to a small thumb of land on the west coast of Manila Bay, the peninsula of Bataan.

There, in jungle wastes and tangled woodlands, they dug trench lines and bunkers, an army of Americans and Filipinos preparing to fight for their lives, the first major land battle for America in World War II.

Starting in January 1942, the Japanese took the peninsula under siege and left the Americans and Filipinos cut off from all help and supplies. The two

sides fought for ninety-nine days, the Japanese taking horrendous casualties, the Americans and Filipinos falling back under the Japanese assaults from one “final” defense line to another. At last, on April 9, sick and starving, without an air force to protect them or a navy to relieve them, the men of Bataan surrendered.

More than 76,000 Americans and Filipinos under American command laid down their arms—the single largest defeat in American military history. The sick, starving, and bedraggled prisoners of war were rounded up by their Japanese captors and made to walk sixty-six miles to a railhead for the trip to prison camp, a baneful walk under a broiling sun that turned into one of most notorious treks in the annals of war, the Bataan Death March.

It is impossible, so the locals say, to walk the ground where this story takes place, the jungles and woodlands and savannas of the Philippines, without feeling the presence, the lingering tenancy, of the men who once fought there—Americans, Filipinos, Japanese. Perhaps that is why at night, Bataanese villagers in their nipa huts often think they hear history stumbling along in the darkness outside their doors.

Some nights it is voices they hear, voices begging for food and water, voices pleading for their lives. Other nights it is the sound of shuffling feet, thousands of feet heavy with fear and fatigue, dragging north through the dust mile after mile up the Old National Road.

All of this is memory, of course, the memory of the old ones who lived along the route, or their children and children’s children who tell and retell the stories of Bataan as if they were reciting from sacred texts.

As the events of 1941-1942 passed into the hands of historians, both the battle for Bataan and the death march became symbols, the former as a modern Thermopylae, a stirring last stand, and the latter as a crucible of courage, the courage to continue on a walk to the grave.

In some sense these conceits were true, but when the dross of propaganda and myth is skimmed from the surface of history, what’s left, in this case, is an example of the miscarried morality and Punic politics that underlie every appeal to arms—the bad leadership, the empty promises, the kind of cruelty that crushes men’s souls. Proof too that the instant the first shot is fired, the so-called rules of war, *guerre de règle*, give way to *guerre à outrance*, war without clemency or quarter.

So much suffering leaves any piece of ground spectral. Little wonder, then, the locals along the road hear voices, and the survivors of that battle and march, old men now, keep the company of ghosts.

BEN STEELE came of age as a cowboy, or an echo of a cowboy, which in his time, the early decades of the twentieth century, was probably the same thing. He grew up in a pine-log house by a crystal spring in the shadow of the Bull Mountains on Montana’s eastern plain. By the time he was eight he

could ride, rope, and shoot. He herded cattle, he drove horses, he tended sheep. Alone at night on the open range he slept in a circle of rope to keep the snakes out of his bedroll. In 1940 when he turned twenty-two, he joined the Army Air Corps and was shipped to the Philippines to fight the Japanese. After ninety-nine days of battle he became a prisoner of war and spent three years behind barbed wire and watchtowers. Every day he was starved or beaten by his keepers: “the Bug,” “Mickey Mouse,” “the Killer.” He never forgot those faces. They insinuated themselves in his psyche, permanent residents now, along with wild mustangs, sheepherders, ambling cowboys, and antelope gamboling through the sage. This is all in his sketchbooks.

The sketchbooks are stacked on shelves and in closets, black buckram and hardbound, most of them. They date from his first days in art school, more than thirty volumes of trials and exercises—sixty-one years of sketching and painting every day, searching for the perfect line, the exact color, the proper balance and emphasis, proportion and perspective. At ninety years plus, a lifetime of trying, as artists say of their work, to “get the thing right.”

On occasion he works from models in a studio or tramps out to the prairie to sketch a scene. He likes to draw horses. He hasn’t been on a horse in nearly twenty-five years, but his respect and affection for the animals run deep, back to the blizzards of his boyhood when his horse would lead him through a blinding whiteout back to the safety and warmth of the pine-log house at Hawk Creek.

By and large, however, the leaves of his sketchbooks hold his ghosts: page after page of prisoners of war and the Imperial *hobei* who guarded them, the men who held Ben Steele captive for one thousand two hundred and forty-four days.

He cannot say why after six decades he still sketches the faces that followed him home from the camps, the faces of old comrades in prison rags, and the faces of the Japanese soldiers who herded them from place to place and kept them penned behind barbed wire.

These ghosts pop up everywhere in his sketchbooks, sometimes like rogues in a gallery but as often as not singly in quick profile or thumbnail, sometimes on the same page with bucking mustangs and cow ponies or, like interlopers, peering in from the edges of landscapes, intruding on the cottonwoods and sage.

In the early sketchbooks, the ones he filled after the war attending college and during his first decade as a professor of art, the drawings of his keepers and his comrades tend to be imitative, realistic, the faces filled with the meanness and misery of war, as if the artist’s aim was to document his experience.

After a certain point, however—ten years postbattle, perhaps fifteen—the drawings become simpler, less emotive. No longer are the faces rendered with the kind of shading and crosshatching that create tone and mood.

Most are simple line drawings in pen-and-ink, quirky enough to qualify as caricature. In his later work the prisoners look more hapless than hopeless, hoboes in bedraggled dress, and the guards appear more often than not as comic grotesques, a little lunatic or just plain goofy.

This is “perspective and proportion” of a different sort, and it has nothing to do with either the geometry or the grammar of art. Ben Steele, brown eyes aglint, almost always wears a smile, like a man who knows he finally “got the thing right.”

## ONE

**H**E ENLISTED on the advice of his mother, Bess. In the late summer of 1940, Ben Steele was working as a camp tender at a large sheep outfit east of town. It was hard, sometimes filthy work, but the freedom of it made him happy—on his own every day, riding a horse or driving a rig between the far-flung camps of the sheepherders, delivering mail and supplies, sleeping in the open, wrapped in an oilcloth, staring up at a big sky dark with bright stars.

One weekend that summer Ben Steele’s mother and father drove out from Billings to visit. His mother had an idea. He’d been a ranch hand most of his life, she said. He was twenty-two now, grown up. Maybe it was time to consider something else. She’d heard on the radio that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had just signed a law creating the first peacetime military draft. The inaugural callup, she said, was scheduled for late October.

“You know, I’ve been thinking,” she went on. “You really ought to get in before they draft you. Maybe if you do, you could, you know, do what you want in the army?”

He wasn’t sure he wanted to wear a uniform, but since he usually took his mother’s advice to heart, he tucked her suggestion away, and a while later, over a smoky campfire perhaps or riding the green hills and valleys, he remembered something; the boys he knew from Billings who had enlisted in the army were usually sent west for training to the golden valleys of California.

He thought, “Going to California—that sounds good. A little adventure.” And on a nice warm day in mid-September, he borrowed a ride into town, ambled over to the Stapleton Building on Twenty-ninth Street and into the recruiting station there, where he found a sergeant sitting at a desk.

“I want to go into the army,” he announced.

“Well now,” the recruiter said, looking up at the lean ranch hand standing in front of him, “we have the Army and we have the Army Air Corps, which one you want?”

Ben Steele knew nothing about soldiering, but some years earlier a couple of fellows up at the Billings Municipal Airport got themselves a Ford Tri-Motor (a propeller under each wing and one on the nose) and for a dollar

a head started taking people for a ride. It wasn't much of a ride—the plane took off from atop the rimrocks, circled the Yellowstone Valley below, and a few minutes later landed to pick up another load of wide-eyed locals. But that short hop stirred something in Ben Steele.

"The Air Corps?" he said. "That sounds real good. Give me that!"

A few weeks later, on October 9, 1940, a month shy of his twenty-third birthday, Ben Steele stood in a line of enlistees at the United States Courthouse in Missoula, Montana, raised his right hand, and repeated one of the republic's oldest oaths: "I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign or domestic . . . So help me God."

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, like every American who read the newspapers, listened to the radio, went to the movies and watched newsreels, Private Ben Steele of the United States Army Air Corps was convinced his enemies would be German. Japan was a threat, all right—that fall, in fact, America cut its shipments of scrap steel and iron to Japan—but Germany, threatening all Europe, was the menace of the moment.

The Germans had invaded Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. By the time Ben Steele arrived at the induction station in Missoula in the fall of 1940, the German Luftwaffe had been bombing Great Britain for three months.

Reading about all this in the *Billings Gazette* or listening to it on KGHL radio, the most popular station in that part of the West, most Montanans wanted no part of the trouble overseas. Like the rest of America, they were focused on finding jobs and recovering from the Great Depression, not crossing swords with the saber-rattling Germans. In a national opinion poll conducted the week Ben Steele enlisted, 83 percent of the those surveyed said they did not want to send American troops overseas.

Young men looking for a job or a little adventure don't pay much attention to opinion polls. The army was offering a paycheck, plus "three hots and a cot" and perhaps a chance to travel. Since they had no feel for the killing and dying in Europe, no sense at all of facing Panzer tanks and Stuka divebombers, the ranch hands, soda jerks, delivery boys, and railroad workers on their way to training camp with Ben Steele were full of brio and eager for action.

"If war's gonna come, I wanna be in it," Ben Steele thought. "Hell, I want to be over there where it's happening."

*Saturday, October 4, 1941, San Francisco*

Blue sky, bright sun, seventy-two degrees, a good day to set sail for paradise.

On a pier off the Embarcadero, the men of the 19th Bombardment Group, United States Army Air Corps, waited in long queues to board the United States Army transport *General Willard A. Holbrook*, a lumbering

troopship used to ferry men and materiel to American bases overseas. In the ranks on the wharf, moving slowly toward the gangway, was Benjamin Charles Steele, serial number 190-18-989, a newly minted private. He had been in uniform nearly a year now, and he liked the life of a soldier. The army had given him just what he wanted, a chance to cross the mountains and see the Golden Land.

California wasn't as golden as he'd imagined, but he liked it well enough. Training camp was a dusty tent city on the dry brown flats at March Field near Riverside. The boys from the cities and suburbs thought these accommodations "kinda primitive," but the men who had been ranch raised looked around and saw luxury: tents with wooden floors and gas stoves, hot showers nearby, latrines that weren't buzzing with flies, and a mess hall that served seconds if a man wasn't sated.

Air Corps basic training was short, just six weeks, long enough for men who would be working as airplane mechanics, gunners, ground crews, and supernumeraries. They attended classes on military courtesy and discipline. They reviewed army rules and regulations. They endured hours of close-order drill and the ritual of forced marches.

These little walks, as Ben Steele thought of them, were too much for many of the men. After one eight-mile hike the road was lined with recruits doubled over, gasping for breath, and grouching about their training. Ben Steele had never heard such bellyaching.

"Holy Christ!" he said, to no one in particular. "Eight miles is nothing. Back home I'd walk that far before breakfast."

"Oh yeah?" one of malcontents came back. "Where the hell did you come from?"

"I'm from Montana," Ben Steele said.

THE ARMY sent him to New Mexico after basic training and assigned him to the 7th Matériel Squadron, 19th Bombardment Group, Kirtland Field, Albuquerque. As soon as he was settled, he made inquiries about buying a horse.

A local stockman wanted fifty bucks for an old plug named Blaze. Not much of a horse, nothing like the spirited animals he was used to, but he missed riding, so he went to a finance company, borrowed the money (agreeing to pay five dollars a week against the balance), and made a deal with a nearby rancher to pasture his mount. His father shipped him a saddle, and every weekend Ben Steele rode out among the cactus and scrub grass. It was hot, sandy country but he didn't care—he was on a horse, and a horse reminded him of home.

The Air Corps made him a dispatcher, tracking flights, and after a month or two of this work he got it in his head that he wanted to be a pilot. Never much of a student, he found a math professor at the University of New



Mexico to tutor him privately in the algebra and geometry that he would need to pass the exam to become a cadet. He studied for several months and was about to take the test when word came down that the 19th Bombardment Group was being sent overseas.

"You can't ship me out," he told his commanding officer. "I'm fixing to take the cadet exam."

"Oh yeah, we can," the squadron commander said. "The whole outfit's goin'."

*October 3, 1941*

*Dearest Mother and Family,*

*Thought would drop you a few more lines before departing the U.S.*

*Am sailing tomorrow afternoon . . . We don't know for sure how long we will have to stay in foreign service but hope it isn't too long, but it may be alright . . . Will write you every chance I get so you will know about where I am at . . . Just heard we were going to the Philippines, but that is just a rumor not certain. Can't believe a thing you hear around here . . . Don't worry about anything, because everything is O.K. Will write as soon as I can make connections. It is possible we will stop at some port along the way, and if we do will send you a line.*

*Lots of Love to you all  
Bud.*

AMERICA REMEMBERS the attacks on its bases in the Pacific in 1941 as acts of treachery, but to label them "sneak" attacks is more propaganda than plain truth. For more than twenty years, a standing committee of admirals and generals in Washington had been planning against just such an attack. They looked at Japan as America's chief antagonist in the Pacific, and they knew well the value of surprise and Japan's history of success with this tactic. The military planners were sure that when war came, it would begin "with a sudden, surprise attack." They did not know exactly where or precisely when, but they were convinced that the Philippines, just eighteen hundred air miles from Japan and sitting directly between it and the oil- and mineral-rich Indonesian archipelago in the southwest Pacific, would top Japan's list of targets. So in the early fall of 1941, with war consuming Europe and with the Japanese Army on the march in Asia, American war planners—more in an attempt to deter an attack than defend against it—began to rush cannon, tanks, airplanes, and men to the Philippine Islands. The men of the 19th Bombardment Group, United States Army Air Corps, were part of that consignment.

The *Holbrook* set sail on the evening tide that October 4. In the ship's galley cooks had prepared a greasy ragout of pork, and as the men passed through the mess line, stewards slopped the dinner on their trays. Later that

night the wind picked up, the waves began to swell and the *Holbrook* began to pitch and roll, and it wasn't long before all that greasy pork began to reappear. Soon the crappers were clogged and the sinks were overflowing.

*October 10, 1941*

*Dearest Mother and Family,*

*Have been sitting out on the deck this morning watching flying fish. They are about six inches long and sail through the air like a bird . . . The water has been sort of rough all the way . . . The ship is bobbing up and down and from one side to the other till I can't even sit still. Am sitting here on the deck and writing on my knee. Hope you can read this.*

AFTER HAWAII, the sailing was easy, flat water most of the way and light tropical breezes. Most men spent mornings topside, watching the water or staring at the horizon, absorbed by the vast vista of the sea. Some played cards on the hatch covers or spread out their towels and baked in the afternoon sun. In the evenings Quentin Pershing Devore of eastern Colorado came topside to listen to his Hallicrafter shortwave radio. One evening a dark-haired fellow with a friendly face eased over and sat down next to him.

"I'm Ben Steele," he said, holding out his hand.

"I'm Pershing Devore."

"What do you get on that thing?" the fellow asked.

"I get the news, sometimes I get music," Devore said.

Devore too had grown up outdoors, working the land and livestock in the rye- and wheat-farming country of Yuma County, a day's drive or so from the Nebraska border. He considered himself "a plain boy with no frills," and that's how this fellow from Billings struck him, too, "real plain."

"Where did you get that name, Pershing?" Ben Steele asked.

"Well, my name is Quentin Pershing Devore, but they call me Pershing."

"That's too complicated," Ben Steele said. "I'm just going to call you Q.P."

*October 18, 1941*

*Dearest Mother, Dad + Family,*

*Met a new friend. He likes hunting and fishing about as well as I do. We get together and talk over old times. It sort of makes me feel at home . . .*

They talked for hours, about farming and ranching and cattle and sheep, about the "hard-up" life on a Colorado farm and the hardscrabble days on a Montana homestead. Ben Steele often turned the conversation to horses—cow ponies, broncs and quarter horses, chestnuts, Appaloosas and bays.

Q.P. thought, "This guy is crazy about horses."

They talked about war as well. Their convoy was flanked by destroyer escorts, and at night the ship was blacked out, a shadow on the sea.

A week and a half out of Hawaii, their company commander called them together. They were going to the Philippines "to fight a war," he said . . .

*[There are thirteen main or "war" chapters in the book and eight short interstitial chapters, "miniatures" the Normans call them. The interstitials are set between the first eight main chapters and deliver moments from the central character's life. "Hawk Creek" is one of those interstitials.]*

## HAWK CREEK

THE OLD MAN told him, "You don't point this at anything unless you're going to shoot it." Bud knew he meant kill it, of course. Then he handed Ben Steele his first weapon, a short-barreled twentytwo rifle. He was seven years old. He was taught how to use it: grip the stock firmly but not too tight, sight with both eyes open, and squeeze the trigger, don't jerk it.

He learned to hunt, how to stalk a prey and finish it. He would set out traplines too (the boy could dress out anything that walked or flew, a handy skill in hard times), but out trapping or hunting, often as not he'd sit there for a while and stare at the trophy before he took aim.

Sneaking up on a pond of mallards, he'd admire their colors, the jade-green head, the chestnut breast, the snow-white wingtips. Stalking sharp-tailed grouse, he'd crouch in the rushes for long stretches listening to the birds' comic cackle. When the time came, he'd always pull the trigger, get those cottontails his mother was waiting to make into rabbit pie, but it was almost as if he wanted to let his supper show him something of the world before he bagged it.

HE HATED school, played dumb, and his mother knew it. The Old Man cursed and grumbled about his bad marks, and Gert, his sister, a couple of grades ahead, thought him so stupid she was embarrassed to call him her brother.

Bess would listen to all this and say, "Just leave him alone. He'll wake up someday and find out he doesn't know anything." He didn't care. He sat there in a stone building in town or some drafty wooden school shack in the hills and stared out the window at the shape of a certain coulee or the way the

snow drifted against a fence, sat there taking note of things, though he could never say why or what for.

The best day of school was the last day of school. Final hour, closing minutes. "Have a good summer," the teacher would say.

He thought, "I'm free."

When his chores were done, when the work was finished, when the Old Man would finally leave him be, he could hunt, he could ride, he could roam Hawk Creek.

THEY HAD THE SAME STORY, the start of the family and the start of the ranch. Maybe that's why Bud loved the place so much. Hawk Creek was where he began, where he always felt he belonged.

At a cattle roundup in 1912 the Old Man, Benjamin Cardwell Steele (tall and strong in the saddle), met Elizabeth Gertrude McCleary (a pale Irish beauty in white lace). When they got engaged, the Old Man gave up running cattle on the open range and looked for a place to settle down. He'd always liked the Bull Mountains. Those hills weren't fit for farming, but a smart rancher who applied himself could make a profit there. Plenty of sweetgrass on the benches, plenty of water in the cool clear creeks.

He settled a section on the dry fork at Hawk Creek. "Prettiest place in the Bulls," he told Bess. And when she saw it, she knew he was right. Their vale was long and winding with a stream down the center. Sheltering the ranch front and back and running the length of the vale were ridgelines rising gentle and green.

With his brother James and a couple of hands, the Old Man set out to build a homestead. They cut trees in the hills, stripped off the bark, squared up the logs, raised the walls and the roof. A neat one-story, three-room bungalow, eighteen feet wide, forty feet long. Then came a barn and privy, storehouse, bunkhouse, icehouse, corrals, and a tack-and-equipment shed. Pretty soon there were chickens scratching in the yard and the cries of children coming from the house.

IN THE WINTER the vale turned gray and white. Bud was older now, just getting up, pulling on his boots. His father wanted him out before dawn to fetch some strays, and his mother got up early too to make him breakfast for the cold work ahead.

He finished his cocoa, stamped across the frozen yard, breath steaming ahead of him, to the barn, where he saddled and mounted his horse. He had far to go but paused in the darklight to look back at the house. Did the same thing each time he rode off early. Something about the way the smoke came out of the kitchen chimney and drifted slowly down the darkened vale.

*[After the interstitial chapters, or "miniatures," the story returns to the narrative of the Death March.]*

*from chapter SEVEN . . .*

APRIL 10, the day after surrender, the Japanese started their prisoners walking.

Groups of one hundred, two hundred, three hundred and more were herded into lines or loose formations (sometimes flanked by a brace of guards at either end, sometimes not) and told to get on the road. The ragged, disorganized groups of men set off at intervals. Half the 76,000 captives began the trek April 10 near Mariveles, at the tip of the peninsula, but every day for some ten days thereafter at various points along the thirty miles of road between Mariveles and Balanga, the provincial capital, roughly halfway up the peninsula, yet another rabble of Filipinos or Americans would come down from the hills or emerge from the jungle, and the Japanese would gather them into groups and head them north up the Old National Road.

To label the movement a "march," as the men took to calling it, was something of a misnomer. During the first few days of walking there were so many men on the road, one bunch following closely behind another, they appeared a procession without end, prisoners as far as the eye could see, mile after mile after mile of tired, filthy, bedraggled men, heads bowed, feet dragging through the ankle-deep dust.

They walked the sixty-six miles in stages. For those who started at the tip of the peninsula, stage one was a stretch of road that ran east nine miles to Cabcaben. There the road turned north and proceeded along Bataan's east coast some twenty-seven miles, passing through the town squares of Lamao, Limay, Orion, Pilar, Balanga, Abucay, Samal, Orani, and Hermosa. At Hermosa the Old National Road turned west toward Layac Junction, then northeast for eleven miles across a torrid, sandy plain to Lubao, then continuing northeast to San Fernando—in all from Mariveles 66 road miles, 106 kilometers, 140,000 footfalls.

Some days the prisoners trekked ten miles, other days fifteen, twenty, or more. And hard miles they were. More than half the Old National Road on Bataan was a rural road—its base stone and crushed coral, its surface fine sand—built for the light traffic of the provinces. Four months of army convoys had churned up the hardpan, leaving potholes and sinkholes that tripped them and shards of gravel that sliced up their shoes and boots.

They walked in the most torrid time of year, *tag-init*, the Filipinos called it, the days of dryness, the season of drought. From March to May the sun hung flame white and unshrouded in the Philippine sky, searing everything under it. By early afternoon the air was an oven, the hardpan as hot as kiln bricks.

LIEUTENANT SAMUEL GOLDBLITH of Lawrence, Massachusetts,

started walking at Mariveles with a full pack—an extra uniform, underwear, socks, blanket, raincoat, shaving kit, stationery, mess kit, canteen, and a pink cotton towel, a keepsake from his wife's trousseau. It wasn't long before he had pitched everything save his canteen, mess kit, and Diana's pink towel, which he used as a mantilla to keep the sun from baking his head.

Goldblith guessed he was bound for a prison camp somewhere in the islands, but where he could not say. One rumor had them being interned in Manila's Bilibid Prison, another had them bound for the railhead at San Fernando, but this information was of little use or comfort since few men were familiar with the local geography and had no real sense of the distances involved or the difficulty traversing them. They were walking, that's all they knew, walking in the heat and dust, eyes burning and throats parched, wondering where they were going and when they would get there.

Richard Gordon happened to be walking in a group that included Brigadier General Clifford Bluemel. Gordon had seen Bluemel in action and remembered him as "a spicy little bastard." Somewhere between Mariveles and Cabcaben, the Japanese had grabbed the general and started him walking, and along the way some of the guards decided to have a little fun.

They circled the general, then made him squat with his fingers locked behind his neck and started turning him in circles. When he lost his equilibrium and toppled over, they laughed—oh, how they laughed—and when he fought to keep his balance, his poise ("The man is a tough nut," Gordon thought), they kicked his feet out from under him and howled that much harder.

The looting went on as well. Units of Imperial Infantry were encamped beside the Old National Road, awaiting new orders and watching the parade of prisoners. Though most prisoners had been stripped clean by the time they reached Cabcaben, now and then a *hobei* resting along the road would get curious.

Sergeant James Gautier, an Air Corps mechanic from Moss Point, Mississippi, felt a hand grab his shirt and pull him out of formation. Another shakedown, he reckoned. All he had left was his wallet, and the Japanese was flipping through the folds, looking for something of value when he came upon a snapshot of a woman.

"Waifu, Waifu?" the Japanese soldier said. Gautier nodded, then the soldier dropped the picture in the dirt, stepped on it, and ground it with the heel of his hobnail boot.

So this is what it meant to be a prisoner of war, thought Robert Levering, a Manila lawyer from Ohio who had volunteered to serve on Bataan. This is what it felt like to "come to the end of civilization."

PAST MARIVELES that first day, the highway ran flat for a few miles, then rose sharply in a series of steep switchbacks that had been cut into the side of an escarpment. The precipitous switchbacks were known as "the zigzag." Unfolded, this accordion section of road was less than a mile, but its angle

of ascent—520 feet in less than two-tenths of a mile—was so acute that the back-and-forth climb was a tough one, especially at the height of the hot season. And for men left weak and exhausted by disease, hunger, thirst, and fear, the ascent was torture.

One hairpin turn after another blocked the marchers' view and made the climb seem endless: another incline, another turn, another incline, up, up again, up some more.

On the outside turns, the road dropped off sharply into deep ravines, stories deep, many of them, with boulders, stumps, trees, and tangled underbrush waiting at the bottom.

The labor of climbing the switchbacks under a tropical sun left the men gasping with each step, and it was not long before some of them began to collapse and crawl to the shoulder of the road.

The guards accompanying the first columns climbing the zigzag seemed to ignore the dropouts, but prisoners in later columns began to spot bodies at the bottom of the ravines, bodies wearing familiar uniforms.

FROM THE TOP of the zigzag the road ran flat and east, seven and a half miles to the seaside town of Cabcaben on Manila Bay. Along this stretch the marchers now began to encounter an increasing number of Japanese trucks, tanks, and horse-drawn artillery, all moving south to stage for the invasion of Corregidor.

Many of these trucks carried troops, and as these vehicles passed the columns of prisoners, Japanese soldiers would lean out with a bamboo staff or a length of wood or the butt end of a rifle and, like a polo player bearing down on a ball, swing their cudgels at the heads of the men marching along in the crowded ranks on the road.

They fractured a lot of skulls, smashed a number of jaws, dislocated scores of shoulders. Now and then a truck would swerve sharply toward a column, and the Japanese riding shotgun would throw his door open to catch a marcher flush in the face.

"Let's stay on the inside row in the column," Humphrey O'Leary told his friend Phil Murray. "If we march on the other side, the Japs will bash us in the head."

Here came a truckful of soldiers holding lengths of rope as long as whips, lashing laggards on the road. One whip caught a prisoner around the neck, and the Japanese in the truck started to reel him in as the truck kept going. The poor man was twisting this way and that, dragging through the cinders. About a hundred feet later he was finally able to free himself, and he got to his feet, clothes shredded, skin lanced and bleeding, and looked back down the road.

"You bastards!" he yelled after the truck. "I'll live to piss on your graves."



A MILE beyond the top of the zigzag, the columns of prisoners passed the entrance to one of the large American field hospitals, part of the headquarters and service area that had been tucked in the American rear. The Japanese had bombed and shelled the service area often during their second attack, fire that left the hospital in ashes. Now wandering among its charred ruins were scores of wounded Filipino soldiers who had been treated there. Many were still in their hospital pajamas or bathrobes, grimy now with dirt and soot. Their wounds and stumps were beginning to suppurate and their bloody bandages and dressings needed changing.

Major William "Ed" Dyess of Albany, Texas, an Air Corps pilot in the line of march, watched Japanese guards herd the sick and wounded Filipinos out of the hospital grounds and set them walking. To Dyess these "bomb-shocked cripples" had a look of "hopelessness in their eyes," and they stumbled along stoop shouldered for more than a mile before "their strength ebbed and they began falling back through the marching ranks" and to the side of the road.

Zoeth Skinner of Portland, Oregon, came astride a Filipino amputee hobbling along on crutches. Japanese infantrymen camped along the way yelled and laughed at the cripple, poked him with sticks, tried to make him stumble. A while later farther up the road, Skinner noticed a tail of white gauze dragging in the dirt ahead of him. At the other end of the tail, twenty feet forward, was a man with a bandaged leg, struggling against his wound, his dressing unraveling as he walked.

AT FIRST the marchers tried to keep their sense of society, their culture of comradeship, and help one another. The lucky ones, men like Humphrey O'Leary and Phil Murray, were able to "buddy-up" and watch out for each other, but in the chaos of the surrender and the first commotion of captivity, friends became separated, and men like Ben Steele and Richard Gordon and Dominick Giantonio of Hartford, Connecticut, found themselves in the ranks of strangers, lending a hand when a hand was needed.

"Get up!"

"Let's go!"

"Don't fall, they'll get you."

Against despair, however, each man had to struggle alone. Ed Dyess got a "sort of sinking feeling" every time he saw a Ford or Chevrolet truck bearing Imperial Japanese Army insignia, prewar American exports (or a little piece of home, as Dyess saw it) packed now with enemy troops that jeered at him as they passed by.

Colonel Richard Mallonée from Utah was a veteran of the old horse-drawn artillery, and when he felt low he distracted himself by studying the equipage of his Japanese counterparts. Each time a horse-drawn limber and caisson came along, Mallonée noted the condition of the animals—Were they in good flesh? Well-groomed and properly harnessed?—and the bearing of the men riding them.



Lester Tenney of Chicago set goals for himself. Make it as far as “the next bend in the road,” he thought, or up to that “herd of carabao in the distance.” He also had a dream—“Without a dream,” he figured, his “resolve would weaken”—a dream of home. He held hard to the image of his wife, Laura, his reason, he told himself, for living. And to keep his dream safe, he tucked a picture of her in his sock, telling himself it gave each step purpose.

THE SUN was inescapable. It blistered their skin, baked their shoulders and backs, beat on their heads. Some men had managed to keep their helmets, some wore hats or caps or took rags and handkerchiefs and knotted the ends to fashion a sort of cap, but many men had no cover at all and walked bare-headed under the blazing sun.

The sweat soaked their clothes and streamed down their faces. It mixed with the thick dust and created a kind of gray sludge that ran into their eyes, stuck in their beards, caked on their clothing. They looked like ghosts of themselves mantled in gray, tramping along in a pall.

As each ragged group of men reached Cabcaben, the southernmost town on the peninsula’s east shore and the place where the Old National Road turned north up the coast, they were halted and put in a holding area—a dry rice paddy, field, or section of runway at Cabcaben’s jungle airstrip. From what the men could tell, there were a number of these marshaling yards in Cabcaben, places where the disorderly processions of prisoners from Mariveles were reorganized.

In the holding areas, the men were made to sit feet to back for hours at a time before moving on (the “sun treatment,” they came to call it). At last, when they were ready, the guards rushed in among them, screaming, kicking, and flogging the men to their feet, then herded them onto the road where they were arranged into regular marching columns, three or four ranks across, a hundred to four hundred men in each column, with a handful of guards assigned to walk the flanks and bring up the rear.

By now the prisoners’ hunger was starting to gnaw at them. They had been half starved before surrender and most had not had a scrap of food since. Even more pressing was their thirst. In the chaos at Cabcaben, only occasionally did the Japanese allow the prisoners to fill their canteens from a nearby stream. Most went without water and they rapidly dehydrated and began to suffer heat exhaustion: their temples pounded with pain, their heads felt afire, they became disoriented and wobbly with vertigo.

Back on the road, the guards yelled at them to pick up the pace.

“Speedo,” they shouted, walking or riding bicycles beside the formations. “Speedo! Speedo!”

Some guards, laughing, started their columns running.

BEN STEELE was watching for socks.

Men were starting to blister. Big blisters, the size of a half dollar, blisters in clusters, breaking and bleeding with every step. Some men used sharp rocks to make slits in their shoes and boots, makeshift sandals, but their feet

were so swollen the skin just bulged painfully through the openings. Others removed their footwear and walked barefoot, wincing with every step.

He had to find dry socks or soon he too would be hobbled. Ben Steele pawed through packs and bags abandoned along the road. Finally, somewhere north of Cabcaben, he saw what he'd been looking for.

A corpse lay on the shoulder just ahead. The dead man was wearing garrison shoes, low quarters instead of work boots, and the laces were untied and loose.

Ben Steele removed one of the shoes, stripped off the sock, and was reaching for the other foot when, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted a guard headed his way and dashed back to his place in the column.

"What the hell were you doing back there with that dead guy?" said one of his fellow marchers.

"You gotta take care of your feet," Ben Steele said, "or you're not going to get very far."

MEN HAD BEEN FALLING by the wayside since the zigzag, but the guards had been so busy collecting all the captives and getting them on the road that they had paid the dropouts little attention. After the prisoners were put in columns at Cabcaben, however, the guards in charge of each formation started watching their prisoners closely, and now when a man went down, a Japanese was soon standing over him.

*"Hayaku tate!"*

The order was unintelligible but the meaning of the kick that followed, the hard toe of a hobnail boot, was clear. Get up! Get up immediately or . . .

The fallen tried to raise themselves, tried to pull their knees under them, push up on all fours, but their heads, thick from fever, pulled them down, and their muscles, wasted by months of malnutrition, collapsed under them.

*"Hayaku! Hayaku!"*

THE JAPANESE type 30 bayonet was twenty inches long, overall, with a fifteen-inch blade. The weapon looked more like a Roman sword than a knife-bayonet, and when it was fixed to the end of a fifty-inch Arisaka rifle, it gave the *hobei* a kind of a pike, a five-and-a-half-foot spear.

The average Japanese foot soldier prized his bayonet. It was a symbol of his office, a twentieth-century warrior nodding to his Samurai forebears. He would wear his bayonet home on leave in a scabbard. No other modern force spent so much time practicing with cold steel or developing in its men the stone heart to use it.

If a prisoner was straggling, lagging behind the formation or slowing it down, most guards would just jab him in the lower back or buttocks, a quick poke deep enough to hustle him along and make him rejoin the formation. (After a guard stabbed Sergeant Ed Thomas of Knox, Indiana, in the right buttock, he told himself he could run "all the way to Manila" if he had to.) If

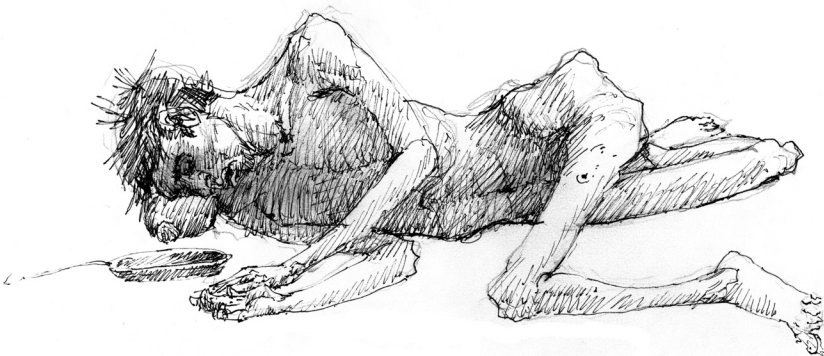
a man failed to raise himself, however, he usually got the blade to the hilt.

A young American in Sergeant Tony Aquino's group had fallen face-first to the gravel roadbed, and a guard at the rear of the column ordered the marchers to halt. He kicked the young American in the ribs and shouted at him to stand up, but the soldier got only as far as his knees before he collapsed again. The guard kicked him harder. (Come on compadre, Aquino thought, get up, get up!) The young American raised his head (Aquino could see blood spilling from the man's mouth) and reached out, as if to ask the guard for help.

The guard put his bayonet to the man's neck, shouted, and drove the blade home. The American rocked back on his heels and rose up on his haunches, then the guard jerked the blade free, and the boy toppled over in the dirt.

So it was going to be a death march, Aquino told himself, "death on the road to nowhere." Falter and fall, he thought, and "there you will stay."

When a sergeant in Joe Smith's column fell to the road, two of his comrades broke ranks to help. A guard from the rear of the column came running and shouting, and he beat the Samaritans back into line, then wheeled about and bayoneted the man on the ground. As Smith came abreast of the scene, the guard was struggling to free his weapon. He had driven the blade so deep that he had to put his foot in the small of the man's back and pull the rifle with both hands to wrest it free . . . .



*Prisoner-of-war sketch by Ben Steele.*

*Tears in the Darkness . . .*

## Writing Narrative Portraiture

by Michael Norman

New York University, U.S.A.

*The answer to figuring out the dramatic structure of Tears in the Darkness was to weave narrative portraiture through the sprawling narrative.*

I began my writing life as a nascent poet, an undergraduate veteran who had returned from the battlefield and embraced verse as an emollient for a scorched soul. One day one of my professors told me that if I wanted to be a “real artist,” I needed a “critical doctrine.” I didn’t know any better, so I started reading my way down his reading list until I found T.S. Eliot’s essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” Eliot’s poetry had appealed to me; I didn’t get his allusions at first, but his belief in the idea of renewal seemed to take the ache out of my chest, so I decided to make his doctrine my doctrine: The writer, he said, “must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past . . . . He must be aware that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same.”

I went on to become a commercial writer, which is to say, a journalist, a profession in which deadlines always trump doctrines. Then I left the business for the academy and started writing long-form or “literary” journalism. Looking around for narrative models, I remembered Eliot’s advice: no writer “has his complete meaning alone.” I didn’t have to reinvent the past; all I had to do was try to build on it.

Ten years ago I teamed up with my wife, Elizabeth Norman, to tell the story of America’s worst military defeat and its aftermath: the 1942 battle for the Bataan peninsula in the Philippines, the infamous “Death March” that followed and the three-year gauntlet of prison camps, “hell ships” and slave labor pens that formed its aftermath. Beth had just finished *We Band of Angels, The Untold Story of American Nurses Trapped on Bataan by the Japanese* for Random House. I had helped with the line edits and became fascinated with the larger story of the lost battle, the brutal death march and the cauldron of cruelty in which the prisoners of war were made to live for more than three years. I had written a lot about war, but was largely unsatisfied with the results. I knew war as anti-heroic, an insane enterprise in which everyone loses. Here,

at last, was a story, a set of facts and situations, that seemed to underscore that view. So I asked Beth whether she wanted to expand her research and work with me on “a big book” of ultra-realism, a book that echoed some of the sobering literature that followed the first world war. Neither of us expected to spend more than three years writing and researching the book, an expectation that seems silly now. War is a conundrum, and no writer has ever sorted it all out. But you get hooked trying, hooked looking for the meaning behind all that loss, all that waste. You look and look, and before you know it, ten years have passed.

Across the decade it took to research and write the story (1998-2008), we struggled again and again with the same problem, the fundamental problem faced by all writers, that of structure. We had only one criterion: the book had to be “organic,” which is to say, we wanted the shape of the story to grow out of the story itself. We followed no critical theory, no orthodoxy, no classic paradigm. We were writers thinking like writers, asking only one question—what would work?

We submitted the final manuscript for *Tears in the Darkness* to senior editor Paul Elie at Farrar, Straus, and Giroux in April 2008. It amounted to 681 pages of narrative. By the end of August the manuscript was ready to go into production, and Beth and I had an exchange of emails with Paul about the subtitle. We wanted to label the book a “story.” Paul wanted to use the word “chronicle.”

“The use of datelines from beginning to end makes it quite literally a chronicle,” he argued.

“Take a look at Schama’s *Rembrandt’s Eyes*,” we shot back. “Uses datelines galore. Publisher calls it a ‘biography.’”

“Yes, of course,” Paul said. But “as for *Rembrandt’s Eyes*, it seems to me to be ‘narrative portraiture’—which is what I was suggesting about your work . . . .”

Later that day I was speaking by phone with a colleague in Chicago and told him about the curious term our editor had used to describe our book.

“Narrative portraiture?” the colleague said. “Ooh, I like that. What does it mean?”

I didn’t know, exactly. We hadn’t created anything new, Beth and I. We’d followed the Eliot doctrine—“art never improves . . . but the material of art is never quite the same.” In other words, we’d borrowed fragments of structure and architectonic from the past and tried to refine and adapt them to the present. Was Paul just marketing with his term “narrative portraiture”? Or had we managed to make what Eliot modestly calls “progress,” some small “development” or “complication” that makes a work both conforming and individual?

Ten years ago we’d started with the idea of aping John Hersey’s 1946 *Hiroshima*, which had aped Thornton Wilder’s 1927 *The Bridge at San Luis Rey*—both stories told through the shifting point of view of a small group of

characters loosely connected to one another. A number of other writers had used variations of this design: Tom Wolfe in *The Right Stuff*; Tony Lukas, to a lesser degree, in *Common Ground*; Melissa Fay Greene in *Praying for Sheetrock*.

So in 1998 we started interviewing to find our characters. Beth attended to the complex history of the event, and I went into the field with a notebook and tape recorder. I worked the East Coast first—Pennsylvania, Florida, New York state, Virginia. Scores of interviews. We were looking for individuals that we might intermingle on the page to form a narrative group, a construct or repertory of characters to act as stand-ins for the experience of the 76,000 men who'd surrendered to the Japanese on April 9, 1942.

The interviews were not going well. Overall we were looking for men of insight, those who understood what had happened to them and had found some meaning in the experience—characters, as Henry James described them, who were “finely aware and richly responsible” enough to carry the narrative. Few of the men, we soon discovered, had experienced every aspect of the historical event we wanted to cover; some, for example, had fought in the battle, while others had waited in reserve, and some had made the death march on Bataan while others had been captured on a nearby island, Corregidor. Many of the men were shy and under-educated and had difficulty expressing themselves. Others, eager to make sure their role in history was remembered, had trouble with the truth. (What did Hemingway say of war stories? “You learn just as much as you are able to believe.”) More often than not crossing a man's threshold I'd run into a wall of *odium inimicus*. A large number of the former POWs still hated their Japanese captors, and their bitterness and anger had reduced their experience to a personal footnote, a venomous afterthought. So after some six months of exploratory interviews, we had two, perhaps three candidates for our list of *dramatis personae* and, hoping that a change in geography might change our luck, I headed west for a swing through California, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Texas. At first I got more of the same, then I landed in Billings, Montana to talk with a man named Ben Steele.

We'd been interviewing in clusters to stretch our research budget, and it was something of an extra expense to go to Montana on a swing through the West just to talk with one man, but, given his profile, we guessed he might be worth it. His “war story” was more complete than most; he suffered through every episode in the saga—fought on the front lines in the battle, made the death march, almost died on a prisoner-of-war work detail building a road through the jungle, sailed on one of the infamous “hell ships” to Japan, where he'd been imprisoned as a slave laborer in a coal mine. And his pre-war and post-war stories were rich with detail, anecdote, American emblems. He'd worked as a cowboy, a ranch hand and camp tender on cattle and sheep ranches. As a boy he'd met the writer-artist Will James, became bewitched by the process of art and during a stay in a prisoner-of-war hospital had taught himself to draw. After the war he went to the Cleveland Institute of Art then became a professor of art at Montana State University in Billings.



I liked Ben Steele right off. A thoughtful man with an infectious smile who turned out to be a natural narrator, an interlocutor out of what Granville Hicks calls the tradition of the American “frontier,” where the stories were “derived from sharp observation.” As an artist he also had a keen sense of nuance and perspective, on the canvas and off. In short, he was perfect for our purposes, right down to his metaphoric last name.

I talked with him for two days. Then I called Beth and suggested we scrap our initial repertory structure and build the book around Ben. Looking back, we did not at that point think in terms of “portraiture,” but we both knew that we’d have to create something more than standard profile and something less, much less, than a biography. We needed room in the story to do a lot of other work. We had history to render—political, military, cultural history—and we were beginning to assemble a rather large cast of Filipino and Japanese characters, a handful of them major characters. (The Japanese and Filipinos were important; we wanted the book to be centered on an American character, but we did not want to write a one-dimensional Amerocentric book.)

How, we asked ourselves, could we make Ben Steele a “central” character instead of a “main” character? How could we allow him to become the chief agent of the story without at the same time emerging as either its protagonist (which, given the facts, would have made him a lie) or its lead mummer (which would have created a hierarchy in a group of characters whose fate was democratic—they all suffered and died equally in that derelict place).

Abandoning the Hersey-Wilder model, we looked at a long list of nonfiction profilers—Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, A. J. Liebling, Lillian Ross, Hannah Arendt, Jane Kramer, Joe McGinnis—but none of their templates seemed right for our story. So we turned to fiction for a model of a central character and soon started rereading Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*. There was a lot of Paul Bäumer in Ben Steele and the reality of the novel, its insistence that at war everyone loses, matched the message we hoped would emerge from our work. We also admired its incantatory, sometimes dirge-like mood and tone. Most of all Remarque’s absolute refusal to cast any of his characters as heroes. I’d spent thirteen months in combat and that word “hero” has always left me dyspeptic.

But *All Quiet* wasn’t quite right. The novel certainly informed our text and reminded us that every page should serve the larger story, which is to say reflect the overall truth of the work. The problem was its design did not allow for the elements in nonfiction that serve as asides to the main story line: history with its facts, figures, anecdotes, multiple agents and their multiple agendas, conflicts and subplots; technical topics and subjects raised in the story that need to be explained and amplified for the reader; the cultural context necessary to understand how different people behave differently in the same set of circumstances; the kind of dramatic irony created by real coincidence, irony that is not a cliché; most of all the liberal use of primary

sources, particularly letters, diaries, and journals, many of which, in our case, had been previously unpublished and would give our readers the satisfaction of encountering fresh, unmediated voices.

To accomplish all this and, at the same time, put Ben Steele at the book's center, we began to think of the work in terms of a play. The war would be the story that ran from first act to last; all we had to do was walk a character on stage when we needed him, let him do his work, then exit to the wings. We'd just walk Ben Steele on stage more than the others, use the parts of his story—both Ben at war and Ben growing up in Montana—strategically to stitch all those disparate elements of nonfiction together.

Our plan left the manuscript a lumpish mess. The segments about Ben as a Montana cowboy disrupted the flow of the war narrative. They also acted like lime, neutralizing the sharp irony of the Japanese stories and Japanese characters we had worked so hard to interview and render. In other words, it shifted most of the empathy to Ben when we wanted the reader to consider every character with an equal emotional eye. We didn't want the book to be Ben's story. We wanted it to be everyone's story with Ben at the center.

Sorting through the mess, we decided to leave Ben's war moments where they were and pull the stories about his youth and early days on the range into interstitial chapters. But we got carried away again, made those interstitial much too long and at first couldn't figure out how to cut and reconfigure them.

All along we'd been studying Ben Steele's sketchbooks. An artist's sketchbooks are his diaries, a diurnal record of what's going through his mind, how he's trying to "work out" his art and life. Ben's sketchbooks for the most part were filled with two subjects—objects from his part of the country (log homesteads, horses and riders, sagebrush and cottonwoods) and sketches of Japanese guards and bedraggled prisoners of war. All the sketches were impressionistic, minimalist line drawings floating on a white page, vignettes surrounded by vapor. And, looking back, it was in those line drawings that we found the answer to the interstitials, an answer, in retrospect, that led to the practice Paul Elie calls "narrative portraiture."

We soon found that the shorter and more elliptical, or impressionistic, the interstitials were, the better they worked. And when we were able to render them in a slightly poetic or suggestive mode they worked very well indeed. In other words, when we aped our central character, our artist, and created vignettes, the interstitials not only advanced the narrative, they did so in a very short space and enhanced, rather than hindered, the flow of the main chapters, the war story and history.

So we were, in effect and without labeling it, practicing a kind of portraiture. The practice worked so well in the interstitial chapters on the young Ben Steele that on a rewrite we decided to revise those parts of the

*continues on page 56*



*Tears in the Darkness . . .*

## The logistics—and cost— of ten years of research and writing

I can tell you how much money we spent during the ten years we worked on *Tears in the Darkness*, but I cannot, nay would not, calculate its real cost, the one to our family, or I'd never write long-form nonfiction again.

For the record, we received an advance of \$160,000 (less \$16,000 in agent fees)—one third on signing, another third begged from the publisher after five or six years, the final third in 2008 after the manuscript was finished and accepted. We raised \$50,000 in grants, fellowships and so forth. The raw costs of the book—a lot of travel, research expenses including books and copying, etc., salaries for transcriptionists and translators and research assistants, equipment (we burned through three computers), and more miscellaneous expenses than I can list—the raw costs came to more than \$200,000. If that math seems to leave us in the red, you're good at arithmetic. We went into our own pockets to the tune of \$100,000 across the last ten years just to cover expenses, and it left us broke at several points and with a large loan.

The point of all this, the only point worth writing about, is the way major commercial publishers fail to fund the kind of work they claim readers clamor for. I'm not an historian of American publishing, but I'd be surprised if the situation was ever any different. The business model for American publishing is atavistic, medieval at best; the lion's share of the risk is on the writer and the lion's share of the profits goes to the publisher. They could adopt a different model, one that takes advantage of the tax and business expense laws, but that's not likely to happen. Writers are still considered independent contractors. You make your best deal, you pay your own costs, you balance your own books.

Fine by us. We didn't sit down to make money. (How could we with ten years of man-hours times two?) We sat down to write a good book, cost in time, expenses and everything else be damned. We kept our eye on the page, not the bottom line. That, of course, will be written by the reader.

— *Michael Norman*

main chapters where we had paused to profile other men—Americans, Japanese, Filipinos. Thinking about this recently, Beth suggested that what we had done was to move or “shift the portrait frame” across the story from one character to another. Sometimes that frame was large and presented a detailed portrait, as of Ben Steele, for example, or of General Masaharu Homma, the Japanese commander during the death march whose portrait runs for more than a hundred pages. And sometimes the frame was small, just big enough to hold a miniature or a snapshot of a character. As Beth described the process, the frame expanded or contracted depending on the size of the role the character played in the story, sometimes pausing for many pages, sometimes for just a paragraph or two. We’d distinguished Ben, she said, because he was the only character who was shown through both a series of small portraits, or poses, that appeared throughout the main war story—beginning, middle, and end—and in the large portrait that emerged when all the interstitials, including the epilogue and prologue, were taken together.

To write about Ben Steele, professor of art, we needed to learn about art, and, again in retrospect, it’s likely some of that learning shaped the way we employed the frames we used to portray him. As writers we’d long ago learned the basic elements of a profile or portrait—the image should be a private view that captures character, reveals psychology, and at the same time suggests the mystery of not being able to really “know” anyone. But through our reading, we had discovered that a portrait can be, perhaps should be, more than just an intimate look at a character. In *The Origins of Impressionism*, Gary Tinterow and Henri Loyrette point out that Degas thought there was a difference between a “portrait” and a “painting”—the portrait was “limited to the simple reproduction of the sitter’s features” while a painting went beyond the figure to include “complementary information . . . context . . . the things and people” that defined the person either in general or in a particular situation. More to our point, the subject of a portrait need not be the main object in the frame or even occupy its foreground. All the subject had to be was the portrait’s “principal motif.” So narrative portraiture, one could say, begins with the practice of thinking of character in terms of motif. In our case it was a useful, and perhaps different, way of conceiving structure and fashioning narrative discourse.

In the end, the most we can assert about “method” is that we aimed to commit an act of literature, as much as that’s possible in a genre driven by information instead of imagination, a form where the impulse to invent must always be tempered and checked by the necessity to authenticate, verify, confirm. Maybe we practiced “narrative portraiture,” or maybe we just borrowed what we needed when we needed it, and Paul was simply reminding us with his label what Eliot had taught writers years before: “What there is to conquer . . . has already been discovered . . . here is only the fight to recover what has been lost.” The rest, as he said, “is not our business.”

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# “My story is always escaping into other people”: Subjectivity, Objectivity, and the Double in American Literary Journalism

by Robert Alexander  
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*In many examples of literary journalism one can detect an “uncanny” correspondence or “doubling” between the subjects of the stories and certain characteristics of the literary journalists who write about them.*

There is a stunning moment in Bennett Miller’s 2005 film *Capote* when Harper Lee asks her childhood friend Truman Capote if he has fallen in love with the convicted murderer Perry Smith. Capote, who has interviewed Smith extensively and will feature him sympathetically as one of the main characters in his best-selling “nonfiction novel” *In Cold Blood*, declines a direct answer, replying instead, “It’s as if Perry and I grew up in the same house and one day he stood up and went out the back door while I went out the front.”<sup>1</sup> Although there is no record of Truman Capote ever having uttered these words, the line does capture the parallels between him and Smith which Gerald Clarke enumerates in the Capote biography on which the film was based: both Capote and Smith were small, both were raised by alcoholic mothers, both spent time in foster homes, both were victims of childhood abuse, and both turned to art for consolation. As Clarke notes, “each looked at the other and saw, or thought he saw, the man he might have been.”<sup>2</sup> They were, in effect, doubles.

Clarke’s observation adds a significant psycho-biographical dimension

to the critical understanding of Capote's landmark work. It also, however, intimates something of the deep undercurrents running between journalist and subject which may silently inform both the selection of subject matter and its representation in certain works of literary journalism. Such an intimation would itself remain highly localized and speculative, were it not for the fact that this "uncanny" doubling of journalist and subject repeats itself in so many canonical or near-canonical works of American literary journalism.

In cases where the journalist and subject are one, that doubling may express itself in a rupturing of the writer's persona. Here we may think of Norman Mailer's third person self-representation in *The Armies of the Night*,<sup>3</sup> or of the split character of Raoul Duke and Hunter S. Thompson carousing through *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*,<sup>4</sup> and perhaps even of Susan Orlean's playful self-interview in the Prologue to the movie edition of *The Orchid Thief*.<sup>5</sup>

Closer to the Capote-Smith relationship, however, are various works in which the writer seems to find his or her counterpart in *an Other*. There is, for example, the implicit analogy between source and journalist which underlies the brief relationship between Joe McGinnis and Janet Malcolm in the latter's *The Journalist and the Murderer*,<sup>6</sup> not to mention the curious *mise en abyme* which opens in the text when Malcolm actually interviews McGinnis, a journalist who, like she, had been accused of employing inappropriate reporting practices in his work. Even more striking, however, is Barbara Lounsbury's description of Gay Talese's first encounter with Bill Bonanno, the son of Mafia kingpin Joseph Bonanno, and a man with whom Talese shared not only the same year of birth but a host of other ethnic, familial, and biographical facts. According to Lounsbury:

When Talese first saw the young Bonanno standing in a federal courthouse corridor with his lawyer in 1965, he was, in some ways, looking across the establishment divide at his double. Talese did not know at that moment of the remarkable similarities of their histories. He did not know that they had been born in the same year, both of their fathers named Joseph with roots in southern Italy; that both of their immigrant grandfathers had died young; that both he and Bill were eldest sons with younger sisters; that both were outsiders in different ways in high school and went to colleges in the South where they joined ROTC. He did not know then that their family albums would look remarkably similar, but he saw enough across that divide to be curious.<sup>7</sup>

Adrian Nicole LeBlanc experiences a similar mirroring of herself in the 16-year-old crack addict and prostitute about whom she writes in "Trina and

Trina,” although in this case, the resemblance is ultimately a diversion which initially obscures the profound differences between them:

Trina was white, Italian, watchful, unyielding, and working class. These attributes not only distinguished her from many urban crack streetwalkers, but also made her like me. Our shared attributes would blind me, delude me into the sort of sturdy plan of action that seems possible when you and the person you are trying to help share common ground.<sup>8</sup>

Most recently, and certainly most bizarrely, is the explicit identification which emerges in the 2005 work *True Story* between its author, the disgraced former *New York Times Magazine* writer (and fabricator) Michael Finkel, and Christian Longo, a man who, prior to telling his story to Finkel, had murdered his wife and three children then fled to Mexico where he had assumed Finkel’s identity. “As much as I like to deny it,” writes Finkel,

the truth is that I saw some of myself in Longo. The flawed parts of my own character—the runaway egotism, the capacity to deceive—were mirrored and magnified in him. All the time I spent with Longo forced me to take a lengthy and uncomfortable look at what I’d done and who I had become.<sup>9</sup>

A similarly exaggerated but no less unsettling doubling is evident between Joseph Mitchell, the *New Yorker* writer Norman Sims credits with helping to sustain literary journalism “during the middle years of the twentieth century,”<sup>10</sup> and the subject of two profiles Mitchell wrote, the first in 1942, the second twenty-two years later in 1964, on the derelict Greenwich Village bohemian Joe Gould, and which comprise the volume *Joe Gould’s Secret*.<sup>11</sup> One might venture that Mitchell saw in Gould—a sort of down-and-out *poète maudit* with a debilitating case of writer’s block—a haunting negative image of himself, not unlike what Gerald Clarke says Capote saw in Perry Smith: in the wraith-like, dispossessed Gould, Mitchell quite possibly “recognized his shadow, his dark side.” And, as with Capote, “When he looked into those unhappy eyes, he was looking into a tormented region of his own unconscious, resurrecting . . . nightmares and fears.”<sup>12</sup>

Superficially, Mitchell and Gould seem to have little in common. Mitchell is a family man, securely employed in a respectable position with a prestigious magazine, Gould “an odd and penniless and unemployable little man”<sup>13</sup> who is “constantly tormented by what he calls ‘the three H’s’—homelessness, hunger, and hangovers.”<sup>14</sup> And yet, with the second profile, curious similarities between the two begin to emerge: neither is native to New York and both are acutely aware of their status as come-from-aways; both are writers, working first as crime reporters before quitting daily journalism to engage in larger literary endeavours, Mitchell to write for *The New Yorker* and

Gould in the service of a sprawling, formless, multi-million word manuscript he calls “An Oral History of Our Time”—a work of history from below similar to Mitchell’s own journalistic project of representing the life and conversation of the everyday but also, as it turns out, an undertaking more conceptual than real and thus not unlike the novel Mitchell describes himself having imagined writing when he first arrived in New York but never set to paper.

Stanley Edgar Hyman, one of the few literary critics to write on *Joe Gould’s Secret*, noted the analogy between Mitchell and his subject, observing:

By the end of the book, when he discovers Gould’s secret, Mitchell becomes, not Gould’s bearer or Gould’s victim, but Gould himself, and the unwritten Oral History merges with Mitchell’s own unwritten novel. . . . Then we realize that Gould has been Mitchell all along, a misfit in a community of traditional occupations, statuses, and roles come to New York to express his special identity; finally we realize that the body of Mitchell’s work is precisely that Oral History of Our Time that Gould himself could not write.<sup>15</sup>

Mitchell corroborated this point, never explicitly stated in the text, when in an interview with Norman Sims, he remarked: “We were in the same boat. We both came from small towns and didn’t fit in, and both had an idea. He had the same feeling about people on the park bench talking. I was talking about myself here. He was talking about himself and I was talking about myself.”<sup>16</sup> Or, as he is quoted in Raymond J. Rundus’s *Joseph Mitchell: A Reader’s and Writer’s Guide*, “I became him and he became me, if you see what I mean.”<sup>17</sup>

There are some commonsense explanations for all of these doubles lurking about in literary journalism. Asked, for example, what subjects attract him, the very canny Gay Talese has said: “The subjects that involve me are those that have, literally, *involved* me. I write about stories that are connected to my life. Although on first impression they might appear to be nonfiction that features *other people’s* experiences, the reason I’m drawn to them in the first place is that I see *myself* in them.”<sup>18</sup> And while Susan Orlean may declare, “The people I’m least excited about writing about are the ones who are most like me. I’m more interested in writing about people who aren’t like me,”<sup>19</sup> it is hard to deny that in *The Orchid Thief*, John Laroche’s passion for orchids does not find a sympathetic resonance in Orlean’s self-proclaimed “one unembarassing passion . . . to know what it feels like to care about something passionately.”<sup>20</sup> It is also on the basis of journalist-subject similarity that *The New Yorker’s* Janet Malcolm distinguishes people she has written about in her literary journalism from other people who, she says, exist “only in life.”<sup>21</sup> Discussing Jeffrey Masson, the subsequently litigious subject of her 1984

work *In the Freud Archives*, she observes that, as a writer, you know someone about whom you have written

more intimately than you know most merely real people—not only because you have had occasion to study him more closely than one studies the people one does not write about, but because you have put a great deal of yourself into him. “*Madame Bovary, c’est moi*,” Flaubert said of his famous character. The characters of nonfiction, no less than those of fiction, derive from the writer’s most idiosyncratic desires and deepest anxieties; they are what the writer wishes he was and worries that he is. *Masson, c’est moi*.<sup>22</sup>

As if to confirm the point, Joseph Mitchell, asked by Norman Sims why he became so interested in Gould, answers with the same allusion: “‘Because he is me,’ Mitchell said. ‘God forgive me for my version of Flaubert’s remark about Madame Bovary.’”<sup>23</sup>

Along with raising the journalistically problematic prospect that any individual who is the main subject of a work of literary journalism may be, in at least some respects, a composite, these examples also present the possibility that any protracted relationship between a journalist and subject is likely to bring whatever qualities—real or imagined—they may share, to light. Such a recognition of the familiar in the unfamiliar, however, is also a defining characteristic of that special category of the frightening which Freud called “the uncanny.” In his 1919 essay of that title, and one of the few places in his work where psychoanalysis and aesthetics meet, Freud described the disconcerting sense of familiarity one experiences in the presence of such strange repetitions as *deja vu* or “the double,” as the startling recognition of some aspect of one’s unconscious. Feelings of the uncanny may arise, Freud says, from the return of “repressed infantile complexes”<sup>24</sup> but also from experiences which seem to confirm superstitious beliefs one’s culture has supposedly “surmounted.”<sup>25</sup> In both cases, he writes, the uncanny “is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it through the process of repression.”<sup>26</sup>

Few discourses could rival conventional journalism for its similarly alienating effect on the subjectivities of its practitioners. For writers such as Mitchell and Talese, whose early rhetorical training took place in the modern newsroom, the self was literally repressed by the dictates of journalistic “objectivity.” As such, it should be no surprise that, when called upon to acknowledge their selves in their work, such writers may well feel at a loss. For example, when contracted to write an autobiographical companion piece to *Unto the Sons*, Talese says he was utterly stymied. “What blocked me, I think, was the imprecision of my persona and the fact that I did not know where



to establish my story," he recalls in *A Writer's Life*. "I had no idea what my story was. I had never given much thought to who *I* was. I had always defined myself through my work, which was always about other people."<sup>27</sup> Or, as he said in an interview with the *New York Daily News*, "I was supposed to do this sequel to *Unto the Sons*, but since it had to be my story, I never could find out what my story was, because I could never find out as a journalist who I was because I was raised in this notion of being outside the story. My story is always escaping into other people."<sup>28</sup>

Talese's comments provide an apt description of the sort of alienating effects that have been imputed to objective journalism. In a suggestive passage, the rise of literary journalism has been attributed in part to "the rhetorical intention of modern journalistic styles," which, in its emphasis on objectivity, alienates the subjectivities of the journalist, the subject, and the readers.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, "narrative journalism" as it emerged in the U.S. in the 1890s, provided "a challenge to or resistance against mainstream 'factual' or 'objective' news, much as the form still does today."<sup>30</sup> It is an attempt "to engage the objectified Other,"<sup>31</sup> including, we might add, that aspect of the journalist's self which escapes into the subject of his or her story. For example, in the lengthy, boozy course of his interviews with Joe Gould, it becomes evident to Mitchell that his subject talks ultimately most not about the Oral History (which is what interests Mitchell) but rather "about nothing but himself."<sup>32</sup> In this wildly solipsistic narrative, Gould embodies precisely the radical subjectivity excluded from the sort of objective journalism in which Mitchell had been trained during his nine years as a reporter.

This encounter with what we might call "the Other into whom one's own story has escaped" is possible, in part, because of the "literary" in literary journalism, that is, the distinctive capacity of "literariness" to disrupt the limits imposed by genre. In the case of conventional journalism, genre dictates not only form and style but also the range of roles and interactions it offers to both its writers and their subjects. Such journalistic convention, in other words, determines and controls the nature of the writer's encounter with the Other, prohibiting, for example, any imbrication of subjectivities and thus tending, as Walter Lippmann observed, to reduce subjects to stereotypes,<sup>33</sup> but also flattening the journalist's own professional self in the process. As a result, both the writer and subject of conventional journalism are condemned to remain within a fairly narrow band of roles, limiting the nature of any exchange possible between them. Literature's generic specificity lies precisely, however, in its capacity to expose and disrupt such limits. As Jonathan Culler explains:

Literature is a paradoxical institution because to create literature is



to write according to existing formulas—to produce something that looks like a sonnet or that follows the conventions of the novel—but it is also to flout those conventions, to go beyond them. Literature is an institution that lives by exposing and criticizing its own limits, by testing what will happen if one writes differently.<sup>34</sup>

It is this disruptive power which is responsible for what has been characterized as literature's resistance to "comfortable critical closure"<sup>35</sup> and what critic Nicholas Royle, commenting on Freud's "The Uncanny," has called "the resistant strangeness of literature."<sup>36</sup> It is this strangeness, moreover, which Ezra Pound said, makes literature "news that STAYS news"<sup>37</sup> and explains why literary works, unlike conventional news stories, are not typically exhausted by a single reading. It is the "literary" element of literary journalism, finally, which permits the literary journalist to confront and acknowledge those aspects of his or her self, repressed and alienated in conventional journalism, in the Other into whom they have escaped.

The disruptive strangeness of the literary makes itself available to the literary journalist through access to the rich rhetorical resources denied to his or her counterpart working in more explicitly "objective" forms. Such resources include narrative but also the possibility of a relatively unrestricted use of a full range of figures including metaphor, symbol, and irony. Unlike facts, rhetorical figures are neither true nor false. To draw on the language of J.L. Austin, they are, rather, felicitous or infelicitous<sup>38</sup> and permit the literary journalist to inflect literal reality in ways which, while not removing them from the confines of what Truman Capote's biographer Gerald Clarke astutely calls "the barbed wire of fact,"<sup>39</sup> allows them greater flexibility in telling their story their own way.

Such a complicating of the boundary between the figurative and the literal (including its implicit acknowledgment of the factual as a particular type of figuration) is another feature of the uncanny. In his essay, Freud noted that "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on."<sup>40</sup> The effect, he continues, is a product of "the over-accentuation of psychical reality in comparison with material reality,"<sup>41</sup> or, for our purposes, we might say, of a mixing of subjective and objective styles such as we find in literary journalism. In a discussion of Freud's essay, Richard T. Gray notes, "Stylistically, uncanny fiction requires a fusion of objective and subjective narrative styles. We commonly find a realistic frame, which reads like a report or a newspaper article, which is suddenly ruptured by fantastic events. But this rupture is also related to the accuracy and detail of objective narration."<sup>42</sup>

Gray here is writing about “uncanny fiction” which, if we agree with Nicholas Royle’s assertion that “Literature is uncanny,”<sup>43</sup> may take in *all fiction*. As the example of the double suggests, however, literary journalism is no less susceptible to uncanny effects than traditional fiction as we understand it. Given its explicit stake in the “real,” it may even be moreso. At any rate, the notion of the uncanny offers a means of thinking through some of the more unsettling implications of the word “literary,” which is relegated, perhaps misleadingly, to the grammatical position of adjective in the name commonly assigned to this genre.



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### Endnotes

1. *Capote*, DVD, directed by Bennett Miller (2005; Sony Classics, 2005).
2. Gerald Clarke, *Capote: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 326.
3. Norman Mailer, *The Armies of the Night* (New York: Plume, 1994).
4. Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (New York: Random House, 1971).
5. Susan Orlean, *The Orchid Thief* (New York: Ballantine, 2000).
6. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York: Random House, 1990).
7. Barbara Lounsbury, “Bridging the Silence: Gay Talese’s Uncomfortable Journey.” *Literature Interpretation and Theory* 14 (2003): 52. In this article, Lounsbury also notes a pattern of doubling in other works by Talese. See p. 51.
8. Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, “Trina and Trina,” in *Literary Journalism*, ed. Norman Sims and Mark Kramer (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 211.
9. Michael Finkel, *True Story* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 307-08. Finkel’s words sound remarkably like *Capote* screenwriter Dan Futterman’s assertion in his commentary to the DVD version of the film that Capote’s relationship with the criminal Perry forced Capote “to face himself.”
10. Norman Sims, “Joseph Mitchell and *The New Yorker* Nonfiction Writers” in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 23.
11. Joseph Mitchell, *Joe Gould’s Secret* (New York: Random House, 1996).

12. Clarke, 326.
13. Mitchell, 37.
14. Mitchell, 3.
15. Stanley Edgar Hyman, "The Art of Joseph Mitchell," in *The Critic's Credentials: Essays and Reviews by Stanley Edgar Hyman*, ed. Phoebe Pettingell (New York: Atheneum, 1978), 84-85.
16. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 183.
17. Raymond J. Rundus, *Joseph Mitchell: A Reader's and Writer's Guide* (New York: iUniverse, 2003), xxii.
18. Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (New York: Random House, 2005), 365.
19. Boynton, 279.
20. Boynton, 275.
21. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 149.
22. Malcolm, 149. Malcolm, probably the most psychoanalytically knowledgeable literary journalist in the U.S. or elsewhere, evinces a particular sensitivity if not an attraction to the double. For example, in the introduction to her 1992 collection *The Purloined Clinic*, she notes that one of her accounts in the volume focuses on a "Czech-Jewish former dissident" she met in Prague and in whom, she writes, she "recognized a sort of double." She goes on to say that in Michael Fried, the subject of the review which provides her collection with its title, she "recognized another sort of double: a critic whose imagination I found almost uncannily familiar and congenial." See Janet Malcolm, *The Purloined Clinic*. (New York: Random House, 1992), ix.
23. Sims, *True Stories*, 183.
24. Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" in *Writings on Art and Literature*, ed. Neil Hertz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 225.
25. Freud, 224.
26. Freud, 217. Among those uncanny experiences apparently confirming such "surmounted" superstitious beliefs, Freud includes "meetings with one's own image unbidden and unexpected" and provides an illustration from his own life:

I was sitting alone in my *wagon-lit* compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet, and an elderly gentleman in a dressing-gown and a traveling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right, I at once realized to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being *frightened* by [my "double"], . . . I simply failed to recognize [it] as such. Is it not possible, though, that [my] dislike of [it] was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction which feels the "double" to be something uncanny?

This sense of the double as a "vestigial trace" of a more ancient mode of being is evident in a curiously parallel scene from Hunter S. Thompson's "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved." The uncanny moment occurs when illustrator Ralph Steadman, who with Thompson has been searching for a person who would symbolize "the whole doomed atavistic culture that makes the Kentucky Derby what it is," awakens Thompson in his hotel room. Thompson writes:

I barely heard him. My eyes had finally opened enough for me to focus on the mirror across the room and I was stunned at the shock of recognition. For a confused instant I thought that Ralph had brought somebody with him—a model for that one special face we'd been looking for. There he was, by God—a puffy, drink-ravaged, disease-ridden creature . . . like an awful cartoon version of an old snapshot in some once-proud mother's family photo album. It was the face we'd been looking for—and it was, of course, my own. Horrible, horrible . . . .”

As in Freud's anecdote, Thompson's response to his double is not simply the effect of encountering “one's own image unbidden and unexpected.” It is related, as well, to the horror of discovering a resemblance between one's self and some remote ancestral type thought to be “surmounted” or at least a cultural type with which one assumed oneself to have nothing in common. Indeed, much of the effect of Thompson's work draws on such a latent identity between his own intemperate persona and the monstrous excesses of the world on which he reports. See Freud, “The Uncanny,” 248-9; Hunter S. Thompson, “The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved,” in *The Great Shark Hunt* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 31, 37.

27. Gay Talese, *A Writer's Life* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 75.

28. Quoted in Boynton, *The New New Journalism*, 364-5.

29. John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 42.

30. Hartsock, 41.

31. Hartsock, 42.

32. Mitchell, 119.

33. Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 224.

34. Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 40.

35. Hartsock, 42.

36. Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 15.

37. Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 29.

38. J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

39. Clarke, 357.

40. Freud, 221.

41. Ibid., 221.

42. Richard T. Gray, “Lecture Notes: Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ (1919),” <http://courses.washington.edu/freudlit/Uncanny.Notes.html> (accessed January 17, 2009).

43. Andrew Bennet and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Prentice Hall, 1999), 36.

# Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible in German and Australian Literary Journalism

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*Australian author Anna Funder's Stasiland serves as a useful study for exploring the differences between German and Australian notions of literary journalism when it comes to claims of verifiability and authenticity.*

Australian author Anna Funder's book *Stasiland*, which deals with life in the former East Germany, is based on a series of interviews. It has been described as "a fresh and highly original close-up of what happens to people in the corrosive atmosphere of a totalitarian state."<sup>1</sup> *Stasiland*, which came out in 2002, tells the story of ordinary citizens who got caught up in the web of East Germany's state security [*Staatssicherheit* or "Stasi"]. Yet, it is more than a history about the Stasi. It is a personal exploration of the reality of psychological terror that, as far as Anna Funder was concerned, had not yet been sufficiently told.<sup>2</sup>

*Stasiland* was shortlisted for numerous prizes in Australia and also "received rave notices"<sup>3</sup> in Britain, where it won the BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize in 2004, a substantial award which carries a prize money of £30,000. The prize is an award for nonfiction only, and *Stasiland* was commended for stretching the boundaries of nonfiction writing.<sup>4</sup> *The Sunday Times*, to quote from the book's back cover, called it "a masterpiece of investigative analysis, written almost like a novel, with a perfect mix of compassion and distance."<sup>5</sup> It was, then, book-length journalism with a literary ambition.

In Australia the manuscript had quickly found a publisher, whereas in Germany it accumulated twenty-three rejection slips before it was taken up.<sup>6</sup>

Why did this book, highly acclaimed in large parts of the English-speaking world, receive such a different reception in Germany? One might attribute it to xenophobia. Yet Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's List*<sup>7</sup> was very well received in Germany, and it, too, was written by an *Ausländer*, or outsider, who happened to be Australian as well. Instead, the answer to this question can be sought in the difficult terrain of how literary journalism is received in both these countries. This article examines the differing traditions of literary journalism in both countries while exploring the legal and ethical framework that shaped these traditions.

### LITERARY JOURNALISM—A CONTESTED FIELD

Journalism has marked literary roots as numerous European scholars have pointed out, most prominently the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas in his book, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*,<sup>8</sup> which most English readers are familiar with as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.<sup>9</sup> Journalism's closeness to literature lasted longer in countries like France and Germany, whereas the U.S. and England turned much earlier towards the briefer, event-driven style of news journalism,<sup>10</sup> which led to the "objectivity norm in American journalism."<sup>11</sup> Not everyone was enamoured with this style, however, leading to descriptions of journalists as "the eunuchs of the craft"<sup>12</sup> whose ideal it was

to grind out a column of more or less well-balanced sentences, capable of grammatical construction, conflicting with no social conviviality or party prejudice, which fills so much space in the paper, and then utterly, swiftly, and forever vanishes from mortal mind.<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, the rejection of this "castrated craft" provoked writers, especially in the U.S., to proclaim a New Journalism in the 1960s. Although the history of literary journalism in the U.S. has been reasonably well established, German scholars tend to use its most notable historical expression, the New Journalism, as a point of departure in comparing their tradition. Recent German studies of the genre like *Grenzgänger. Formen des New Journalism*<sup>14</sup> use it as the yardstick for their research into American as well as German literary journalism. Elisabeth Klaus titles her contribution to the book "Jenseits der Grenzen—die problematische Unterscheidung zwischen Fakt und Fiktion" [Beyond boundaries—the problematic differentiation between fact and fiction] and focuses thus on one of the central problems of the genre.<sup>15</sup> For literary journalism, which uses narrative elements we often associate with the fictional novel, credibility is one of the most contested fields. On the other hand, these elements help to achieve, as noted East German novelist Christa Wolf argues, "a truth beyond the important facts of the world" [*eine Wahrheit jenseits der wichtigen Fakten der Welt*] as the facts

in themselves do not necessarily provide understanding.<sup>16</sup> Nance followed a similar line of reasoning when he said, referring to Truman Capote, "It is a fascinating ideal: to reach a point at which the inner reality coincides with the outer and the free use of the artists' shaping power results not in distortion, but in heightened fidelity."<sup>17</sup>

This establishing of wider contexts [*Kontextgebundenheit*] and enabling of an emotional connectivity [*emotionale Anschlussfähigkeit*]<sup>18</sup> has brought a revival of literary journalism in countries outside the United States. Literary journalism—also under the name of creative nonfiction and narrative journalism—is now being taught in many journalism schools as well as in creative writing workshops. Creative writing schools are hardly worried about the implications of a "subjective, dramatized narrative style" [*subjektives dramaturgisches Erzählen*],<sup>19</sup> whereas credibility is in the forefront of the discussion led from the journalism side.<sup>20</sup>

The key issues, according to James Aucoin, are notions of accuracy, verifiability and authenticity.<sup>21</sup> In his study of Polish author Ryszard Kapuściński he rejects the narrow confines drawn by Norman Sims and Mark Kramer, and their demand that any text carrying the co-name of journalism should have "no composite scenes, no misstated chronology, no falsification of the discernible drift or proportion of events, no invention of quotes, no attribution of thoughts to sources."<sup>22</sup> If the above mentioned rules were applied, then not only Ryszard Kapuściński or Australian author Helen Garner contravened them, but also Anna Funder.

Aucoin rejects the strict demands placed on literary journalism by critics like Kramer on the much established evidence that journalism, too, "constructs a truth that is based on culturally accepted conventions."<sup>23</sup> By the same token this article contends that literary journalism, like its component parts of literature and journalism, is a construct based on different culturally and socially accepted conventions. German and Australian views of literary journalism are shaped by different histories and expectations, as the reaction to Anna Funder's book *Stasiland* in Germany demonstrates. This reception will show the notion of authenticity as the most contested one.

## GERMAN LITERARY JOURNALISM CONFRONTING THE EAST GERMAN PAST

**I**n early nineteenth century Germany a new kind of writing emerged, which was no longer primarily concerned with adhering to established literary forms but aimed at a political and social public impact. One such writer *cum* journalist was Karl Marx. This brought about a change not only in the style of writing but also publishing.<sup>24</sup> Well-known writers and poets, such as Georg



Büchner, Ferdinand Freilingrath and Heinrich Heine, wrote for newspapers in a social and political context. Yet in the second, far more conservative, half of the nineteenth century few writers sought the public arena to discuss political and social issues.<sup>25</sup> That said, the connection between German literary journalism and political and social concerns never quite ceased to exist.

In the first half of the twentieth century one of the most prominent exponents of literary journalism, writing in the tradition of political and social concern, was Egon Erwin Kisch, who is lauded for having developed the literary reportage.<sup>26</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century it is the still-living author Günther Wallraff who assumed false identities to be able to report first hand on various social injustices, be they against workers in certain jobs or against migrants.<sup>27</sup> Apart from highlighting social injustices, what Kisch and Wallraff also have in common is the fact that they report on what they experienced personally. They restrict themselves to eyewitness reports, and this, to this day, is the major criterion for literary journalism in Germany. This attitude confines the writer to the role of "authoritative interpreter of a reality subjectively experienced by him."<sup>28</sup>

This point of view, namely that only those who have had the experience themselves are permitted to speak or write about it, can also be found in the literature about the former German Democratic Republic, or GDR, and its state security. The books which have been published in Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall are either pure fiction, such as Ingo Schulze's *Simple Stories* (1999) and Thomas Brussig's *Am kürzeren Ende der Sonnenallee* [*At the Shorter End of the Sonnenallee*] (1999), or they are nonfiction books presenting detailed research in a scholarly manner, such as Joachim Walther's *Staatssicherheit und Schriftsteller* [*State Security and Authors*] (1996).

The only book to which the label literary journalism is applicable in the widest sense is *Aktenkundig* [*Knowing the Files*], edited by Hans-Joachim Schädlich and published in 1992.<sup>29</sup> Schädlich's book "describes the perpetrators and talks about the resistance of the victims and their right to the truth."<sup>30</sup> Fourteen dissidents of the former GDR wrote about their encounters with state security, in particular their experience of reading through the files accumulated on them. In these files they were confronted with the facts of their lives as reported by those who spied on them for the former East German state security.

In order to understand the impact of Schädlich's collection, one has to be aware that there was a heated debate in political circles about whether or not to open the Stasi files, and who should have access to the information. At the time *Aktenkundig* was published in 1993, many people in Germany as well as abroad were of the opinion that disclosing the information held in these files

would do more harm than good.<sup>31</sup> Today, once again, the same question is being discussed about closing the archives and moving the files to the Federal Archive, where they can be used for historic and other research, but will be no longer available to those individuals who want to see and read their own file, and know the truth about who spied on them.<sup>32</sup>

As far as the legal situation is concerned, it is also becoming more and more difficult for the media in Germany to report about alleged Stasi contacts with politicians and other individuals in the public eye. Almost all individuals confronted with the accusation of ties to the Stasi are suing the press, TV stations, and publishing houses. They are fighting on the basis of privacy rights that there should be no disclosures about them. In recent years German courts have increasingly ruled against the media, such as daily newspapers, news magazines and political programs on TV, and prohibited them to publish such material.<sup>33</sup>

The rulings give the clear message that German courts place privacy and personal rights [*Persönlichkeitsrechte*] above the right to free speech. In the case of presumed Stasi connections, the onus of proof is on the media, and only signed commitments of individuals who worked for the Stasi are permitted as evidence. Corroborating evidence is not seen as proof. The problem that arises is that high-profile people in the GDR, such as artists, scientists, sports people or prominent lawyers were not required to give in writing this undertaking of cooperation with the Stasi because "the Ministry for State Security did not want to scare intellectuals away."<sup>34</sup> Given this legal framework, it is difficult to write about Stasi activities today.

These decisions of giving greater weight to the protection of privacy than to freedom of the press are in keeping with aspects of the German Press Council regulations. The German press codex, in article eight, erects a far higher protective wall around privacy than is the case in Australia and more broadly the Anglo-American world.<sup>35</sup> The result is that when combining the tradition of "participant observer" with a legal framework that puts a premium on privacy, a far tighter space for literary journalism emerges in Germany. As *Aktenkundig* demonstrates, this leaves only those who can write and publish to tell the tale. Those who cannot most likely will never have their stories told.

#### AUSTRALIAN LITERARY JOURNALISM IN THE ANGLO-AMERICAN TRADITION

In Australia, journalism and literature have always been closely intertwined. Ken Stewart (1988) has argued that from 1855 to 1955 "literary Australia was largely a journalists' Australia."<sup>36</sup> David Conley, with his 1998 article on Robert Drewe, offered as an appendix the list of 174 names of "Australian

novelists/journalists”<sup>37</sup> to illustrate the large number of authors who also wrote journalism and journalists who published fiction and book-length nonfiction. Understandably, not all of these would be labelled prominent writers and not all brought their journalism to bear on their books. But among those who are stars on the Australian literary firmament and who used journalistic technique in their creative work are Marcus Clarke, Katherine Susannah Pritchard, George Johnston, Robert Drewe, and Helen Garner.<sup>38</sup> Currently one of the best-known Australian journalists writing fiction is Geraldine Brooks, a widely experienced former foreign correspondent, who won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for fiction for her historical novel, *March*.

Australia did not have the wave of “New Journalism” the United States had, where Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe and Hunter S. Thompson were some of the major driving forces behind the movement. As Conley’s long list shows, there was a more easy association between journalism and literature, which resulted in a fairly low profile for literary journalism. But ever since Helen Garner published her controversial account of a sexual harassment scandal at Melbourne University’s respectable Ormond College, *The First Stone* (1995), the genre of literary journalism has been brought to wide public attention in Australia.

Today, Anna Funder’s book *Stasiland* is one of the best known of this genre in Australia next to Garner’s *The First Stone* and Joe Cinque’s *Consolation* (2004). In contrast to Garner’s *The First Stone*, which took a divisive Australian case as its subject matter, Funder’s book about the dark deeds of a state security apparatus in a distant land evoked the admiration usually given to a good novel because, as far as the Australians were concerned, it was a reality with which they had no personal experience with. No one in Australia questioned, to cite Aucoin again, “the accuracy, verifiability and authenticity” of Funder’s account. To be sure, the former GDR was a long way away and that cannot be discounted. But, in addition, the genre as such caused no concern. The heat of discussion caused by Garner’s volume, after all, did not focus on the genre of the book but on Garner’s lenient attitude towards the Master of the College, which brought her many attacks from feminist critics.<sup>39</sup>

Even though Funder structured her research like a traditional fictional narrative, this was seen in Australia neither as a falsification of events nor as an intrusion into the private sphere of others which, in the German tradition, would have been frowned upon. Such disapproval is a sign of the different ethical and legal frameworks of the two countries with regard to privacy. In accordance with its Press Council rules in Germany, for example, those killed as soldiers in Afghanistan, in terror attacks, or accidents cannot be named unless they are public figures. The exposure given to their grieving relatives

in Australia or the United States is rarely found in Germany. With regard to the deceased, Australia follows British law (as do the Americans) which determines that the dead cannot be defamed. One can thus write ever so much more freely about the dead, and their relatives, than would be permissible in Germany.<sup>40</sup> This freedom, which also includes writing about matters that have not been experienced firsthand, is reflected in such books as Garner's *The First Stone* or Funder's *Stasiland*. As a consequence, authors in Australia have access to a far wider range of topics, and they can give their books a "dramatized" [*dramaturgisierte*] narrative that attracts readers far more than a mere recounting of facts.

### STASILAND

Charting the reception of *Stasiland* in Germany neatly illustrates these diverging traditions. The citation of the BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize for Non-Fiction, which at present carries the highest prize money for nonfiction in the world, sums up the reaction of the English-speaking world:

The winner, Anna Funder's *Stasiland*, is a fresh and highly original close-up of what happens to people in the corrosive atmosphere of a totalitarian state. An intimate portrait—both touching and funny—of survivors caught between their desire to forget and the need to remember. A beautifully executed first book . . . *Stasiland* . . . gives a voice to the ordinary people of the former German Democratic Republic. The reader follows Funder as she unearths stories of astonishing cruelty inflicted on its citizens by the state. Despite the sobering subject matter, it contains wonderful flashes of humour and has been described as "a brilliant and necessary book" which "both devastates and lifts the heart."<sup>41</sup>

Germany, on the other hand, gave the book a mixed reaction. Of the twenty-three rejection slips Funder received, only one publisher bothered to tell her why. "This is the best book by a foreigner on this issue. But, unfortunately, in the current political climate, we cannot see our way to publishing it."<sup>42</sup>

When the book was eventually published by the Europäische Verlagsanstalt in Hamburg and Funder went on a reading tour in Germany, the reviews showed up the old divisions between east and west. Interestingly, it was not always a case of where the paper was published so much as where the reviewer had grown up. Whereas the *Ostsee-Zeitung* very politely invited its readers to the event<sup>43</sup> in Rostock's university bookshop, the *Sächsische Zeitung* in Dresden was far more aggressive and even hostile in its headline and article. Titled "Collapsing houses and confused people—Today Australian author Anna Funder presents her book *Stasiland* in Dresden," the article is clearly

based on an interview with the writer.<sup>44</sup> The questions are kept in the text, and they aim time and again at the issue of why a foreigner had to write about the former GDR:

Why does an Australian have to tell us what it was like? . . . How does she arrive at her judgement? What interest does an Australian have in the GDR? . . . A picture of the GDR that only shows victims and perpetrators? . . . Does she ever wonder how she herself would have behaved had she lived here?<sup>45</sup>

The reviewer for the *Hamburger Abendblatt*, who had also grown up in the former GDR, had similar difficulties. While admiring her book, it makes him angry that in the interview **he cannot make her see that his experiences** of life in the GDR were not entirely negative. In this view, the GDR was not only

a grey Stasi prison, an unloved, and often hated state, which limited and humiliated us, which watched and surveyed us, but [it was also a place] in which we did not feel persecuted 24 hours a day, and from which we managed to wrest a fulfilling life.<sup>46</sup>

After the fall of the wall, the reviewer accessed his Stasi file and found that his best friend had spied on him. However, he still asks himself, did he really “live in Anna Funder’s *Stasiland*”?<sup>47</sup> His disapproval, therefore, is mostly directed against the position Funder takes towards the former GDR. At the core of this criticism is the fact that Funder had never experienced life in the GDR with all its bad, but also good, moments.

**N**one of these reviews ever accuse Funder of having “invented” things. But in emphasising the fact that she herself had never lived under the gaze of the Stasi, the critiques by former residents of the east consciously or unconsciously—take on the wider German attitude that literary journalism has to be an eyewitness report.

From the western German perspective, on the other hand, it is in particular “the foreign gaze, this looking in from the outside, which makes her book so excellent.”<sup>48</sup> Reviewers are also intrigued by the narrative Funder uses:

Anna Funder wanted to write a nonfiction book that reads like a novel. For example, how it feels to want to scale the wall at 16. Or how it felt being interrogated by the Stasi. “I wanted to make it as dramatic as I could. Though everything is true.”<sup>49</sup>

For the unnamed reviewer “Funder’s literary reportage is as engaging as a journey into a long lost country.”<sup>50</sup> Another reviewer reacts similarly:

Interviews and observations are the basis of Anna Funder’s *Stasiland*, a gripping and journalistically precise book in the best Anglo-Saxon tradition. That means: Funder does not even pretend to be fiercely objective, so as to

wrap up thoroughly researched facts into a text bundle and stamp them with the seal 'historical truth'. Instead she interweaves her curiosity and observations of everyday life so skilfully into her reporting that in the end the book has something of a narrative line, almost like a novel.<sup>51</sup>

The critic, Eva Behrendt, sees Funder's book as more valuable than the existing reports "on the lives and fates of individuals either on the side of the victims or perpetrators."<sup>52</sup> Even works by such eminent historians as Timothy Garton Ash did not succeed to put together "the human pieces of the puzzle to an analytical overall picture"<sup>53</sup> whereas Funder succeeds in doing so.

### CONCLUSION

To be sure, such an examination is not entirely equal because we do not know how Australians might react to an *Ausländer*, or outsider, writing about an equally controversial subject in Australia. Until that happens we may not be able to fully appreciate some of the negative German responses. But what we do know is that Australia has a different tradition regarding privacy and free press that even the Garner controversy over *The First Stone* could not silence. And any number of "outsider" literary journalists have written critically about the U.S., Jonathan Raban for one in his *Hunting Mr. Heartbreak*,<sup>54</sup> without a resulting outcry.

That said, the reception of *Stasiland* in Germany and Australia provides one opportunity for understanding different cultural responses to the genre. What the western German reviews show is that Funder's book fills a gap for Germans in the literature about the former GDR. In using the genre of literary journalism the book not only increases the reader's knowledge about the former GDR but also provides for an emotional engagement with the subject matter. The eastern German reviews, however, pose exactly those questions about authenticity and credibility that have troubled literary journalism in Germany all along. The German notion of what can be written about in a literary reportage is relatively narrower than in Australia and more broadly in the Anglosphere. In the context of literature about the former GDR, this means that only those who can provide eyewitness reports, i.e., those who can write for themselves—and get published—will be heard. This was the very point Funder picked on when she emphasised time and again that she wanted to show to a wider public "the extraordinary courage in so-called ordinary people."<sup>55</sup> She used the possibilities provided by the Australian—and Anglophone—concept of literary journalism to write a gripping and forceful book which helps to keep alive the memory of the wrongs of the GDR.



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# Recovering the Peculiar Life and Times of Tom Hedley and of Canadian New Journalism

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*The now largely forgotten Tom Hedley of Canada was a major influence on the New Journalism in his country both before and after he worked as an editor for Esquire magazine in New York.*

When one begins to explore the era of the Canadian version of the New Journalism, 1965-1980, quite a number of living sources will say something to the effect of, “Have you talked to Tom Hedley yet?” or “Hedley—you have to find Hedley.”

Tom Hedley? Who is Tom Hedley?

Hedley is a fascinating, complex and very much submerged figure in the history of the New Journalism in the 1960s and 1970s, not only in Canada but also in the United States. There is little doubt that he is one of the central—if not the central—promoter of Canadian New Journalism even though he remains little acknowledged in the history of the movement, eclipsed in part by American exceptionalism, or the general belief that only the Americans contributed to the movement. That said, the New Journalism for Hedley was more than just the literary journalism we associate today with the movement of Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Joan Didion, and Truman Capote. True, that is part of it. But for Hedley the New Journalism was also a way of thinking—a state of mind—for conveying what has been called the “aesthetics of experience”<sup>1</sup> in examining contemporary experience at the heart of such complex terms as New Journalism and literary journalism.

One reason why his contributions to the movement remain so submerged is that he left behind the world of magazines years ago, only to return occasionally, but in the meantime becoming a successful scriptwriter and script doctor, and later a film producer and even book publisher. Because

of this, not too many people in Canada actually know where Tom Hedley resides and what he has been doing lately. In fact, he now makes his home in New York but recently has been doing work in the United Kingdom on a live theatrical production of *Flashdance*, which was mounted for a test run there in the summer of 2008. What may seem even more surprising—and perhaps what might at least partially explain this influential New Journalist's obscurity in the history of literary journalism, even in his own country, is that he is the original author of—and retains the copyright to—the script for the 1983 blockbuster movie *Flashdance*. Lately he has returned to this one undeniable commercial success of his life to transform it for theatre patrons. Perhaps even stranger, he will insist that *Flashdance* is the result of his New Journalism roots, although he is hard pressed to explain why.

Such is the peculiar history of Tom Hedley—and to some extent the history of the Canadian version of the New Journalism. To understand it, we must go back to the beginning and try to recapture a lost era in Canadian journalism, an era when “The New Journalism,” as espoused by Wolfe, et al., began to penetrate the border, colonize the young, and infiltrate the Canadian newsroom.

## I

If you were to pick a time frame to call the “Golden Age of Canadian Literary Journalism,” that period would not be now, an era thoroughly dominated by service magazines catering to people's consumer needs.<sup>2</sup> But a few decades ago, in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, literary journalism, in the guise of the New Journalism, began to impose its message, its methods and, in contrast to the staid presentation of the news of the day, its mayhem on Canadian journalism.

If one cared about writing, the dream in Canada at the time was very much like the dream in the United States. Upon graduation from university the idea was to work at a newspaper for about a decade. “You'd get your speed down, your style down, pay off your debts, then you'd quit and write your novel,” says Don Obe, who would prove to be one of Hedley's earliest comrades.<sup>3</sup> But with the advent of literary journalism—as practiced in *Esquire* magazine by the likes of Gay Talese, and especially in the *New York* supplement to the *Herald Tribune*, which contained the exciting work of the young iconoclast Tom Wolfe—suddenly a reporter who cared about writing did not have to write the great novel to bask in the satisfaction of having made an impact as a writer. One could in fact remain within the journalism realm and find the same level of artistic satisfaction. One could experiment, one could write in one's own voice, one could even write short stories—except these particular short stories would be true.<sup>4</sup>

This is exactly what Hedley would eventually engineer. His journalism

career started when his father, a military man, called in a favour to help his son,<sup>5</sup> then only an Ottawa high school graduate, to land a summer job in the radio room for the *Winnipeg Free Press* in 1960.<sup>6</sup> He worked the overnight shift, and when September arrived he enrolled at the University of Manitoba and continued to report for the *Free Press* in the evenings. His first byline, “The Mr. Vibes of Jazz—Red Norvo,” appeared in October 1960.<sup>7</sup> This pattern continued until Hedley dropped out of school in his final year in favour of a full career.<sup>8</sup> According to Hedley, it was not until many years later that he cobbled together the necessary credits from New York University and the New School—while employed at *Esquire* magazine—to earn his undergraduate diploma.<sup>9</sup>

Hedley’s final front-page byline, “City Trucking Terminal Levelled in Big Blaze,” appeared in January 1962 and provides hardly any indication of his future path as a New Journalist.<sup>10</sup> He left the *Free Press* soon after,<sup>11</sup> moved east and began reporting for a larger daily newspaper, the *Toronto Telegram*. As a young reporter he was assigned to various bureaus in cities and municipalities surrounding metropolitan Toronto, such as Hamilton and York. Before long, he had impressed his superiors sufficiently to be summoned back to the *Telegram*’s downtown Toronto offices. His unusual background—he was born in England to a British mother and a Canadian father,<sup>12</sup> had moved numerous times, including a stay in Germany, where he picked up a modest amount of the language<sup>13</sup>—landed the junior reporter a plum reporting task in 1966: being flown to Europe as a reinforcement to chase after the just-broken story of East German prostitute and alleged spy Gerda Munslinger, whose services a number of years earlier had been paid for by at least two Canadian cabinet ministers and was now found to be living in Munich, West Germany. The *Telegram* had badly trailed its archrival the *Toronto Star* on the story up until that point, but according to Hedley once he offered money to Munslinger he started to get somewhere. Then the race for more exclusives quickly degenerated into a case of cheque-book journalism, with Munslinger holding out for the highest bidder. According to Hedley, the winning entry ultimately was not Canadian but American. Having decided the entire episode was a farce, he bolted for Paris and the Left Bank to retrace Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s steps, before being ordered to return to the *Telegram*, whereupon he was reassigned to editing.<sup>14</sup>

After stints as assistant entertainment editor and assistant sports editor—revolving around layouts and paste-ups, mostly—he was appointed entertainment editor of the *Telegram* in 1966. Like the mythic editor Clay Felker at the *Herald Tribune* in New York, who had transformed the Sunday supplement *New York* into a New Journalism venue, Hedley inherited the *Telegram*’s version, which was called *Showcase*. It was here that Hedley

encountered his first important ally in the guerrilla war he was about to perpetrate against conventional newspaper and magazine journalism: Don Obe.

Obe had landed his first major professional job at the *Vancouver Sun* in 1961, where he was developed into the “zipper” man—the feature writer who contributed a lifestyle piece to Page One’s bottom horizontal strip.<sup>15</sup> Somewhat bored with straight newspaper journalism, he acquired the habit of liberating the *New York* supplement every Monday morning from the op-ed editor’s copy of the *Herald Tribune*.<sup>16</sup> Obe could not get enough of Felker’s transformed supplement, where Wolfe already had broken free of constrictive newspaper formulas. Then he moved back to central Canada and the *Telegram*, which is where Hedley found him.

It was an important bond, as both men had developed a passion for *New York* before they discovered a mutual interest. Hedley explains:

I was the youngest possible reporter. I had just come [to *Showcase*] from my job at the *Winnipeg Free Press*. I didn’t really know what I was doing. I was nervous, and Don Obe would help me. I would write these little literary memos. He told me they were very funny and original and that he wanted to meet me. He was also very influenced by *New York* magazine. We had a real common ground. He understood what I was doing, and supported it. It was easy to put it down as a kind of ambition of a kid who’s dreaming a bit, but he was very good at saying, “Oh no, no, what he’s doing, it’s good.” And I went on to do my thing.<sup>17</sup>

Hedley really did need the support. He had not yet been given the opportunity to let his editorial packaging skills flourish, and in the meantime his colleagues were critical of his writing. Looking back years later, in 1975, one said: “[H]e was a terrible writer, a joke whenever he wrote a story.” Another said: “In those days . . . we would never have thought (the ability to write) was in him. Still another said: “He writes like I play piano, . . . not very well and not very often.”<sup>18</sup>

Obe continued to defend Hedley against his critics, recalling in the same 1975 feature on Hedley, “There was this antagonism towards Tom, but it was the kind of antagonism you get from people set in their ways; what you get when somebody comes along and breaks every rule. At that time what later became known as the new journalism was just having its impact. Tom understood it earlier than anyone else.”<sup>19</sup>

Once Hedley was appointed entertainment editor in June 1966, he wielded the power to hire and fire and, influenced by *New York*, began to shape the publication. For example, he hired Barry Callaghan, the son of Lost Generation novelist and short story writer Morley Callaghan, and a budding novelist, short story writer and literary critic himself, to be his book editor at

the supplement. (Callaghan was already working at the *Telegram*. That spring television critic Bob Blackburn had asked him to “run the book pages,”<sup>20</sup> and Hedley’s predecessor Jeremy Brown subsequently hired him.) Callaghan was impressed with Hedley’s ability to present stories differently. “Hedley came out of the sports department,” he says. “He would put a half page shot of a horse in the mist on the cover of the sports page and everyone would wonder what was going on. He got all of his ideas straight out of *New York* magazine.”<sup>21</sup>

Initially, Callaghan did not want to have anything to do with the grubby daily journalism of the *Telegram* (let alone its weekly supplement), but editor Jeremy Brown took him out for lunch and charmed him. Still, he was skeptical that anything lofty could be accomplished. Here is Hedley’s account:

Barry Callaghan was an academic and was writing poetry and fiction. I met him because I wanted to meet [his father] Morley, and he took me to him. And I said [to son Barry], “I’m now the editor of this thing, *Showcase*. I’m no longer the assistant. I can hire my own team, so why don’t you be my book editor? You don’t have to worry, we’re not going to run anything embarrassing.” In fact, he did one of the last interviews with Edmund Wilson for me, and I sent him to do Edward Albee as well. We did serious stuff—we really went after it—because of what was happening in the *Herald Tribune*, in *New York* magazine. It was the precedent that allowed me to go for it. I wasn’t inventing anything; I was essentially copying them.<sup>22</sup>

This was a time when Hedley was also very much under the spell of fiction writers. Five years later, in 1971, when he joined the staff of *Macleans* magazine back in Canada, he enumerated to then-editor Peter C. Newman what those exact influences were: the Lost Generation writers, especially Hemingway and Fitzgerald; Beat author Jack Kerouac; and the moody Hollywood actor James Dean.<sup>23</sup> And here he was, a half-decade earlier, meeting the son of the man who had lived in Paris in 1929, boxed with Hemingway, and gingerly walked through a typically complex relationship with Fitzgerald:

I had a very close relationship with Morley Callaghan, who was my mentor. Barry would bring me to see Morley at 20 Dale Avenue in Rosedale [a modest house situated in a tony downtown Toronto neighbourhood], and we would sit and talk about Hemingway and Fitzgerald and about writing, and about excellence, what good fiction writing is all about. Morley would finish writing late at night, around midnight. Then he would take a break and bring out the single malt whiskey that he drank, and he would have a few acolytes like us sitting around, and we would just talk about writing. We were completely immersed in it. It was all about fiction.<sup>24</sup>



And what Hedley wanted to do was see journalism written with the techniques associated with fiction.

There was one other writer who was an important influence for Hedley: the philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan. Beyond Hedley attending parties and spending time in favourite downtown artist and poet bars with friends Robert Markle and Graham Coughtry, or sitting at the feet of Morley Callaghan in Rosedale, McLuhan loomed large in the young editor's thoughts about culture and journalism. Hedley got to know him because he once acted as gopher for the intellectual giant at the Centre for Culture and Technology on the University of Toronto campus. "I loved the way McLuhan thought," says Hedley. "I would go and get him coffee and hang around, and then he ended up writing for me in *Showcase*."<sup>25</sup> Hedley convinced McLuhan to contribute some words to a special issue devoted to some of Canada's intellectual and artistic giants on the occasion of the country's centenary, as well as to submit a column on the National Hockey League—hockey being the sport about which so many Canadians are most passionate. Not only was Hedley editing one of his intellectual heroes, he was setting up an *Esquire*-style, fish-out-of-water scenario—pairing a topic and a writer in a novel way—in order to create what he thought of as a New Journalism-experience for the reader. Hedley explains New Journalism's relationship to McLuhan this way:

The medium is the message, it is absolutely true. Your responsibility is to the idea, and what the medium of the idea is, rather than, "Let's just do it the way it's normally done." By identifying what the idea is, and [what] the emotional continuity is, how the characters feel at the beginning, middle and end, you can create truly literary scenes, but they're happening in real time and in real situations. Whatever it is, this New Journalism, I've never done anything else but that—whether it's writing, film, or theatre.<sup>26</sup>

Under the protection of various editors, Hedley's version of the New Journalism thrived at *Showcase*. He hired friends—his Toronto artist chums, not writers—to be his columnists, and their writing was fresh. Obe says people such as Coughtry and Markle were different because "they hadn't been brow-beaten, they didn't know any of the rules and they didn't care about them. Markle was a natural, and wrote stories that bore no resemblance to newspaper journalism, skiing stories that started, 'I ventured into a new world today. There I was on the slopes and I shook me some city.'"<sup>27</sup> The effect was soon felt across the *Telegram* newsroom, as other writers realized that for Hedley they could write in a freer style.<sup>28</sup>

Hedley's moves at *Showcase* were revolutionary within the encrusted confines of the *Telegram*, where "small pockets of excellence and

contemporaneousness were hidden here and there amid the general run of mediocrity and indelible old-fashionedness.”<sup>29</sup> As journalist Douglas Fetherling recalls, Hedley had a knack for finding that talent:

Some of the talent reposed at a section called Lifestyle . . . Most of the rest could be found in *Showcase*, where Don Obe, Tom Hedley and others were managing to bring magazine techniques [to newspaper publishing]. Word spread. *Esquire* had its eye on two of the *Showcase* editors, one of whom was Hedley, a smart, slick, slow-spoken young fellow who somehow fostered a faint suggestion of greatness. Undoubtedly he possessed a certain style not then common in the brown-shoed Canadian media landscape.<sup>30</sup>

With Hedley at the helm, the weekly *Showcase* magazine hummed along through 1966 and 1967, becoming more ambitious and steadily improving. The one issue Hedley returns to again and again when he talks about his time at *Showcase* is the one in which he dedicated the entire issue to Canada’s birthday centenary, Saturday, July 1, 1967. He brought together luminaries such as the aforementioned McLuhan, writer Morley Callaghan, pianist Glenn Gould, surgeon Robert Penfield, actress Kate Reid, mathematician Donald Coxeter, and Group of Seven painter A. Y. Jackson to pose for a group photography session. Each of these leading Canadian lights wrote his or her column to accompany the extended series of pictures. The only person missing from the photo shoot was then-federal Minister of Justice Pierre Elliott Trudeau (elected Canada’s fifteenth prime minister the following year), yet he also submitted a written piece for the special edition. Hedley’s extraordinary ability to attract well-known national and international talent, and to mix and match that talent to task, did not escape the notice of Harold Hayes, another mythic editor who helped to shape the American New Journalism in addition to Felker. And it is a knack that continues. A couple of years ago Hedley suggested to *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter that he reinvigorate a dull service feature concept by choosing the eccentric journalist and author Christopher Hitchens to be the perfect guinea pig for an extreme makeover.<sup>31</sup>

The first time Hedley realized he could get away with hiring international talent at *Showcase* was when he capitalized on a newspaper strike in New York. He began to telephone and offer work to established names such as *New York Review of Books* illustrator David Levine. He knew the names of all the relevant artists in New York, and did not hesitate to use them if he could get them. This willingness to hire Americans, and eventually other foreigners, helped to spread Hedley’s name around in New York’s magazine publishing world. As Hedley remembers:

I did a concept issue—this is one of the things that got the attention

of *Esquire* in New York—where I had a motorized camera and I had these great Canadians walking towards the camera, and as you turn the pages they moved closer to you, and behind them were these lyric, young ballerinas dancing. It was a beautiful setting. I brought all of these people in for the photograph and we had a big lunch and celebrated them. I published a piece by Pierre Trudeau ... and all of these people—Gould, McLuhan, Callaghan—they were in the issue. They were edited interviews, really, and then they okayed them. That was a widely celebrated issue, and recognized in New York.<sup>32</sup>

Barry Callaghan cites the special issue as an example of Hedley's visual way of getting across information. "The idea of that lunch, to take them all out and photograph them as a group, would have been Hedley's idea, there's no question. That's one of the great photographs of Canadian cultural history. That's the stamp of Hedley."<sup>33</sup>

Callaghan agreed with what Hedley was doing from the start, although he says he would never have called his work "New Journalism"—then or now—insisting on the term "storytelling."<sup>34</sup> Whatever it was called, it was certainly not standard newspaper journalism. Callaghan was the sort of columnist who might write at length about subjects that were dear to him, not necessarily well-known authors the average reader might recognize. For instance, Callaghan decided to run a long conversation with John Montague, dedicating a huge amount of space to a then-unknown poet, reasoning that in a couple of decades he would become famous and therefore the *Telegram* would have been ahead of the curve on the topic. J. D. Macfarlane (not the magazine editor John Macfarlane), the newspaper's managing editor of the day, retorted angrily, "Don't you understand—this is fish wrap! Nobody will read it in twenty years." Callaghan says, "Now that I look back, it *was* outrageous, [writing about] wandering around the graveyards of Paris [with Montague], musing about Baudelaire."<sup>35</sup>

## 2

The story of how Hedley came to work directly under Harold Hayes at *Esquire* magazine is convoluted and depends on the source. According to a post-*Flashdance* magazine profile of Hedley, *Esquire* management was actually interested in hiring Jeremy Brown, Hedley's predecessor and the one who had launched *Showcase* in the first place.<sup>36</sup> But Brown said he turned down the offer because it did not pay well.<sup>37</sup> According to Hedley, however, Harold Hayes was not all that interested in the ideas Brown had to offer, which is why Hedley was given a chance.<sup>38</sup> During the interview process with Brown, Hayes had an opportunity to look at several editions of *Showcase*. Hedley's visual sense and packaging savvy stood out, and Hayes took particular notice of Hedley's July 1, 1967 special issue dedicated to the

Canadian centenary. Hayes was interested to know more about the young editor who had conceived it.

Suddenly *Esquire* beckoned, as Hedley recalls:

I got a call out of the blue and Hayes said, "Look, would you come down for an interview? We're looking at a thousand people for this job and it's unlikely that you'd get it but why don't you come down anyway?" So I got into New York and I was staying at a hotel around the corner on Madison Avenue the night before the interview. *Esquire* phoned and said, "Oh by the way, we want twenty story ideas from you tomorrow morning." So I stayed up all night and came in with twenty-eight story ideas. [The number varies depending on the account.] The next day Harold said, "I want you to meet Arnold Gingrich"—the man who had published Fitzgerald and Hemingway and all that.<sup>39</sup>

Gingrich was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, not so far from the Canadian border, and grew up experiencing the same landscape and weather as most Ontarians. Along with David A. Smart, he started *Esquire* magazine in 1933, during the Great Depression.<sup>40</sup> Hedley would have been star-struck, since Gingrich had known two of his Lost Generation heroes, Hemingway and Fitzgerald, as well as many other literary giants in editing the magazine until 1961:

So I went into this vast office with a big leather-winged chair, and [Gingrich] was finishing his hour-long practice of the violin. That put me to sleep. I was so exhausted, young, and stupid. He left me alone and I woke up startled an hour and a half later, realizing that I'd fallen asleep and he'd gone and I was really embarrassed. So I went out and they said, "Well, there are sixteen of your ideas that we'd really love to do right now." And then Harold Hayes said, "When can you get here?"<sup>41</sup>

Hayes initially advised Hedley to stay away from the office and learn about the city. Most of all, he wanted Hedley to be on the lookout for fresh story ideas. Being twenty-four years old and interested in all things countercultural and avant-garde, *Esquire's* newest and youngest associate editor happily complied, ingratiating himself with various New York subculture groups—Andy Warhol and his Factory entourage, members of the Youth International Party (Yippies) such as Abbie Hoffman, and so on. Yet he was tested and thrown into the editorial mix quickly, working on the March 1968 cover story package, "Here Come the Microboppers," and visiting campuses around the nation during the era of student protest for the magazine's September 1968 back-to-school issue, "The Beautiful People: Campus Heroes for 68/69." His knowledge of Warhol and Pop Art came in handy for the May 1969 trend cover story on culture, "The Final Decline and Total Collapse of the American

Avant-Garde,” which *Esquire* art director George Lois famously illustrated by depicting Andy Warhol drowning in a Campbell’s soup can.

A couple of other “high concept” magazine packages define the kind of technique for which *Esquire* during Hedley’s era is known. It was not so much New Journalism (or literary journalism) as a writing style, although that was an element of it. But it was a part of the general anti-establishment ferment of that era in which the old conventional models of journalism were being challenged by the New Journalism as a way of viewing the world. For example, the October 1968 cover features a group still of playwright and author Jean Genet, author William Burroughs, author and screenplay writer Terry Southern, and the only New Journalist of the bunch, John Sack. All four men were sent to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, August 1968, to report in their own voices what they felt, thought, and saw, with Hedley’s fellow associate editor John Berendt acting as chaperone.<sup>42</sup>

Turning famous literati into reporters is exactly the fish-out-of-water trick Hedley favoured and returned to over and over again in his career. He admits that sometimes the concept is much better than the actual execution. The Chicago Democratic convention cover package, he thinks, fell apart because not all of the writers delivered work of quality (Genet’s contribution in particular being especially difficult to edit into usable magazine prose).<sup>43</sup> But it is a technique *Esquire* pioneered and had been using for years—hiring novelist Norman Mailer to write a journalism feature about incoming President John F. Kennedy for the November 1960 issue, for instance—but one that Hedley was more adept at than most. In fact, he forced it on occasion. For the October 1970 issue, when Hedley and photographer Bud Lee could not find enough examples of white servants working for wealthy black people, they found fill-ins to complete the photo spread, “Do Whites Make the Best Domestic? Five Blacks Think So.”<sup>44</sup> It was certainly not literary journalism, and to some not even New Journalism. Obe takes that position: “Getting Norman Mailer to write about Jack Kennedy is a technique, but it’s not New Journalism. Gay Talese writing about Frank Sinatra is New Journalism. It’s the narrative scenes, where the reporter just shuts up—maybe he’s got a tape recorder going, maybe he’s going into the can and taking some notes or whatever, but watches and just recreates the scene.”<sup>45</sup>

Regarding writing style, at least, Hedley is in agreement: “At *Esquire*, we were defining what the New Journalism was. There were arguments between us but we were very conscious that we were involved in a new form, and that form was the use of fiction techniques on nonfiction subjects.”<sup>46</sup> How the editors and artists of *Esquire* debated and defined the New Journalism sounds a lot like how Tom Wolfe codified it a few years later in his essay, “Like a Novel,” when he described it as a “journalism that reads like a novel.”<sup>47</sup>

But to Hedley the New Journalism also meant more than just a writing style, his friend Obe's position notwithstanding. It was for Hedley a concept to be applied to the entire production process and he continued to push the boundaries of editorial convention. As editor, he says his particular skill at *Esquire* was the "Superman Goes to the Supermarket" trick: "The way I conceived ideas was to take an idea that the writer would not normally do, bring the writer outside of his milieu, his expertise, into an idea that is almost uncomfortable for him. You get something fresh out of that."<sup>48</sup> Indeed, for one of the *Esquire* cover concepts Hedley got something spectacularly fresh. For the August 1970 issue, he took the most staid of magazine trend stories—an overview of new films for the coming fall season—and transformed it into a window focused on the exotic perspectives of the European auteur: Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and François Truffaut all contributed essays on the making of their art. Thus, some of the most distinguished film-makers in the world were now reversing roles and playing film critics.

It might appear that Hedley conflates two disparate concepts. One is to write nonfiction stories using the same narrative devices one associates with writing fiction stories. And this would be a version of the classic definition of New Journalism, which in turn is the 1960s-1970s equivalent of literary journalism, and which forms the basis upon which more recent, expanded definitions have been constructed. The other idea, the mix-and-match trick, may be clever, it may be entertaining, it may even have its informative and enlightening moments, but it is more about the craft of editorial packaging for magazines than literary journalism, at least as we know it now. But if the New Journalism meant improvising upon the normal recipes for presenting stories, then Hedley's spicy gumbos were exotic and it can be said that they were a part of the New Journalism culture of the time. They were a novel way of orchestrating and refracting through different lenses the aesthetics of experience. Today we see, of course, that it is now just another editorial tactic to attract readers—just one of many. But it also reflects just how much the New Journalism culture became mainstream in magazine publishing. Hedley's knack for juxtaposing elements that would not seem to work together, as well as his obvious social skills as an editor for enticing major names to do projects for him, happened consistently throughout his career.

For Hedley, the idea was to release the writer's shackles, to imbue the narrative with everything he or she could muster. But the writer had to be, in a certain sense, responsible about this newfound freedom. He or she had to avoid the "notebook dump," the feeling that whatever was written down was worth reading. Other musts to avoid were the chronological list of actions or the petty diary entries that could easily creep into the story. Hedley says a

good deal of New Journalism, or even so-called New Journalism, descended into the pit of “Me” journalism before too long:

The trick with editing these writers quite often is that it’s not personal. You have to see yourself in the third person . . . You are not you in the piece, you are a character in the piece. And the more distance you can create from that character, and the more you can make that you into the third person, the better New Journalist you’ll be. So it’s not about the ego, although it creeps in.<sup>49</sup>

The Canadian feature writer Sylvia Fraser, for example, who wrote many personable magazine pieces in the 1960s for the old rotogravure format magazine, *The Star Weekly*, and who continues to do so for publications such as *Toronto Life* today, uses a *modus operandi* when constructing her stories that does not deviate from Hedley’s version of New Journalism (although she, like Callaghan, has never considered herself to be a New Journalist).<sup>50</sup> She says, “Sometimes it looked like I was writing personal journalism when I wasn’t. What I mean by that is that I used myself as a device in the story simply to be the straight person. You’d see me in the article and it looked like personal journalism but it wasn’t. It was just the structure.”<sup>51</sup>

At this point in his still young career Hedley seemed to have a firm purchase on a rich vein of New Journalism knowledge. Here is one description of his deep, abiding understanding of the form and his seeming gale-force editorial powers, as one critic has noted:

Hedley was spoken of with awe because the visual side of his brain was said to be so highly developed. He was more a designer than an editor in the normal sense, people avowed; a sort of god-like journalistic being who could somehow command text, image and design to come together, in some process more closely related to physics perhaps than to management.<sup>52</sup>

### 3

And then, at the height of his powers, Hedley began to contemplate a return to his native country. The wonder of it all is that he stayed only as long as he did in New York, from the fall of 1967 until the winter of 1971, and the obvious question about his vertical career rise is this: Why exactly did Tom Hedley leave *Esquire* magazine? He had interviewed successfully for the job in late summer 1967. Then, with his editor’s permission, he had prowled around New York’s arts and intelligentsia scenes during the fall of 1967. His name was listed on the masthead as one of several associate editors for forty-one issues. Three and a half years is a good run during a great period in the magazine’s history, but not that long of one—so why leave?



Hedley says it was because he, like many, had become disillusioned with the ideals of the 1960s.<sup>53</sup> Plus, he was homesick for Canada. Plus, he wanted to write his great novel. Later, about a year and a half after he had returned, he wrote about this disillusionment. His feature story, "Mickey Mouse at 44," was published in a special America edition of *Maclean's* magazine, November 1972, published on the cusp of the Richard Nixon–George McGovern presidential election. Hedley attempted to explain the cumulative and collective fragility and exhaustion of his generation in purple New Journalism prose: "We would know that Manhattan Island was only 32 miles square and could pack six million ambitious souls together in unhygienic conditions and that from the sky it was apprehended as one large elitist cloister where outsiders were turned away at the gates of true acceptance."<sup>54</sup>

And: "The facts have nothing to do with the magical rhythm. Ants are on top of the Empire State Building, for God's sake! How they got there is a question of academic pettifoggery for the aged."<sup>55</sup>

As one critic observed: "[I]t reads like a bad imitation of Tom Wolfe . . . ."<sup>56</sup>

In the climactic scene, or nadir, as the case may be, Hedley recounts a story about dining with New York literati:

The rhythm broke for me just after midnight on March 21, 1971, the first day of spring, at the Café Nicholson on East 58th Street between First and Second Avenues, on the otherwise insignificant occasion of my twenty-ninth birthday.<sup>57</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinian writer, had poured a glass of champagne over the table cloth announcing that this, the first glass, would be for the gods, and the second would be in mourning for the year I had just recently lost, and I knew, instinctively, that many more glasses would be toasted to this moment of my time and that, finally the evening exhausted, I'd be presented with the bill. It was my birthday but, after all, friends had arranged that Borges join us despite his hectic schedule and as he quoted from *Beowulf* in the original Anglo-Saxon, drinking *my* champagne, I realized that this was an utterly gratuitous and meaningless meeting of people, with the best of intentions, mind you, but empty, devoid of warmth and friendship and any intimacy, so typically a New York evening, people trapped by a manner of behavior imposed on them by something larger and more evil than themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Barry Callaghan tells a slightly different version of the story:

He was out having dinner with all of these high-powered literary people, such as Norman Mailer, Jorge Luis Borges and a bunch of others [including Gore Vidal],<sup>59</sup> and they all had this fabulous dinner. They had this long evening of eating and drinking and talking and at

the end of the evening [Borges's translator, Thomas Di Giovanni]<sup>60</sup> turned to Hedley and said, "You get the cheque." Here Hedley was deluding himself that he was one of them—an equal—and yet to them he was just there to pick up the cheque. It devastated him.<sup>61</sup>

Over the previous four years Hedley had become something of a habitué of the various scenes and subcultures of New York, and was now exhausted to find that his magazine's expense account—as well as *Esquire's* coveted status as an entrée to a larger, popular market—were what the literary crowd most craved about him.<sup>62</sup> What was clear of "Mickey Mouse at [the age of] 44" is that an American cultural icon for these young protesting Baby Boomers, invented by Walt Disney some forty-four years earlier, had now become an emblem of failed youthful idealism. The idealism had become a cartoon parody, with all that implies. And like Walt himself, the dark innocence of the Mickey Mouse Club had died. It was time, as Hedley understood, to put away the Mouseketeer ears.

So the June 1971 issue of *Esquire* was Hedley's last. Leaving New York behind, ostensibly to work away on his Great Canadian/American Novel—to be called "Some Evenings on a Farm Near America"—at a farmhouse in the hamlet of Holstein, Ontario, about a two-hour drive northwest of Toronto, Hedley instead ended up working at two Canadian media institutions, *Maclean's* magazine and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It was at CBC that Hedley began to explore crossing over his New Journalism ideas to another medium: film. Over the next couple of years he produced documentaries for a program called *Weekend* on playwrights Sam Shephard and Tennessee Williams, and author Norman Mailer.<sup>63</sup>

In true Canadian homecoming fashion, Hedley encountered jealousy and suspicion upon his return to Toronto. After all, why would any self-respecting Canadian magazine editor, who had transcended the parochial world of Toronto publishing and made it in the upper echelons of New York magazines, want to come back—unless he had to? Callaghan says, "Some people didn't make it very easy for him—really looked down on him, as if to say, well, you must be a loser because you're back here."<sup>64</sup> To Ian Brown, a Canadian feature writer, Hedley put it this way: "I had to go away to be hated in Canada. But they don't want you to come back. You come back, and they say, 'Oh, he came back. He blew it. He's just another loser like the rest of us.'"<sup>65</sup>

*Maclean's* magazine, Hedley's print destination, was a venerable, dependable, if a little dull, forum. Today it is a weekly newsmagazine much in the vein of *Time*, and, under the leadership of current publisher and editor-in-chief Kenneth Whyte, sports a faux-tabloid design to go with its

pushy, irreverent right-wing tone. In 1971, however, under the guidance of Peter C. Newman, it was a monthly general interest magazine committed to tortuously examining Canada's national identity, especially in relation to its friendly superpower neighbour's overwhelming influence. Newman hired Hedley to be one of his associates, and his new editor joined the masthead for the July 1971 issue. Hedley brought the New Journalism with him,<sup>66</sup> and immediately began recruiting cronies from his *Showcase* days, including his painter friend Robert Markle and his literary friend Barry Callaghan as columnists. Here is how Newman enthusiastically described his newest star:

In those early months Hedley was the vital centre of the magazine, providing the visual and intellectual excitement . . . , prodding all of us into fresh ways of looking at our country. . . . We frequently disagreed on how far he could go without insulting our audience, but the tension seemed productive for both of us. Hedley seldom appeared in the office more than two or three times a week . . . but each visit was memorable.<sup>67</sup>

Journalist Doug Fetherling, who wrote many magazine pieces during the era, describes Hedley's effect on Newman and the *Maclean's* staff this way:

Hedley was cool. He dressed cool, he dated cool. His stint at *Esquire* had given him a certain aura, which he wore like a cloak. He was renowned as a champion conceptualizer, a spinner and vetter of ideas, a child of McLuhan whose genre was spontaneous well-written conversation combined with a basic disdain of the medium in which he was working. He edited by means of what the Germans call *Fingerspitzengefühl*, the feeling in one's fingertips. He was totally disorganized, as though to suggest that paperwork and the mundane practicalities of getting out a magazine were beneath him.<sup>68</sup>

Today, Hedley is less charitable about his stay at *Maclean's*:

I was always at odds with Peter Newman because I thought he was a plodding nationalist—black is beautiful, Canadian is beautiful . . . it was all wrapped up in [the] political correctness of the time, and it wasn't a true intellectual assessment of the country. I don't think you need to be a nationalist protectionist. You end up with things like "Canadian Studies." I couldn't bear it. To me, that's a second-rate way of looking at the world. Obviously he wanted me there, but I had not a lot of interest in being there.<sup>69</sup>

The November 1972 issue of *Maclean's*, the America issue, was edited by Hedley, not Newman. Hedley lobbied for it and won the chance to do his own issue. But in so doing he demonstrated an unfortunate trait that proved to be something of an Achilles' heel upon his return to the Toronto magazine publishing world. Newman recounts:

This turned into a disaster because he suffered writer's block over his own article, "Mickey Mouse at 44." Even though he'd had three months to work on it, it was three weeks late, and the magazine's delivery schedule was disrupted for the first time since 1905. Hedley finally left by mutual agreement and thereafter only came in a couple of times a month to write treatments [meaning conceptualizing story ideas as well as suggesting display copy, headlines and sub-headlines for features].<sup>70</sup>

## 4

Hedley continued to work sporadically at *Maclean's*. He contributed a Lifestyle piece, for example, about losing weight entitled "Lead Us Not Into Temptation" to the July 1973 issue, which was long on packaging and short on prose. He also kept alive his dream of transferring his New Journalism skills to the medium of film during this time. In 1975, for example, a screenplay of his, *Double Negative* (adapted from a 1948 Ross McDonald novel, *The Three Roads*), was being shopped around in Hollywood. This became the hook for a cover story about Hedley written for *Toronto Magazine*, a Sunday supplement to the *Toronto Sun*.<sup>71</sup> Eight years prior to the success of *Flashdance* already he was being christened "Canada's highest-paid screenwriter."<sup>72</sup>

Then in 1977, Alexander Ross, who was the editor of *Toronto Life* magazine at the time, recommended to his publisher Michael de Pencier that Hedley succeed him. All of a sudden, Hedley found himself being drawn back into the magazine world for one more round. Initially he balked, but once he realized he was being handed an opportunity to recreate his beloved New Journalism, he was seduced. Again he reassembled his team of writers, artists and photographers. Again he added a couple of new voices, such as Stephen Williams and Norman Snider. He turned Café des Copains, a restaurant/bar located across the street from the *Toronto Life* offices, into a hangout for his writers. It was something of a "boys' club"—Hedley, Barry Callaghan, Stephen Williams, Paul William Roberts, Norman Snider, Robert Markle, and Don Obe, to name several. The fact is, Hedley very much enjoyed and encouraged having an entourage around him.<sup>73</sup> But, as Fetherling pointed out in his memoir, this would not have been unusual for the era:

*Toronto Life* was also where almost everybody in time would be editor—except the women in whom reposed much of the magazine talent in the city but who all through the 1970s (and indeed 1980s and 1990s) continued to perform the managing editor's function of cleaning up the messes of the male conceptualizing geniuses and their respective entourages who followed them everywhere, hanging on their every utterance.<sup>74</sup>

Following his old mentor Harold Hayes's advice, Hedley refused to edit

manuscripts in the office, much to the chagrin of his production-minded fellow editors. Lynn Cunningham, Hedley's managing editor, said Hedley once took a cover story manuscript with him and flew to New York for the weekend. When he did not return the following Monday, evidently because his plans had altered, panic ensued in the office.<sup>75</sup> (Hedley denies that he would have taken manuscripts with him to New York, saying he preferred to edit either at Café des Copains or go directly to the homes of his writers.<sup>76</sup>)

It is certainly the case that Hedley subscribed to Harold Hayes's dictum—"people who worked in offices were "worker bees" and a good editor should avoid them."<sup>77</sup> It was not the case that Hedley had no respect for the practical work of putting out a magazine; he simply did not want to be bogged down in it himself, or let himself get bogged down in it. "I wanted it to be a kind of café-society, Paris-in-the-twenties kind of thing—a salon, I guess—so they would come in and then we'd move over to Copains for lunch, and then you'd meet up later at Grossman's Tavern [a blues club on Spadina Avenue in the Chinatown section of Toronto's downtown] or the Pilot Tavern, where Leonard Cohen as well as all the painters would hang out."<sup>78</sup> Cunningham, as managing editor and perhaps chief-working-bee-of-the-day, was nonplussed. Today, Hedley says of Cunningham, "She was very good at her job."<sup>79</sup> Today, Cunningham's assessment of Hedley consists of one word: "poseur."<sup>80</sup>

However briefly he presided over the nation's most successful city magazine, Hedley made his presence felt. For his first issue his Canadian literary hero, Morley Callaghan, filed new fiction for him. The prominent Canadian artist Harold Town ruminated on the importance of Tom Thompson in the national psyche. Thompson's demise was—and remains—one of the country's enduring mysteries as he disappeared while painting his beloved Algonquin Park trees and rocks in 1917, leaving behind only his canoe.

In the subsequent issue of *Toronto Life*, October 1977, Hedley titillated readers. His friend Robert Markle penned the cover story entitled "Portrait of a Stripper, Sexy Sadie," defending the seediness of Yonge Street, which begins at Lake Ontario and runs north, bisecting Toronto's east and west. A luminous cover photograph displayed Sadie's ample décolletage. Companion pieces included hard-boiled miniatures of "Lisa" the body rub parlour worker and "Janine" the drug smuggler. Hedley's *Toronto Life* was designed to vicariously provide pleasure to its wealthy subscriber base with the street-level wares of the city.

A couple of months later, in the December 1977 issue, the New Journalism devotee (and transplanted American) Philip Marchand—whose publisher and editors had spent much of the 1970s touting him as Canada's answer to Tom Wolfe but who was now looking for the key to free himself

from this stylistic straitjacket—produced an extraordinary long piece on the immigrant Azores Portuguese community of Toronto. Marchand's focus on one immigrant culture was the flipside of Markle's defence of seedy downtown society. There was a trigger to both stories. On July 28 of that year, a shoeshine boy named Emanuel Jaques was abducted from his perch on Yonge Street, sexually assaulted numerous times, then murdered. Torontonians demanded action in response to the crime, and the era of cleaning up Yonge Street began in earnest. Markle's piece rebutted the sanctimony of the citizenry, while Marchand's investigation into the community that produced a child such as Jaques was both elegiac and thoughtful, and, because of its immersion in Toronto's Portuguese subculture, much closer in both conception and execution to what Norman Sims characterized as a major trait of literary journalism: "Literary journalists gamble with their time. Their writerly impulses lead them toward immersion, toward trying to learn all there is about a subject."<sup>81</sup>

Barry Callaghan also returned to the Hedley fold at *Toronto Life*, this time as columnist rather than books editor. "He gave me a monthly column, and called it 'Callaghan,' saying, 'Write about the city, whatever you want, and if it's reporting, OK, and if it's fiction, OK, let the reader figure it out.'"<sup>82</sup> Not only did Hedley's expanding version of New Journalism *cum* literary journalism include Wolfe's definition, plus Hedley's fish-out-of-water editorial packaging tricks, evidently it also made room for the quasi-gonzo journalism conceit that sometimes, under certain circumstances, the imagined truth is perceived as the greater truth. And, in fact, Callaghan was perfectly happy with this arrangement. As an English literature professor, with all that the discipline's tradition entailed, he would have recognized his area of study as one where literary journalism and fiction (which happily allows the creation of composite characters from reality and encourages invented dialogue in the spirit of capturing a perceived truth), might co-mingle.

Hedley's reign as editor of *Toronto Life* was not long—ten months. When his friend Don Obe took over, beginning with the July 1978 issue, Hedley was shifted to executive editor. For the next sixteen months he worked directly under publisher Michael de Pencier to develop special projects such as travel, fashion, wine, and stereo "guides." Hedley presided over the magazine at a time when it enjoyed healthy, even fat page counts, mainly because of the additional special interest sections. The idea was to develop the sections in *Toronto Life* and if they succeeded break them off to start new magazine ventures.<sup>83</sup> These thinly disguised sops to advertisers were intrusively inserted into the section of the magazine where *Toronto Life* readers would normally expect to find the in-depth stories—in effect cleaving the feature area in two. Even so, top-notch talent was enlisted to write for them. To name

two examples, novelist Margaret Atwood, of budding international renown at this juncture, and future multiple-award-winning investigative feature writer Marci MacDonald, reported on their travels to Afghanistan and Paris, respectively. In other words, Hedley's special sections, notable for their ability to attract advertising, contained uncharacteristically strong writing merit. As Hedley says, "I used to phone writers or authors up and say, 'Where do you want to go? We'll send you there and you can write about it for us.'" <sup>84</sup>

With his literary entourage and his financially healthy magazine, Hedley seemed to have everything going his way at *Toronto Life*. One of his new writing recruits, Norman Snider, recalls meeting with a supremely confident Hedley while discussing Snider's upcoming feature profile of the reclusive classical pianist Glenn Gould:

No underdog, [Hedley] looked like a veteran ad exec type. With his penchant for a hybrid mix of high and low, unlike most Toronto editors, [he] had a talent for putting out magazines that had sexual glamour. . . . Hedley stood in pugnacious opposition to the cramped style of much of Canadian media. He loved Andy Warhol and Pop Art, magazines were just part of a hip mix that included novels, movies, comics, you name it; an article could reflect it all. <sup>85</sup>

Hedley played to his strengths. He conceptualized ideas into clever and trendy packages for magazine consumers. In the context of the time, Hedley's preferences were in keeping with a general transformation in the role of editor from the previous generation:

[T]he notion of the magazine editor as a creative public personality, blown this way and that by myth and mystique, a setter of fashions and trends no less true (nor more false) than those it was his or her business it was to ferret out for readers—that I, believe, was a 1970s innovation, at least in Toronto. Like so many of Toronto's innovations, however, it was in fact a ripple of something that had taken place with more force in the States a few years earlier. <sup>86</sup>

Hedley's weakness, as mentioned above, was in the organization and execution of his extravagant ideas and schemes. At *Toronto Life*, the production problems that had surfaced at *Maclean's* began to magnify. John Macfarlane, who edited the magazine twice, 1972-1973 and 1992-2007, recalls Hedley's *modus operandi* succinctly: "When he was editor it was a nightmare—it wasn't a nightmare of a magazine—but it never came out on time. Hedley was such an eccentric guy. He edited the magazine from the restaurant/bar across the street [Café des Copains]." <sup>87</sup> Don Obe, who at this point in time had been Hedley's colleague at the *Telegram* and was now his senior editor at *Toronto Life*, took the good with the bad quite willingly, but understood only too well the challenges involved in being led by such a mercurial figure:



Hedley was a freewheeling editor with an attention span of about five seconds. Lynn Cunningham was his managing editor, and he drove her completely nuts. Somebody had to hold the place together. You can imagine her frustration. Tom was not a thoughtful man, for the feelings of others or the job they were doing.<sup>88</sup>

For Hedley, production chaos was secondary to creating the aura of the editor as artiste, the writers as acolytes, and together creating a kind of phalanx in the vanguard of cultural expression and change in the city.

## 5

And then Toronto found itself on the cusp of wholesale change. Film culture began to supplant magazine culture as the preferred destination of writers. Instead of becoming a famous long-form writer one could become a famous—and rich—screenplay writer (or so the thinking went; in Hedley's case, it actually happened with *Flashdance*). Instead of hanging out at Café des Copains around the St. Lawrence Market, everyone congregated at Club 22 at the Windsor Arms Hotel, just south of Yorkville. Once famous for its hippies and drugs, Yorkville was rapidly gentrifying through the 1970s into an acceptable playground for the rich and the celebrated. Magazine culture in Toronto, in other words, was in the process of declining in direct proportion to film culture's rise. Many feature-writing outlets ceased to exist; others were changing drastically. "Unlike Tom Hedley, the new editors often didn't like writers, especially free-booting types like [Paul William] Roberts or [Stephen] Williams, who didn't take easily to formulaic, corporate prose."<sup>89</sup>

Hedley was certainly at the forefront of this change, having already produced documentaries for the CBC, and, during the late 1970s, writing screenplays for three separate Canadian films aimed at the Hollywood market. Hedley's ideas about repackaging the New Journalism of Felker and Hayes, as well as his own, for the big screen, started to gel in the late 1970s while editing *Toronto Life*. Two factors emerged in the city at this time, both of which helped ambitious members of this suddenly burgeoning film community. One was the 1976 birth, at the Windsor Arms Hotel, of The Festival of Festivals. Today called the Toronto International Film Festival, it is one of the top film festivals on the annual world circuit, but at the time it was just another fledgling celebration whose sponsors looked across the ocean to the glamour of Cannes. The other factor was the government of Canada's change in tax policy that allowed generous write-offs for films being produced on Canadian soil.

As part of this new cultural gold rush, Hedley worked on three screenplays late in the decade. All three films—*Double Negative*, *Circle of Two*, *Mr. Padman*—were considered failures despite a certain level of acting and

directing talent involved. Yet failure was no deterrent. In fact, at the 1980 Festival of Festivals, Hollywood agents wanted to meet the Torontonian who had in so prolific fashion written three screenplays in one year. It was time for Hedley to leave magazines behind, which he did when he ceased to be executive editor of *Toronto Life* in autumn 1979 (although he has returned to his first passion periodically over the years, as occasional writer and consultant for *Esquire* and *Vanity Fair*).

Through his film connections Hedley's showbusiness career and lifestyle included toiling on a script for Barbra Streisand, renting a house on the beach in Malibu, buying a house on Big Rock Drive high in the Hollywood Hills overlooking the Pacific Ocean, dating beautiful blondes,<sup>90</sup> owning and driving around one of Elvis Presley's Cadillacs, notoriety and financial success with *Flashdance*, and, finally, marriage to an Italian "*principessa*."<sup>91</sup> His old comrade Barry Callaghan remarked that this son of an obscure Canadian career military man seemed to have become the embodiment of Jay Gatsby,<sup>92</sup> a sentiment shared by feature and screenplay writer Norman Snider: "Like Jay Gatsby, Hedley had sprung out of some Platonic ideal of himself."<sup>93</sup>

Hedley has often said the idea for *Flashdance* came to him while watching strippers perform at a now-defunct club called Gimlets, at Victoria and Lombard Streets near the *Toronto Life* offices. There, young working class women with stage names such as "Gina, Gina the Sex Machina" and "Muscles Marinara" presented highly idiosyncratic and personalized strip routines—their own *tableaux vivants*, Hedley calls them<sup>94</sup>—to customers. Originally, it was not Hedley's idea to frequent the club; his old friend, the painter Robert Markle, preferred to paint female movement, and suggested Hedley accompany him to a club in Buffalo. Mostly, though, they stuck to Gimlets in Toronto. It was probably cheaper for Markle to sit at a strip club and paint than hire models for studio work. Hedley describes this particular club world as pre-Mob infiltrated and pre-pornography obsessed, innocent by today's standards of shock and boredom in the realm of the sexual.<sup>95</sup>

For Hedley, film was not a medium well suited to absorbing ideas directly from the novel or the play; rather than the literary world, he decided film's natural cousin was actually pop culture, from which he could effortlessly borrow and mix ideas and concepts—the quick-cut-away film techniques of MTV music videos, for instance, or the idea of the performer singing directly to the camera. In this regard, Hedley's film work resembled his magazine editor's output. "I ended up succeeding in film work based on my application of my *Esquire* techniques."<sup>96</sup> But again, these were not the techniques of the style of writing associated with literary journalism. Instead, they were the New Journalism techniques of magazine production, in this case putting disparate elements together in surprising and new ways. At least, that's what Hedley claims, and applying the lessons of editorial magazine packaging to

film packaging is not implausible. After all, the main character in *Flashdance*, Alex, is a blue collar welder by day and a dancer by night.

## 6

Although *Flashdance* was Hedley's major commercial success, it was not the end of New Journalism in print for him. And although it is true that he is remembered largely as an editor with an outsized influence on Canadian New Journalism, Hedley has continued to embrace literary journalism—at least, the kind recognized as such today—most fully when he has written about the one area he knows through direct experience: Hollywood. This is reflected in two feature-length salutes to fallen friends and comrades, comedian Sam Kinison<sup>97</sup> and (especially) Don Simpson<sup>98</sup> (“Don Juan in Turnaround”). The writing is still florid, but considering the topics—two over-the-top Hollywood characters—wholly appropriate. Here is a sample that contains Wolfe's desired cinematic effect of “telling the story by moving from scene to scene and resorting as little as possible to sheer historical narrative”<sup>99</sup>:

Which brings us close to checkout time at the Hotel California. It is January 19, 1996. Simpson must be fifty pounds overweight. He's tired and troubled but somehow retains a gallows charisma. He'd spoon-fed himself an entire jar of peanut butter, washed it down with an exceptional bottle of wine, and talked to his friend writer-director James Toback for three hours on the phone. . . . As he heads upstairs to bed, he picks up a new biography of Oliver Stone subtitled the *Controversies, Excesses and Exploits of a Radical Filmmaker* and makes his way to his laboratory. He settles on the toilet and begins to read. Don Simpson, fifty-two, straining at stool and pregnant with death, suddenly pitches forward. His nervous system has shut off abruptly—and with it his heart. It can no longer live with impunity in a lethal environment of antidepressants, antipsychotic medication, sedatives, cocaine, and alcohol.<sup>100</sup>

Whatever one may argue about whether this or that technique or tactic in magazine production is or is not New Journalism, Hedley's writing certainly reflects the aura of New Journalism, and, indeed, retains the imprint of literary journalism.

Although the indulgence of the New Journalism had been frowned upon in many quarters for its indiscipline (well-warranted, in many cases), it is clear that Hedley had an enormous influence over the period 1965-1980 in Toronto, and by extension, Canadian journalism circles. He himself seems to have recognized that his way of presenting stories began to lose its appeal and fall from fashion. With the New Journalism devolving into the Mickey Mouse

“Me” journalism, younger editors becoming resistant to (or bored with) its charms and also less patient with independent-minded, high-maintenance freelance talent.

Yet at the same time, considering how diligently magazine culture attempts to “sex up” each and every newsstand package for allure, purchase and consumption, we might at least say that in the 1960s and 1970s, the *Esquire* team perfected many techniques and tactics of magazine presentation. Tom Hedley contributed to those, and brought many of the New Journalism techniques back with him to seed Canadian magazine and newspaper journalism.

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#### Endnotes

1. John C. Hartsock, “Tracing the Historical Outlines of ‘Literary Reportage’: The ‘Other’ Literary Journalism,” *International Literary Journalism: Historical Traditions and Transnational Influences* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, in press), MS p. 2.
2. John Macfarlane, Interview, Toronto (18 January 2008).
3. Don Obe, Interview, Toronto (25 April 2008).
4. Obe.
5. Tom Hedley, Interview 2, New York (14 January 2009).
6. Dale Pollock, “Mr. Flashdance,” *Saturday Night*, October 1984, 48. (Tom Hedley told me in my second interview with him that he had always felt that Pollock had been commissioned by *Saturday Night* magazine to write a “hatchet job” profile, a typically snide attack on a Canadian success story (i.e., a Torontonians who became a millionaire in Hollywood and was known for being the original scriptwriter of a crass commercial bauble, *Flashdance*).
7. Hedley, “The Mr. Vibes of Jazz—Red Norvo,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 1 October 1960, 32.
8. Hedley, Int. 2.
9. Ibid.
10. Hedley, “City Trucking Terminal Levelled in Big Blaze,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 January 1962, 1.
11. According to a *Toronto Telegram* notice published June 4, 1966, announcing

Hedley's appointment to the entertainment editor position, Hedley had been "a reporter and editor for more than four years."

12. Pollock, 48.
13. Hedley, Int. 2.
14. Ibid.
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17. Hedley, Interview 1, New York (3 June 2008).
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19. Base, M3.
20. Barry Callaghan, *Barrelhouse Kings* (Toronto: McArthur & Company, 1998), 184.
21. Callaghan, Interview 2, Toronto (22 September 2008).
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23. Peter C. Newman, "Introducing Tom Hedley," *Maclean's*, July 1971, 14.
24. Hedley, Int. 1.
25. Ibid.
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28. Ibid.
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32. Hedley, Int. 1.
33. Callaghan, Int. 2.
34. Ibid.
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41. Hedley, Int. 1.
42. Carol Polsgrove, *It Wasn't Pretty, Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun? Esquire in the Sixties* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 190.
43. Hedley, Int. 2.
44. Polsgrove, 218.
45. Obe.
46. Hedley, Int. 1.
47. Tom Wolfe, "Like a Novel," in Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (eds.), *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 10-22.
48. Hedley, Int. 1.
49. Ibid.
50. Sylvia Fraser, Interview, Toronto (22 April 2008).
51. Ann Ruppenstein, "Dear Sylvia." *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, Summer 2007, 71.

52. Fetherling, 210.
53. Hedley, Int. 1.
54. Tom Hedley, "Mickey Mouse at 44," *Maclean's*, November 1972, 36.
55. Ibid.
56. Pollock, 48.
57. The occasion was actually Hedley's twenty-eighth birthday. During our second interview in January 2009 Hedley realized the mistake in the copy, thought about it, then decided the fudge may have been intentional. The dictum, "Never trust anyone over thirty," was still part of the *zeitgeist*, he reasoned, and so turning twenty-nine sounded a lot more ominous.
58. "Mickey Mouse at 44," 92-93.
59. Upon being read Barry Callaghan's quotation, Hedley, in my second interview with him, mentioned that his friend had gotten it mostly right, but that Vidal had also attended.
60. Hedley corrected Callaghan here, saying it was actually Jorge Luis Borges's translator (Thomas Di Giovanni), not Borges himself, who delivered the fateful instruction to Hedley to pick up the cheque at his own birthday celebration.
61. Barry Callaghan, Interview 3, Toronto (25 September 2008).
62. Hedley, Int. 2.
63. Pollock, 49.
64. Callaghan, Int. 3.
65. Ian Brown, "Route 66 Revisited," *The Globe and Mail, Destinations Magazine*, 6 March 1987, 48.
66. Obe.
67. Newman, *Here Be Dragons: Telling Tales of People, Passion and Power* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2004), 367.
68. Fetherling, 201.
69. Hedley, Int. 1.
70. Newman, 367.
71. The *Toronto Telegram* went out of business in 1971, but many of its employees banded together to start the *Toronto Sun*, the city's first tabloid newspaper.
72. Base, M1-M3.
73. Lynn Cunningham, Interview, Toronto (15 October 2008).
74. Fetherling, 212.
75. This story was recounted by Obe as well.
76. Hedley, Int. 1.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
80. Cunningham.
81. Norman Sims, "The Literary Journalists," in Sims, ed., *The Literary Journalists: The New Art of Personal Reportage* (New York: Ballantine, 1984), 10.
82. Barry Callaghan, *Raise You Five: Essays and Encounters 1964-2004, Volume One*. (Toronto: McArthur & Company, 2005), xx.
83. Hedley, Int. 1.
84. Hedley, Int. 2.
85. Norman Snider, *The Roaring Eighties and Other Good Times* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 2007), 1, 3.
86. Fetherling, 204-205.
87. John Macfarlane.
88. Obe.

89. Snider, 19.

90. Hedley, Int. 1. Hedley told me that, like many others before him, his first inclination after making his fortune on *Flashdance* was to find a house in Malibu along the more exclusive ocean front property that is well away from Pacific Highway 1. But he found that whenever he went walking on the beach he would encounter a pesky film management type, who would proceed to harass him about a script he was working on. So the “beautiful blonde” he was living with at the time found him a house in the hills overlooking the ocean, where he could retain his privacy.

91. John Macfarlane’s term, not Hedley’s.

92. Callaghan, Int. 3.

93. Snider, 2.

94. Hedley, Int. 1.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Hedley, “The Last Laugh,” *Esquire*, December 1992, 140-3, 172-7.

98. Hedley, “Don Juan in Turnaround: Sleaze and Excess Lose Their Glamour in Hollywood,” *Esquire*, 1 Sept 1996, 122-132.

99. *Wolfe*, 31.

100. “Don Juan in Turnaround,” 127.



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## Literary Journalism on Trial

*Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* by Kathy Roberts Forde. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008. Paperback, 288 pp., \$28.95.

Reviewed by Peter Parisi, Hunter College, U.S.A.

When the flamboyant psychoanalyst Jeffrey Moussief Masson sued *The New Yorker* magazine and writer Janet Malcolm, charging that she had altered or fabricated quotes to portray him in a defamatory light, narrative technique in journalism came under unprecedented legal scrutiny. Was it legitimate for a journalist to reshape a subject's words, drawing together statements from various times and smoothing gaps and ambiguities, all to translate "speech into prose"? How was such creative license to be evaluated in the context of libel and the Supreme Court's ringing affirmation in *Sullivan v. New York Times* of the importance of robust, free-wheeling, even caustic, public expression.

In *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment*, Kathy Roberts Forde sets these questions in a richly intricate yet lucid historical, legal and literary context, organized around three closely interwoven strands. There is, first, the virtually irreconcilable debate between fact-based and literary journalism with their distinct conceptions of reporting, writing technique and the nature of "truth" and "reality"; secondly, the philosophical rendition of this debate through the postmodern rejection of objectivity and unitary, palpable truth; and, finally, the bearing of these differences on the law of defamation with important implications for the quality of democratic discussion.

Conventional practice for an argument like this might suggest a linear design, opening with legal and cultural background of the case, followed by its chronological unfolding and closing with discussion of journalistic implications. Forde, instead, ingeniously spirals in on her conclusions, creating an intellectual suspense unusual in a scholarly volume. After an introductory overview, she takes up *Masson v. New Yorker* in the middle of its course at the end of the first federal trial in 1993. Thereafter, she alternates chapters, tracking the case with chapters on elements of the cultural context. Thus Chapter 2 lays out the history of American journalism's competing models of reportage, the news-based and the literary, with due attention to *The New Yorker's* place in that history. Chapter 3 traces American libel law as it was transformed in *New York Times v. Sullivan*, with particular notice of changing

standards of truth and the First Amendment. Chapter 4 follows libel suits against *The New Yorker* from its founding to the period after *Sullivan* and its strategies for fending off suits (a favorite: foot-dragging until the complainant got tired of the business). Chapter 5 takes the initial years of *Masson v. New Yorker* to the point when the Supreme Court remanded it for lower courts to evaluate the factual basis of the alleged libelous statements. Chapter 6, "Libel Law and the Postmodern Dilemma," explores the Sullivan-Masson line of Supreme Court cases attempting to define actual malice and the conditions that deem defamatory speech factual enough to incur damages. Chapter 7 sees the case to its close, with the jury concluding that Malcolm's contested statements were either not defamatory or not made with absolute malice. A fascinating final chapter offers Forde's thoughts on mediating between the opposed approaches of news and literary journalism in order to maximize journalism's democratic service.

Forde approaches the news/literary divide as an adherent of postmodernism, inflected by the "middle way" of American pragmatism. This is to view "human action and reality as embedded within social and cultural contexts and thus always open to interpretation" (215), a far cry from the worldview of conventional journalism. But in placing social action at its center, this orientation escapes the smug obscurantism of postmodernism that renders all of experience as "text."

Given Forde's pragmatic postmodernism, she is well aware of reasons why the sacrosanct verbatim quotation, so much revered in conventional journalism, can be greeted skeptically. "Quotations cannot always be viewed as factual statements," she writes (209). Nor is it so easy to determine whether a quotation has been substantially altered. "The test demands interpretation, compression, and weighing of the actual spoken words and written quotation. But what happens when the actual spoken words are not recoverable? What happens when the words spoken are ambiguous in meaning and rambling to boot . . . ? In these instances, the speaker's actual utterance can hardly be treated as a fact. Yet the material alteration test assumes that it can" (p. 209). Janet Malcolm may have failed openly to acknowledge her technique of compressing and smoothing quotes, but Forde responds that traditional journalism commits an equivalent misdemeanor when it fails to reveal the exact question that elicits a quote.

Forde rightly notes that the dichotomy between news and literary journalism is not absolute. Any reading of *The New York Times*, she says, will find journalists deploying narrative technique and any survey of *The New Yorker* will reveal writing from an objective stance centered on facts.

If journalism is to register the multiple perspectives of social experience and serve democratic debate in the process, what is needed, Forde contends, is greater candor and transparency about the writing and reporting process. Journalists and news organizations should be much more forthcoming about their methods of gathering information, presenting it, and the assumptions that underlie their interpretations. For the many press observers who find journalistic claims of objectivity to be dangerously simplistic, often disingenuously masking political-economic interests, Forde's emphasis on transparency is attractive and opens some rich lines of discussion. What exactly would such full disclosure look like? Is it entirely feasible? I propose here to respond to Forde's valuable, foundational work (and the launching of a scholarly journal devoted to literary journalism) by offering a few reflections for further discussion.

There are some indications of conventional journalism registering the postmodern critique, which is so inimical to its basic truth claims and objective approach. Most significantly, narrative journalism has carved itself a secure niche, supported through Harvard's Nieman Foundation and the Poynter Institute. To judge from work published in the online *Nieman Narrative Digest*, long-form work, following a compelling story with rich detail and description, is appearing in a wide variety of news outlets (see <<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/digest/notable/notablebysource.html>>). The editors of the *Digest* note that narrative journalism isn't just a matter of good yarns, but is a strong medium for opening out the complexities of social issues such as race and class. (Narrative fiction of that stripe deserves further examination.)

Other indicators are more subtle but show the institution of journalism responding to debates about its factual credibility. *The New York Times* has taken to publishing a "Reader's Guide," initially on page A2 or A3, and now on the web ([www.newyorktimes.com/readersguide](http://www.newyorktimes.com/readersguide)), that aims to explain the various "special forms"—"news analysis," "reporter's notebook," "memo" or "journal"—that readers will encounter in its pages. The real function of this service seems less to acknowledge the multiplicity of possible viewpoints than to prevent readers from expecting objectivity uniformly throughout the paper and complaining after they stumble on qualitative judgment or description. So this move falls well short of acknowledging a world of multiple, competing interpretations.

Another sign of "soft postmodernism" is the increasing use of the term "narrative" to refer, not to story-telling, but to the interpretive construction of social realities. So we find a *New York Times* business reporter speaking of "the corporate narrative that is Time Warner" and in a reaction story on the destruction in Gaza, "The heroic Israeli narrative has run its course."

A problematic form of postmodernism is in campaign reporters' adoption of a "dramaturgical" frame. Within that frame, candidates' "performance"—not just in debates, but in the whole conduct of the campaign—is the core object of assessment and is treated as a more significant sign of political competency than positions and plans. This suggests something that gets somewhat obscured in Forde's discussion: narrative structure and assumptions ("frames") are as consequential in hard news reporting as in literary nonfiction.

One of the advantages of the dramaturgical frame is that it allows the reporter to appear both objectively descriptive and critical all at once. The objective stance dies—or deconstructs—hard. There are solid political-economic reasons why mainstream journalism would have difficulty disclosing the styles and assumptions of press accounts. The rhetorical strategies that constitute objectivity are essential passport for navigating between the powerful interests that represent the "sides" in mainstream, corporate media.

Although my own philosophical sympathies lie with Forde's, there are some problems with allowing too much flexibility to the phrasing of the facts. Forde believes that sophisticated readers of *The New Yorker* understand full well the creative license that gives us characters enunciating long, eloquent monologues such as we do not encounter (or produce) in life. Is there not something problematic about representing human experience as more polished than it is? Critics are generally much less comfortable with compound characters than with *The New Yorker* writer's accepted "compound quotations." Why the difference? Can we really claim that characters compounded of several others, as Joseph Mitchell confessed to creating, express a "deeper truth"? Perhaps, but the question needs a good airing.

"Journalism history," Ford says, "has yet to engage in a sustained way the postmodern critique of objectivist knowledge that has influenced the broader discipline of history" (19). For all its complexities, Forde has made a major contribution to that engagement.

## Stories of New York

*New York Stories: Landmark Writing from Four Decades of New York Magazine* by Editors of *New York Magazine*, foreword by Tom Wolfe. New York: Random House, 2008. Paperback, 624 pages, \$17.

Reviewed by Elizabeth B. Christians, Louisiana Tech University, U.S.A.

**N***ew York Stories: Landmark Writing From Four Decades of New York Magazine* is a wonderland of the most enduring cultural, social and political events, ideas, and people in America's recent history told through the eyes and with the voices of those who experienced and witnessed them—a losing candidate, a cancer survivor, an illegal immigrant, prostitute and swinger, working class and high-class, police officer and firefighter widow, mobster and rock star, and several sassy and sophisticated journalists. They are all within these pages, and they tell the story of *New York* but also the story of America from 1968 to 2008.

From the intensely personal to the culturally significant, *New York Stories* not only covers the last forty years but includes nearly as many subjects. The foreword is appropriately written by the father of New Journalism, Tom Wolfe, whose eloquent style and satirical wit defined much of the best literary nonfiction of the 1970s. Wolfe's *New York* masterpieces include "Radical Chic," about the absurdity of the Black Panther fundraiser held by renowned composer Leonard Bernstein in 1970 in his Park Avenue palace, and "The 'Me' Decade"—in which Wolfe examines the enormity of the ego—using of all things, a woman's continuously worrisome hemorrhoid.

The selections chosen for *New York Stories* compilation illustrate how culturally and politically significant the literary journalism of the magazine has been since its 1960s inception as a Sunday supplement to the *New York Herald Tribune*, which Wolfe defines as "the lowest form of newspaper journalism in America at the time" (xiv). Merely surviving would have proved a feat at a time when magazines were dying in droves or reinventing themselves for a niche market. Yet, Felker's *New York* rose to the challenge of putting out a weekly publication that challenged readers—primarily Manhattanites—to look at their world in new ways, to learn about issues that they had perhaps heard of but only superficially, and to explore new ideas.

In 1968, *New York* became its own stand-alone magazine. Felker had gotten his start at *Esquire* and helped that magazine set the bar—along with *The New Yorker*—for expansive, subjective and literary works of journalism. Many of the writers that have graced the pages of *New York* already had

successful careers in the business. For others, *New York* gave them the opportunity to spread their wings without confine as to space or subject matter, and the results are priceless. Some of the pieces were expanded and became best-sellers.

After a glance at the table of contents of *New York Stories*, some readers may not realize the significance by title or author of works like “Tribal Rites of the New Saturday Night” by Nik Cohn, which was the basis for the movie *Saturday Night Fever*, which has garnered an eternal place in American popular culture. Or Mark Jacobson’s 1975 article, “Night-Shifting for the Hip Fleet,” which served as the basis for the hit TV series *Taxi*.

From food—humorist and novelist Nora Ephron’s “Critics in the World of the Rising Souffle (or is it Rising Meringue?)” and writer George Plimpton’s “If You’ve Been Afraid to Go to Elaine’s These Past Twenty Years, Here’s What You’ve Missed”—to female issues in Ariel Levy’s “Female Chauvinist Pigs” and Joyce Wadler’s intensely private emotional journey, “My Breast: One Woman’s Cancer Story,”—to finances in Pete Hamill’s look at “The Revolt of the White Lower Middle Class” and John Taylor’s “Hard to Be Rich,” about the rise and fall of Wall Street mogul John Gutfreund and his wife, Susan.

From a historical standpoint, one realizes upon reading *New York Stories* just how well connected Felker had to remain in the fickle world of literati to pull off such a successful and poignant magazine week after week in an increasingly saturated media world. Felker and his editorial staff deserve much praise for their craftiness and creativity at content selection. *New York Stories* is a testament to this.

Gloria Steinem served as *New York*’s political writer in 1969, when she wrote “After Black Power, Women’s Liberation,” which is included in *New York Stories*. Three years later, in 1972, Steinem founded *Ms.* magazine, which was funded and distributed initially by Felker and *New York*. Interesting from a historical perspective, Steinem’s initial article on women’s liberation actually predated Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*, which is often credited with the start of the 1960s feminist movement. Steinem wrote the article dealing with women’s health issues and choices (or lack thereof) in contraception for *Esquire* at the bidding of Felker, who was a features editor. She credited Felker with encouraging her to write serious journalism.

Several authors appear more than once in the collection in addition to Wolfe and Steinem. Columnist Jimmy Breslin’s 1969 profile of the young party-boy quarterback Joe Namath appears with an essay about his and Norman Mailer’s attempt at taking New York City Council by storm that same year.



A more recent article by multiple *New York* contributor and political journalist Joe Klein tackles the issue of race in one of the most unforgettable essays in the book, “Race: The Issue,” which chronicles the Central Park rapist case of 1989. Klein, perhaps best known for his penning of *Primary Colors* under the pseudonym “Anonymous,” bravely uncovers the multiple layers to racism.

*New York* has long been recognized for its colorful profiles of the rich and famous, and several are included in this collection. Unique portraits of award-winning author Truman Capote, depressed and alone at the end of his life, and Woody Allen, as a pen pal to essay-writer Nancy Jo Sales in her early teens in 1980, show readers familiar celebrities in unfamiliar and uncomfortable ways.

From the most seemingly innocuous of pastimes—crossword puzzles (Stephen Sondheim’s “How to Do a *Real* Crossword Puzzle or What’s a Four-letter Word for ‘East Indian Betel Nut’ and Who Cares?”) and Internet chatting (Emily Nussbaum’s “Say Everything”)—to the most heinous acts in American history, *New York* has covered them all in memorable fashion. A 2004 article, “The Dead Wives Club, or Char in Love” by Steve Fishman, about the 9/11 widows, reads almost like morbid humor while respectfully exploring the process of mourning on a personal level over an event that touched the nation. The title of the article comes from the name the group gave themselves.

One of the most recent and enlighteningly funny articles, “Up With Grups” by Adam Sternbergh, an editor-at-large at *New York*, borrows its name from a 1960s *Star Trek* episode to describe the state of adulthood in the twenty-first century. Grups, according to Sternbergh, are thirtysomethings—and sometimes even older—who are stuck in a mindset that is a cross between wannabe rock star and Peter Pan. They have jobs and kids but want to wear holey jeans and listen to iPods. “They’re making up adulthood as they go,” according to Sternbergh (73).

The final part of *New York Stories* includes political essays on the character of and characters that have been part of the American political climate during the past four decades. They include the newest American president, Barack Obama, in a profile of the then-Illinois senator written by *New York* writer Jennifer Senior in October 2006.

It takes the right mixing of flavors, of styles, and of voices to create a magazine that can survive and thrive as long as *New York* has. And that whole menu of flavors can be found in this collection.

## Settling the Borderland

*Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism* by Jan Whitt. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008. Paperback, 159 pp., \$29.

Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts, University at Albany, U.S.A.

“**B**orderland” is a familiar metaphor for the realm where journalism’s supposed factual verifiability and literature’s techniques can contrast and coalesce to form a work of art that communicates a larger truth about human existence. Yet “borderland” also aptly describes the terrain occupied by several women and some men of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States whose literary journalism has been under-represented. This is the landscape of “other voices” that Jan Whitt explores in this insightful addition to the growing scholarship about the relationship between journalism and literature.

Whitt, a journalism professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder, focuses here on the work of five women (Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Joan Didion, Sara Davidson, and Susan Orlean) and three men (Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and John Steinbeck), all of whom were deeply influenced by journalism. She undertook this study, she writes, in part because she wondered, “Where were the women?” when preparing to teach literary journalism courses during the 1980s. Instead, at that time she “confronted the standard set of characters” such as Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Ernest Hemingway, Hunter S. Thompson, Mark Twain, Tom Wolfe, and others.

*Settling the Borderland* reflects Whitt’s thinking, developed over at least two decades, about both the practice and the academic study of literary journalism. Her background as a practicing journalist, with degrees in English and journalism and a Ph.D. in literature, richly informs this study. One of her original insights is the important role of allegory as used by women literary journalists such as Joan Didion, Sara Davidson, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, and Susan Orlean. Techniques of literary journalism such as “reliance upon description, appropriation of narrative forms, heavy use of dialogue, [and] emphasis on character . . . were already in use by the men who represented the genre,” Whitt notes. “But to employ these strategies in the service of rich symbolism—for Joan Didion to tell a tale of middle-class America in which a seemingly content woman would burn her husband to death in a Volkswagen on a street called ‘Bella Vista’—well, that is allegory. This use of allegory taps into the wellspring.”

Whitt argues that while male writers such as Capote, Wolfe, et al. are “settlers” of the genre, women literary journalists are its

“revolutionaries.” Joan Didion, Sara Davidson, Susan Orlean, and others mastered the “rituals” of literary journalism, she asserts, adapting to the genre, and “then, quietly—without visible disruption—some of them would begin to subvert the accepted tenets and transform the genre.” Such transformations include Susan Orlean’s *Orchid Thief*, a tale of people’s lifelong search for a “symbol of beauty and perfection—in a tormented and imperfect world,” and Sara Davidson’s *Loose Change: Three Women of the Sixties*, which Whitt calls “the story of friendship and betrayal and forgiveness and despair.”

Whitt offers key insights about literary journalism’s contributions not just to aesthetic but to social discourses. She builds upon John Pauly’s germinal essay, “The Politics of the New Journalism” (in Norman Sims’s edited collection, *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*), in choosing to analyze seemingly disparate works such as Didion’s *Salvador*, Poe’s detective stories (such as “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”), Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*. All seem to have in common a social commentary and even criticism that may derive from each author’s immersion in the day-to-day world of journalism.

The chapter dealing with the work of Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty is particularly intriguing, as here Whitt demonstrates in detail the direct links between these authors’ early journalism experiences and their later literary writing. For example, Whitt points to “the importance of place and the supremacy of the moment” in Porter’s later work, as well as her usual “desire to observe without passing judgment on the events she describes.”

Whitt grounds her study in a nuanced review of some of the major ideas and controversies in literary journalism scholarship for the last several decades. She finds particularly useful literary journalism’s definition as developed by Thomas B. Connery in “Discovering a Literary Form,” the introductory essay in his anthology about literary journalism: “nonfiction printed prose whose verifiable content is shaped and transformed into a story or sketch by use of narrative and rhetorical techniques generally associated with fiction” [in Connery, ed., *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, New York, NY: Greenwood, 1992, p. 15]. She also seems to agree with Connery’s definition of the genre as *not* including essays and commentary, and with his view that “much of the content of the works comes from traditional means of news gathering or reporting, including interviews, document review and observation. Finally, journalism implies an immediacy, as well as a sense that what is being written about has a relevance peculiar to its time and place.”

So it is surprising that Whitt calls Didion’s *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a 2005 book about the death of her husband, both a “memoir” and an

important work of “literary journalism.” Given the amount of invention, often unconscious but nevertheless present in any autobiographical work, the two cannot happily coexist. First, there is the perennial problem of memory’s notorious duplicity. Also, as Timothy Dow Adams has convincingly argued, all autobiographers (including memoirists) are “unreliable narrators,” in effect, “liars,” because they are shaping *their* version of the story, which always includes the creation of a “self” (an enterprise that requires imagination as well as memory) [*Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. ix]. And as the memoirist Patricia Hampl has written, “memoir is not a matter of transcription, . . . memory itself is not a warehouse of finished stories, not a static gallery of framed pictures” [“Memory and Imagination,” in *The Dolphin Reader*, ed. Douglas Hunt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986, pp. 1006-1007]. I would argue that memoir belongs in its own, unique category as a partly factual genre that shares literary journalism’s use of literary techniques to evoke a larger (“literary”) truth (what Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks called “truth of coherence,” as opposed to factual “truth” or “truth of correspondence”).

That said, there is much to recommend in *Settling the Borderland*. Whitt should be commended for raising and investigating penetrating questions about the other voices of literary journalism. Her book offers an engaging discussion of a wealth of literary journalism’s history and trends. At book’s end, the reader will be struck by how much has been imparted in relatively few pages. Whitt’s scholarship here is sound and will doubtless inspire continued exploration of this less known realm. If Whitt’s women literary journalists are “revolutionaries,” she herself is a pioneer in the genre’s scholarship.

## Telling and Reading True Stories

*Telling True Stories—A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Neiman Foundation at Harvard University*, edited by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call. New York: Penguin Group, 2007. Paperback, 352 pp., \$15.

*The Writer's Reader—Understanding Journalism and Non-fiction*, edited by Susie Eisenhuth and Willa McDonald. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Paperback, \$37.

Reviewed by Douglas Whynott, Emerson College, U.S.A.

Reading *Telling True Stories* is like being at a nonfiction writers' conference with most of the shining lights of literary journalism as practiced in the United States over the past twenty-five years or more. There are nearly fifty of them here—Pulitzer prize winners, National Book award winners, MacArthur fellows, all offering up short talks on craft, issues, or concerns. Reading the various pieces, two to four pages each, you get the impression that each writer chose what he or she knew best and wanted most to talk about regarding narrative nonfiction. This book kept reminding me of another book I read three decades ago when I was very interested in higher states of mind and meditation, a little volume called *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* by Shunryo Suzuki: short takes, distilled wisdom, building upon the accrual of knowledge like mist on a wool jacket.

*Telling True Stories* probably isn't a book appropriate for a course introducing students to nonfiction writing. Though I say that with reservation, because anyone interested in writing could get something out of this book. All in all, however, it is best suited for the writer who already has read and perhaps begun to practice narrative nonfiction. (I for one will assign it in a graduate course on writing the nonfiction book in the coming semester.) *Telling True Stories* is certain to be useful and inspiring for accomplished and professional writers, because its range and the above mentioned wisdom and distilled knowledge. Anyone, no matter who and how experienced, will take something away.

Disclaimer: I know Mark Kramer and was once his student when I was in a Master of Fine Arts program and he taught a nonfiction workshop. Mark had just written his wonderful book about agriculture, *Three Farms*. I told Mark when I ran into him recently at a nonfiction conference in Boston what I have told others over the years, that I learned more about writing in ten minutes, listening to him read through a *New Yorker* piece paragraph by paragraph, identifying techniques, than I did in the entirety of other writing

courses. Mark introduces, with Wendy Call, the various sections in *Telling True Stories*, and contributes two chapters, on “Reporting for Narrative: Ten Overlapping Rules,” and “Setting the Scene” (“Try to array details and events so that readers experience the location in three dimensions. You can write, ‘Out the window, a tree waved in the wind,’ or ‘She spoke from across the room.’”)

I found the opening piece in this book to be unforgettable, painful, and perfectly appropriate for the leadoff story. Jacqui Banaszynski tells about an assignment she had in Sudan at a famine camp on the Ethiopian border, where 100,000 people had come because they have no water, where little girls soaked rags in mud by a river and wrung them out in plastic jugs drop by drop. Banaszynski feels freaked out by it all, and terribly guilty. But she keeps hearing this noise at night, this *singing* sound: “You hear sweet chants and deep rhythms. Each night, over and over, at about the same time.” She asks around, and learns that the singers are actually telling stories, that the nightly storytelling is a ritual, that the elders are the ones singing the songs and passing the knowledge. “Stories are the connective tissue of the human race,” she writes. “Tell yours with accuracy and understanding and context and with unwavering devotion to the truth.”

David Halberstam is here, the giant of nonfiction writing who didn’t publish any books about writing, but a lot of them about momentous subjects, on canvasses large and small. The moment I saw him on the contents page I turned to see what he had to say: In his four pages, titled “The Narrative Idea,” he writes: “To write good narrative you must be able to answer the question: *What is the story about?* The *idea*, the concept, is critical to narrative journalism. Moving the idea from genesis to fruition is what it’s all about.” He provides an example from *The Teammates: A Portrait of Friendship* (concerning four friends of sixty years caring about each other late in their lives) and says, “The book *is* the idea. Once you have the idea, it just flows out. Taking an idea, a central point, and pursuing it, turning it into a story that tells something about the way we live today, is the essence of narrative journalism.” He has another bit of wisdom to offer aspiring writers and states it emphatically: “Read,” he says. “Read good nonfiction books. Read good detective fiction, because no one does narrative structure better than good detective writers.” That advice is a recurring theme throughout *Telling Good Stories*, and the nice things about the various writers represented here is that not only do you learn about some of their books, the ones you don’t know, but you also sometimes get their reading recommendations. One more thing about Halberstam, not to give it all away, but to my thinking the price of the book is covered, for anyone seeking to do literary journalism, in one

little nugget of advice he offers up: At the end of the interview always ask, “Who else should I see?” How much better a question than the rusty old saw: “Is there anything I haven’t covered?”

*Telling True Stories* is organized into ten parts under such titles as “Finding, Researching and Reporting Topics,” “Constructing a Structure,” “Building Quality into the Work,” and “Building a Career in Magazines and Books.” As one can imagine, because each of the essays or talks is freewheeling, the pieces don’t always confine themselves to the subject at hand; frequently the writer thinks of something else, starts off by talking about structure but then (like Halberstam telling us to *read*) suddenly is talking about editing or ethics or quality—which to this reader made it more interesting, because books about writing can be so very dull and organized and plodding.

Lane DeGregory asks the question, “Will there be interaction between my character and others?” Dialogue is more important than explanation, she says: Look for ways to observe interaction: If you can, go out to lunch with your subject and his grandma. Isabelle Wilkerson speaks to the fact that interactions between journalists and sources are relationships, though ones of accelerated intimacy. Jon Franklin writes of the psychological interview: explore what made the character who he or she is, he says; ask, “What is your first memory?” and other such questions. Ted Conover tells about how he went to prison, in the only way he could manage—as a prison guard, to write *Newjack*. Philip Lopate writes that memoirists must dramatize themselves, and must find distance from themselves to do it. Nicholas Lemann writes that yarn-spinning alone will not suffice; there must be ideas. He says that when Tom Wolfe listed his famous four devices in the introduction to *The New Journalism*, he didn’t name the one thing he does very well in his nonfiction and that is responsible for his success, that he “works actively with ideas as well as techniques.” And in this book there is even Tom Wolfe himself, examining once again his four devices, stating their value once again, then going on to show how Stephen Crane had the right stuff (for narrative nonfiction).

I claimed that published writers have a lot to learn from *Telling True Stories*. I would say that the most intriguing piece for me was a short meditation on story structure by Jon Franklin, when he writes that all stories have three layers. The top layer is what happens, the narrative. The next layer is how those events make the main character feel. Then there is the third layer, which is the rhythm of the piece, Franklin writes, mentioning the neuroanatomist Paul MacLean and his idea of the triune brain, that each person has three brains: “One understands rhythm, one understand emotions, and the third is cognitive.” Rhythm is important, because storytelling is symphonic.

I liked thinking about that in terms of writing your first draft, the idea



that you would listen to the rhythm, rather than to the inner editor, which can be so debilitating.

This is a useful *and* inspirational book, slices of advice caught in a moment in time—the Nieman nonfiction conferences, which Mark Kramer founded and imbued with his energetic personality and perceptive mind for several years.

**T**he *Writer's Reader* is more of a textbook, and would be useful in courses that introduce students to narrative nonfiction for the first time, perhaps journalism students who have some knowledge of feature writing and are now ready to break out into longer narrative forms. It is also, as the title states, a reader, and so one of its advantages is that it provides writing, full length articles and essays, by the various authors featured, which include Joan Didion, Barr Siegel, Jessica Mitford, David Sedaris, Annie Dillard, and Pico Iyer.

The authors, Susie Eisenhuth and Willa McDonald, are Australian journalists, and the word choice is distinctly Aussie flavored at times (“while the NJ boys were frequently *lairizing* on centre stage, Joan Didion was, typically, huddled quietly in the wings.” Or, “Didion . . . had returned to the essay writing of her early years, but in a much *stroppier* mode.”) The italics are mine; I take “lairizing” to mean making a lair, wallowing, just as I take “stroppier” to mean touchy (with some help from Webster). But Aussie term-bending is always fun, and this is a well-organized book.

It begins with two chapters, “News and Follow-Ups” and “New Journalism and Its Legacy,” on topics and follows with six chapters on genres: Profiles, Investigative Writing, Essays, Memoir, Place, and Travel. Each chapter begins with an overview of the topic by one of the book’s authors, followed by analysis of the respective writers. In the New Journalism chapter Susie Eisenhuth writes, “Another thing Didion showed them—and continues to demonstrate—was the elegant economy of her style. Anyone who spends time with new writers knows the perils of overwriting, the way they often abandon their natural bent for the forthright and retreat instead into self-conscious writer mode, producing complex sentences garlanded with adverbial tinsel and trailing dependent clauses as they head recklessly into their fourth or fifth line.”

A piece by Joan Didion then follows, “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream,” from *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*. A piece by the journalist Barry Siegel follows the Didion, his “A Father’s Pain, a Judge’s Duty and a Justice Beyond Their Reach,” which won a Pulitzer for reporting. The New Journalism chapter concludes (as each does) with an interview, in this case with Barry Siegel. With these interviews *A Writer’s Reader* enters the realm of *Telling True*

*Stories*, with the seasoned writer Siegel offers his knowledge and experience: “I just simply gravitated towards the stories where the people were facing ambiguous moral issues, where the characters had to choose and act in situations where there were no clear right or wrong answers. Instinctively as a writer, it struck me as being rich material for storytelling . . . and it’s universal. This is what life is and this is what we all do.” *A Writer’s Reader* is a versatile book that approaches the subject of narrative nonfiction from several vantage points.

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## U.S. and Slovenian Parallels

*Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia* by Sonja Merljak Zdovc. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008. Paperback, 145 pp., \$26.

Reviewed by Alice Donat Trindade, Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal

Three years ago at the University of Nancy, France, a new international association was founded—the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies. Among our early founding members, who are both scholars and practitioners of this particular nonfiction genre, was Sonja Merljak Zdovc, the author of *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia*. The Slovenian academic and journalist was able to meet and interact within this new society with some of her international peers, with those who clearly shared her interests. Despite the number of works of literary journalism written over the past one hundred years, academic recognition has been slow in coming. Depending on countries and continents, the emerging recognition of this type of writing has been translated into a more or less profuse number of academic publications in a number of countries and continents, but especially in the U.S.

The author, therefore, uses a lot of the seminal theoretical work written

so far on this matter in the United States by such authors as Thomas Berner, Thomas B. Connery, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, John C. Hartsock, Kevin Kerrane, Mark Kramer, Barbara Lounsberry, John Pauly, Norman Sims, and Ben Yagoda, to name but a few of those who have helped in the last twenty to thirty years to lay the foundations for this area of academic study. Her work is then placed within two demanding and complementary areas—comparative and literary journalism studies—using pieces of writing originating in her home country and America. Merljak Zdovc is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana, and a feature writer as well for the *Saturday Supplement* of the daily newspaper *Delo*. Consequently, she is in a position to analyze both the reasons that direct a journalist towards becoming a practitioner of literary journalism, and those that lead a community of international scholars to delve into this (often) misunderstood and even denied genre.

This scholar/journalist enlightens the reader as to why she chose to focus on American Tom Wolfe: “Tom Wolfe is synonymous with a movement he helped bring into existence in the mid-1960s.” (46) The time of the original publication of the pieces of Wolfe’s work which are used as corpus in the volume—the collection *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby* (1965), and the nonfiction novels *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) and *The Right Stuff* (1979)—are two decades of particular relevance not only in the U.S., but also across the Atlantic, in Slovenia.

The writings by the herald of New Journalism, “The Loudest of Them All,” as Merljak Zdovc describes Wolfe in her book, are to be compared with the audible whispers of Slovenian writers who, under the somehow benign, but still stern rule of President Tito’s Yugoslavian regime, could not do much more than shout with half-sealed lips. The comparison between American New Journalism and the work by Slovenian journalists, handling the individual lives and hardship of their peoples in the same time frame—the 1960s and the 1970s—has an indeed intellectually fascinating outcome. In fact, it clearly demonstrates beyond doubt the way the written word frames the surrounding world for the benefit of readers, and of the various interests involving all possible gatekeepers—journalists, editors, publishers, secret police, and so on. The slight opening of the Socialist Yugoslavian establishment in the 1960s allowed for some innovation in themes and structure. Reference is made to some authors, namely Predrag Djuričić and his 1965 article “Adria Foxtrot Charlie.” The close comparison of this particular text shows how techniques, systematically described by Wolfe in his introduction to the 1973 volume *The New Journalism*, are used by the Yugoslavian writer even if he was totally unaware that he was using the exact same techniques in use half

way across the world by American writers who were also trying to figure out how to portray the joys, sorrows, and plights of their corner of the world to all audiences.

Although, as Merljak Zdovc notes, not many Slovenian journalists' texts can be compared in style and technique to the American literary journalism production of the period, still, even in situations as diverse as the ones experienced in capitalist America and socialist Yugoslavia, authors in the two countries were experiencing the same urge to write detailed, vivid, well-researched accounts of their countrymen's life experiences. In the preface to his influential work, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, Thomas Connery calls literary journalism a "type of cultural expression" (xi). This concept of "expression" explains much of what those writers were doing at the time in that in all moments of history there are particularly suitable "types of cultural expression," types that are ripe to be produced by authors and received by the public. It is as if each type of writing in each historical circumstance was found by means of a fruitful silent (sometimes loud) exchange which engages those two elements of communication, plus all other agents involved in the process: editors, media, their ownership, and even political regimes. Thus the "shaping" quality of journalism, as Merljak Zdovc puts it, drawing on John Hellmann's, *Fables of Fact. The New Journalism as New Fiction*, paradoxically assumes utmost significance in very different, almost opposite social circumstances. Whereas Wolfe captured situations, issues and people living in extreme, sometimes incomprehensible, times of social change for the many who were not experiencing them directly, Slovenian writers were well aware that the neatly framed socialist society where they lived and about which they wrote was not as uncontroversial as it was made to seem. The author reminds the reader: "Similarly, almost as a rule, literary journalism is about an everyday story that assumes true meaning when the journalist places it into a broader context" (8). That was made by Wolfe and his counterparts in Slovenia—when Wolfe wrote about customized cars, or when journalists, writing for the magazine *Tovariš*, tried to evade official Yugoslavian journalistic discourse. The situations experienced by New Journalists and their European colleagues were far from similar; however, they all felt that established, conventional journalism was unsatisfactory.

Wolfe actually introduced a designation in the introduction to the volume *The New Journalism* for the particular sort of writing and publication he was rejecting, "totem newspapers." Readers buy them because they need to display to themselves and others that their style of living is in conformity with the principles and rules of the publication. It is a sign of belonging.

Whereas this sort of newspaper had this symbolic value in the U.S., rules and values were more rigidly enforced in Slovenia—and not only in terms of outward appearance. Merljak Zdovc notes (78) that some reports “‘flew’ out of the magazine” because they were not in conformity with the established rules on matters that could be approached without endangering yourself and your family. In appearance and in substance, all Slovenian newspapers had, thus, to be “totem” newspapers, as they had to show both writers and readers compliance with the establishment. Nevertheless, there was always some, often scarce, room for transgression, and journalists in Slovenia “turned to novelistic techniques because analytical, factographic reporting was not possible” (84).

Finally, we may say that reading Merljak Zdovc’s book enlightens journalism and literary journalism scholars as well as all those interested in matters related to these areas on how two radically different sets of reasons may lead authors to similar techniques and genres: both Wolfe’s depictions of extraordinary moments of considerable social change, and Slovenian authors’ use of literary techniques to bring hard times to the fore without being regarded as enemies of the regime resulted in writings of *News that Lasts*.

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## A Century of True Stories

*True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* by Norman Sims. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2008; paperback, 398 pp., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Paul Ashdown, University of Tennessee, U.S.A.

Trying to write a history of American literary journalism is a bit like trying to write a history of baseball. The recondite origins of each reach back at least to the early nineteenth century, drawing liberally upon rustic entertainments that predate the American nation. Near the beginning of the twentieth century forms emerge we might recognize today.

The problem is where to begin. A clodhopper whacking a hurled orb with a stick and then running to a clump in a pasture before his progress is arrested

by a team of defenders may anticipate later competition between the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees, but is it really the same game? Likewise, Washington Irving was writing fictional literary sketches during the Monroe Administration. By the time Mark Twain gave the form a journalistic twist the commonplace sketch was no more likely to anticipate Joseph Mitchell's *McSorley's Famous Saloon* than Trick McSorley, who played briefly for the 1875 St. Louis Red Stockings, was likely to presage Alex Rodriguez. But somehow it happened.

Norman Sims has plowed these fields capably before in *The Literary Journalists* (1984), *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (1990), and *Literary Journalism* (1995). A professor of journalism at the University of Massachusetts, Sims advises critics to read nonfiction as a "creative medium that permits an author's expression in subtle ways." A critic might read *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* that way too. Sims darts in and out of his text, sometimes in the guise of teacher, interviewer, passionate fan, wide-eyed schoolboy reader, raconteur, or perceptive critic. This is a lively, personal, investigation of a literary and historical phenomenon. We learn why Sims thinks literary journalism really matters, how it developed, and what the writers themselves consider the essential nature and purpose of their work. Sims's enthusiasm for fine writing drives the text forward. This is history and creative criticism with a vital point of view. Sims comes admirably close to achieving his goal of establishing a historical foundation for American literary journalism.

The term literary journalism in its contemporary meaning was first used by University of Minnesota professor Edwin H. Ford in a 1937 bibliography, as Sims notes. Ford defined the term as writing that fell in the "twilight zone" between literature and journalism. That was neither the first nor the last attempt to situate literary journalism in some kind of limbo or contested no man's land. Borders are inherently intriguing places where cultures clash and smugglers skulk, yet that edge of uncertainty too often beguiles without purpose. Although this sort of Gnostic journalism may not be everyone's idea of what nonfiction is about, it does point to the richness of field.

Sims wisely is less interested in mulling over definitions, theories and metaphors than in letting the writers and their works speak for themselves. He is a superb interviewer, beguiling writers like Mitchell to explain or further mystify their own work. He provides a selected historical bibliography and five fine examples: "Red Caucasus," by John Dos Passos, an excerpt from *Orient Express*, published in 1922; "The Jumping-Off Place," by Edmund Wilson, originally published in *The New Republic* in 1931; "The Old House at Home," by Mitchell, originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1940; "The Long Fall of One-Eleven Heavy," by Michael Paterniti, published in *Esquire* in 2000; and "Family Journeys," by Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, from *Random*

*Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx*, published in 2003.

His focus is on themes and trends that began in the nineteenth century and on significant writers who shaped the field in the last hundred years. The hundred-year time frame is arbitrary because so many of the writers who interest him have pre-modern roots. Nor are they exclusively American. While most are familiar to students of the genre, their canonical stature mandates inclusion in any survey.

Literary journalism came out of early newspaper work, emerging in the 1890s from “a maze of local publications” in urban environments where reporters struggled to define their identity in the mass circulation press (43). While editors wanted more objective “scientific” accounts, the writers experimented with more “humanistic” reporting with strong narratives and gritty realism. Chicago writers such as George Ade, Finley Peter Dunne, and Opie Read joined the Whitechapel Club, a peculiar association of police reporters and other urban realists who gathered for strong drink and literary discussion in a ghoulishly appointed back room of a saloon on Newsboy’s Alley. The club drew its inspiration from Irish revolutionary cells with an admixture of socialist and anarchist bluster that attracted visitors ranging from Rudyard Kipling and Richard Harding Davis to Theodore Roosevelt.

Newspaper publishers, according to Sims, were willing to put up with the profitably eccentric columnists who haunted the club, whose members shaped the mythology that eventually produced *The Front Page* and other tales of reportorial profligacy and adventurism. The cult, which had its counterpart in press clubs in Boston, New York, and San Francisco, predated the emergence of literary journalism in popular magazines.

Magazine prose styles, influenced by the newspaper writers, changed to engage readers in narrative reporting that would eventually become the prevailing literary style. Exposition gave way to storytelling as a new kind of journalism emerged in the twentieth century.

Another influence was travel writing, a form that had developed in the eighteenth century, been used by Twain and others in the nineteenth century, and inspired Hemingway, Dos Passos, and John Reed in the twentieth century. By the time of the First World War, writers increasingly were impelled to explore the modern world, and the journey narrative became one of the primary forms of literary creativity. That meant writing about ordinary people as well as politics and the crosscurrents of global conflict. As Dos Passos put it, “Journalism is the business of fussing with bigbugs—and above anything on earth I detest bigbugs.” Literary journalism, Sims reminds us, “generally dispenses with bigbugs” (110).



With the onset of the Depression, the writers distanced themselves from the media bigbugs, who, ever conscious of their advertising base, largely ignored the collapse in hopes it would just go away. It was a story conventional journalism was ill equipped to tell, and it was left to writers like Dos Passos, Wilson, James Agee, John Steinbeck, and Martha Gellhorn to invent new ways of personal, sometimes radical, reporting equal to the task.

Sims suggests that during the Depression nonfiction writing may have begun to upstage fiction. A major part of that shift occurred at *The New Yorker*, where, beginning in the 1930s, writers and editors with a vision of what literary journalism could become began producing the kind of work that has directly influenced the genre ever since. "That's the magazine that changed everything," Mitchell told Sims. "For one thing, the detail was important but it seemed to lead to something" (165). What it led to was John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, classic works by A.J. Liebling, Lillian Ross, Truman Capote, John McPhee, and, of course, Mitchell. And it was Mitchell who came up with what could be the best, and simplest, definition of literary journalism: "With *The New Yorker*, you were trying to write something that could be read, again" (171).

The New Journalism of the 1960s never displaced *The New Yorker* approach, despite Tom Wolfe's attack on editor William Shawn in the Sunday supplement of the *Herald Tribune*. The attack, according to Sims, triggered a literary war that unjustifiably tainted New Journalism as inaccurate. He argues that the much maligned and loosely connected New Journalism movement was more "important, influential, experimental, and valuable than the controversies would lead us to believe" (223). Perhaps, however, it is impossible to separate New Journalism from the era in which it flourished. As the culture turned narcissistic and solipsistic, so did the writers who interpreted it. New Journalism had no more future than the leisure suit.

In a concluding chapter, Sims examines contemporary literary journalism, noting the emergence of the book as the form's privileged medium, as well as a certain retro-affinity for long narratives in some newspapers. Internet sites, documentary films, and even graphic novels hold promise as well. Paterniti's discussion of his *Esquire* article shows the craftsmanship of a master writer who understands character and point of view. "Sometimes this work feels like method acting," Paterniti tells Sims. "You attempt to live so completely inside of your characters and their stories that it becomes part of you" (313). Getting narrative nonfiction right, he says, requires commitment to the "metaphysical details" (315). Can writing be both metaphysical and factual? Language, Sims concludes, "is more powerful than facts, if we can control it . . . This is tough. It takes a literary sensibility. And at the same time, it takes a commitment to the facts. Paterniti could not cut corners and make things up. Because this was real life" (317). Real life, true stories.



## MISSION STATEMENT

### *Literary Journalism Studies*

*Literary Journalism Studies* is an international, interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal that invites scholarly examinations of literary journalism, a genre also known by different names around the world as literary reportage, narrative journalism, the New Journalism, *nuevo periodismo*, reportage literature, literary nonfiction, creative nonfiction, and narrative nonfiction, among others. Published in English but directed at an international audience, the journal welcomes contributions from different cultural, disciplinary, and critical perspectives. To help establish comparative studies of the genre, the journal is especially interested in examinations of the works of authors and traditions from different national literatures not generally known outside their countries.

There is no single definition of the genre, but the following descriptions help to establish a meeting ground for its critical study:

- “The art and craft of reportage—journalism marked by vivid description, a novelist’s eye to form, and eyewitness reporting that reveals hidden truths about people and events that have shaped the world we know.”—*Granta*
- “Reportage Literature is an engagement with reality with a novelist’s eye but with a journalist’s discipline.”—Pedro Rosa Mendes, Portugal
- “I think one of the first things for literary reportage should be to go into the field and to try to get the other side of the story.”—Anne Nivat, France
- “A good reportage must not necessarily be linked with topical or political events which are taking place around us. I think the miracle of things lies not in showing the extraordinary but in showing ordinary things in which the extraordinary is hidden.”—Nirmal Verma, India
- Literary journalism is a “journalism that would read like a novel . . . or short story.”—Tom Wolfe, United States

Such definitions are not comprehensive and may at times conflict, but they should help to establish an understanding of this fundamentally narrative genre, which is located at the intersection of literature and journalism.

At the critical center of the genre lies cultural revelation in narrative form. Implicit to the enterprise are two precepts: (a) that there is an external reality apart from human consciousness, whatever the inherent problems of language and ideology that may exist in comprehending that reality, and (b) that there are consequences in the phenomenal world, whether triggered by human or natural agency, that result in the need to tell journalistically-based narratives empowered by literary technique and sensibility.

# INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies is a multi-disciplinary learned society whose essential purpose is the encouragement and improvement of scholarly research and education in literary journalism (or literary reportage). For the purposes of scholarly delineation, our definition of literary journalism is “journalism as literature” rather than “journalism about literature.” Moreover, the association is explicitly inclusive and warmly supportive of a wide variety of approaches to the study and teaching of literary journalism throughout the world. The association’s web address is <http://www.ialjs.org>.

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