



ILJ

*Literary Journalism Studies*

Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 2011

**Engaging civic life . . .**

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



*Credit: U.S. General Services Administration. In the public domain.*

Cover art: *Fourteenth Street and Sixth Avenue*, painting by John Sloan, 1934. Part of the New Deal arts program to put artists to work during the Great Depression by engaging them in civic life. On loan to the Detroit Institute of Arts.

# *Literary Journalism Studies*

The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 2011

---

## Contents

<i>Information for Contributors</i>	4
<i>Note from the Editor</i>	5
<hr/>	
The Underwater Narrative: Joan Didion's Miami by <i>Christopher P. Wilson</i>	9
Radio and Civic Courage in the Communications Circuit of John Hersey's "Hiroshima" by <i>Kathy Roberts Forde and Matthew W. Ross</i>	31
Making Overtures: Literature and Journalism, 1968 and 2011— A Dutch Perspective by <i>Thomas Vaessens</i>	55
Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life: Keynote address, IALJS, Brussels, Belgium, May 13, 2011 by <i>John J. Pauly</i>	73
The 2011 Keynote: An Appreciation by <i>Richard Lance Keeble</i>	83
BOOK REVIEWS	89
Selected Bibliography of Scholarship and Criticism Examining Literary Journalism by <i>Miles Maguire and Roberta Maguire</i>	125
<hr/>	
<i>Mission Statement</i>	128
<i>International Association for Literary Journalism Studies</i>	129

## 2 *Literary Journalism Studies*

Copyright © 2011 International Association  
for Literary Journalism Studies.  
All rights reserved.

Website: [www.literaryjournalismstudies.org](http://www.literaryjournalismstudies.org)

*Literary Journalism Studies* is the journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies and is published twice yearly. For information on subscribing or membership, go to [www.ialjs.org](http://www.ialjs.org).

MEMBER OF THE  
Council of Editors of Learned Journals

Published twice a year, Spring and Fall issues.  
Subscriptions, \$50/year (individuals), \$75/year (libraries).

ISSN 1944-897X (paper)  
ISSN 1944-8988 (online)

# *Literary Journalism Studies*

---

## *Editor*

John C. Hartsock  
State University of New York at Cortland, U.S.A.

## *Associate Editors*

Bill Reynolds  
Ryerson University, Canada

William Dow  
American University of Paris, France

Jenny McKay  
University of Sunderland, U.K.

Miles Maguire  
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, U.S.A.

Roberta Maguire  
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, U.S.A.

## *Book Review Editor*

Thomas Connery  
University of St. Thomas, U.S.A.

## *Publisher*

David Abrahamson  
Northwestern University, U.S.A.

---

## Editorial Offices

*Literary Journalism Studies*  
State University of New York at Cortland  
Department of Communication Studies  
P.O. Box 2000  
Cortland, New York 13045-0900 U.S.A.  
Email: literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com

---



Published at the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University  
1845 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208, U.S.A.

## SUBMISSION INFORMATION

*LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES* invites submission of original scholarly *L* 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 and narrative 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 on occasion short examples or excerpts of previously published literary journalism accompanied by a scholarly gloss about or an interview with the writer who is not widely known outside his or her country. The example or excerpt must be translated into English. The scholarly gloss or interview should generally 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 generally should 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.

Email submission (as a Microsoft 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. No identification should appear linking the author to the submission or abstract. 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>.

Copyright reverts to the contributor after publication with the provision that if republished reference is made to initial publication in *Literary Journalism Studies*.

**B**OOK REVIEWS are invited. They should be 1,000–2,000 words and focus on the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editor based on merit. Reviewers may suggest book review prospects or write the book review editor for suggestions. Usually reviewers will be responsible for obtaining their respective books. Book reviews and/or related queries should be sent to Thomas B. Connery at <tbconnery@stthomas.edu>.

## Note from the Editor...

Engage: to connect, to share, to rub shoulders. I'm having my Saturday morning cup of coffee and thinking how I might define the verb "engage." I put down the cup and reach for the closest dictionary at hand, *Webster's Seventh* (I know, dated, but closest at hand): One definition resonates: "to induce, to participate." Two synonyms: "involve, entangle."



What is impressed upon my mind is how much the verb "engage" is at the center of what literary journalism attempts to do—to engage, to involve, to entangle. And if, as suggested elsewhere, literary journalism is (among other things) about cultural revelation, then it is about engagement of the cultural, the social, the civic in their different colors, shades, degrees, and gradations. I especially like the synonym "involve" because it suggests another central quality to literary journalism. Alan Trachtenberg, in his discussion of Stephen Crane, identified that quality of the genre as the ability to *engage* "in an exchange of subjectivities," when contrasted with the mainstream models of journalism extant at the end of the nineteenth century and which dominated much of the twentieth, models that in their claims to "objectivity" objectified experience and alienated readers.

It is that sense of alienation that has contributed to the rise of the "civic journalism" movement in the United States (among other places) in recent years, the sense that readers and viewers were separated or alienated from the larger world out there that is the subject of journalism. Certainly there has been a response: Newspapers, for example, have created citizen focus groups. They invite citizen authors and journalists as regular contributors in an incremental evolution beyond the old-fashioned letters-to-the-editor sections of newspapers. And, they routinely offer blogs on their web sites in cyberspace where the citizenry can comment on issues of civic concern, much as did the good citizens who gathered in the *Forum Romanum* when news from the Senate was posted on the *alba* ("What's black and white and re[a]d all over?" goes the tired, worn out *Forum* joke. "The *alba*, of course"). The result, to be sure, was civic engagement in the discussions that followed while drinking a good cup of the best Falernian vintage, or perhaps some fine imported from Lesbos.

There are, of course, different ways to realize civic engagement in journalism—including in the discussions over wine or beer at the local tavern. But what has struck me across the years is how what has been missing from the discussion of civic journalism is the contribution literary journalism can make precisely because the genre's *sin qua non* is the attempt, however imperfect, to close the gap or distance between alienated subjectivities—even if the full exchange of subjectivities is ultimately impossible, a I have long insisted. At the least, one gains a better understanding or insight or empathy into those once alienated subjectivities so often consigned to the cultural Other.



## 6 *Literary Journalism Studies*

At last May's conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies in Brussels, John J. Pauly, provost at Marquette University in Milwaukee, but, more important, one of the pioneers of literary journalism studies, served as the keynote speaker. And it was the contribution literary journalism could make to civic engagement that was his theme. It is a discussion long overdue. Indeed, it is one Pauly has been making for years. But the civic journalism movement has been largely deaf to his entreaties. After his eloquent presentation, when we opened up for questions, I asked him why the civic journalism movement has long ignored the possibilities of what literary journalism can offer. A perplexed look spread across his face, along with a gentle if somewhat defeated smile, because it was something he, too, had long pondered, and, as he said, an issue he had long raised, and yet one to which the civic journalism movement has been largely blind.

Why? I'm back to my cup of coffee (although I wouldn't mind if it were some Falernian), as perplexed as Pauly by what should seem a natural for the civic journalism movement.

Something else strikes me: The journalism establishment has long been dominated by a professional group who believed that they were to be separate from their audience—that their professionalism required them to be separate in order to be judges—or make news judgments. That's why they have been described as “gatekeepers,” which distinguishes them from the non-gatekeepers. In other words, alienation is unquestioningly built into the professional ethos. I won't dispute that there can be advantages to this. But what are the liabilities? Much the same could be said of the scholars who advocate for civic journalism. After all, they are scholars who implicitly must separate themselves from their subject if they are to have suitable scholarly distance to weigh and evaluate. Thus, the alienation of the journalism profession and the scholars tends to be mutually reinforcing—Heaven forbid that they should be *engaged*, or *involved*, or *entangled* with the *hoi polloi* who gawk at but can't read the *alba*. That would be like exchanging bodily fluids resulting in morganatic offspring.

It seems to me that what's been missed from the civic journalism movement is what I have always found inherent to literary journalism. It is that the genre helps to reestablish what English cultural critic John Berger ably described as the “relation between teller, listener (spectator) and protagonist(s). . . .” Particularly missing is the relationship of the journalist-as-teller to the listener and the subjects or protagonists (in fairness, some advocates of civic journalism have advocated for the engagement of the journalist, but, and I may be wrong, I don't hear calls for a literary journalism which invites such engagement). This is where the integrity and power of literary journalism comes in. These derive, I think, from the arsenal of language as an aesthetic practice that literary journalists draw on in order to *engage* the subjectivities of reader and subject by means of the journalist's subjectivity. It is based on the fact, as Berger's observation implies, that to some degree we all have experiences we can share (the “common sense-appeal of the shared common senses,” I like to call it), even if we may have different interpretations of those experiences. It is here we can come together and understand each other better in an act of civic engagement.

These are the thoughts that Pauly's keynote address prompted in me as the discussion continued afterwards, courtesy of the wonderful—and delicious—hospitality



of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, and later at a delightful café where we gathered in the spring air to quaff rich Belgian ale (but no Falernian) as we considered the import of Professor Pauly's observations.

It is for these reasons that I decided his eloquent keynote address should be a part of this issue, so that readers could understand its implications. Accompanying it, too, is a thoughtful appreciation by Richard Lance Keeble of the University of Lincoln, U.K. and one of the leading (if not the leading) scholar of literary journalism studies in his country who has done so much in his volumes as editor and author to marshal greater recognition of the genre there. His insights remind us of the ends to which literary journalism is written—as both a journalism and as a literature seeking engagement of Other's subjectivities.

But there is a further consideration, I think, as I take another sip of coffee. I always find it remarkable when putting out this journal how themes emerge and coalesce. While looking at literary journalism through the critical prisms offered by Pauly and Keeble, I began to realize how they tie together the other contributions to this issue. This is by accident. But it serves as one measure of why the keynote in Brussels makes such a powerful contribution to the study of literary journalism. Take, for example, "The Underwater Narrative: Joan Didion's *Miami*," by Christopher P. Wilson of Boston College. After reading it, I realized that what he examines is how one civic engagement fails because of self-serving and self-protecting institutional rhetorics—in this case, not so much that of mainstream journalism although that is a part of it, but rather that of the *gobblegobble* of bureaucratese. This is what Didion with her usual acuteness of observation reveals in the culture clash between the Cuban community in Miami and the Anglo establishment in Washington, D.C. Then there is "Radio and Civic Courage in the Communications Circuit of John Hersey's 'Hiroshima'" by Kathy Roberts Forde and Matthew W. Ross of the University of South Carolina. Forde and Ross recover the lost memory of the role radio played in introducing the American people to Hersey's "Hiroshima" when it was first published in the *New Yorker* in August 1946, a year after the atom bombing of the Japanese city. Publication and radio's coverage of publication would prove a watershed event, one in which the American people first began to learn of the terrifying consequences of nuclear war, something the *gobblegobbles* of Washington would prefer Americans not know—after all, America was to be a charitable Christian nation. The roles Hersey, the *New Yorker*, and radio broadcasting played in informing the American people proved a signal act of civil engagement—and courage—as you will see when you read the article. Finally, but not least, "Making Overtures: Literature and Journalism, 1968 and 2011—A Dutch Perspective," by Thomas Vaessens of the University of Amsterdam, examines, one, why the leading Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* turned to novelists and other litterateurs to write journalism about the 2010 elections in that country, and, two, how the late Harry Mulisch of the 1960s and Arnon Grunberg of our contemporary period share much in common, but also reflect how literary values have shifted in the intervening years so that the literary today gains more credence by embracing journalism in the attempt to engage citizens in the civil polity. Hence, we have returned to civic engagement.

But, I leave it to readers to decide for themselves. Read the articles first, then Pauly's keynote, and Keeble's appreciation to see if you agree that one important critical prism through which to read and gage and engage literary journalism is through the prism of civic engagement. In that we have a civic journalism.

With that, my cup is drained.

## *Farewell, Tom*

With considerable sadness I announce that Thomas B. Connery, our book review editor from the beginning, is leaving us. This is his last issue. As a colleague in more ways than one, Tom has been critical to the success of this journal. He stepped into a new enterprise when we began publishing in 2009 and immediately brought his considerable experience to bear, experience much needed. He was, after all, the former book review editor of *American Journalism*. Thus, he could rapidly bring the book review section up to speed. But as I mentioned, he is a colleague in more ways than one. Like John J. Pauly, Tom is one of the pioneers of the study of literary journalism. Indeed, my own work is hugely indebted to his *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism* (1992), a seminal work in the field. At a time when the genre was widely ignored by the academy, Tom demonstrated considerable courage (might we characterize it as a civic courage?) when he brought out his book. Scholars who engage in scholarship largely ignored by the academy take tremendous professional risks. Hence the courage.

I will miss Tom and he shares some parting words with us in the book review section. That said, I am pleased to say that he has assisted with his succession in identifying our next book review editor, Nancy Roberts of the University at Albany of the State University of New York. Nancy is an established scholar in her own right, one whose contributions to journalism history and literary journalism have long been acknowledged as exceptional. I look forward to working with her, and I know she will continue to build on the strong foundation that Tom established.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce that we have posted our inaugural bibliography of scholarship on literary journalism at the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies website: [www.ialjs.org](http://www.ialjs.org). This was a project we began in our last issue, to provide a clearing house for research and scholarship on the topic to readers. At the end of this issue, our associate editors for bibliography, Miles Maguire and Roberta Maguire of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, discuss the latest bibliographical developments, and provide their latest entries to the bibliography. These will be added to the online site in the near future.

Should anyone have contributions they believe are appropriate to the bibliography, I invite them to contact Miles and Roberta. Their contact information can be found at the end of their discussion, which starts on page 123.

—John C. Hartsock

# The Underwater Narrative: Joan Didion's *Miami*

Christopher P. Wilson  
Boston College, U.S.A.

*This essay examines Joan Didion's Miami in light of its off-stage or "underwater" narrative concerning the Iran-Contra affair and the distortions in contemporary political rhetoric that scandal epitomized.*

A few years ago, while teaching a course on contemporary narrative journalism, I took what was for me the rare step of designing a visual aid that went beyond the usual handout, graphic map, or PowerPoint. I took two standard, 8.5" X 11", head-and-shoulder Presidential photographs—one of Ronald Reagan, the other of John F. Kennedy—and glued them together, back-to-back; then I jammed a thin wooden dowel between them, so that I could spin the dowel in my palms, thereby allowing each portrait to morph into the other. In part, I hoped to provoke students into thinking about the way we often approach a work of reportage by gauging our distance from, or identification with, a fixed point on a political spectrum, or the political personage said to embody that position. But as a result, I meant to suggest, we are also flummoxed when we encounter a journalist who sees no fundamental difference between the supposed ends of that spectrum: no difference, say, between the policies of a Reagan or a Kennedy when it came to Latin America. The intended effect of my device was therefore to spin our ideological compass, and make the solid suddenly seem fluid.

Frankly, I can't honestly say whether my visual device cleared up existing confusion in the class or just added to it. But the idea had been provoked, in large part, by the considerable difficulty of the text I was teaching at that moment: Joan Didion's *Miami* (1987), the first-person narrative expanded

from four previous installments in the *New York Review of Books*. Ostensibly, Didion's central subject was White House entanglement with Miami's Cuban exile communities from the Bay of Pigs to her present, and I was teaching her in a semester that ended with texts that, like *Miami*, broached transnational or border matters. In different incarnations of my syllabus over the years, Didion has been an enduring if often perplexing pivot point: a former conservative who clearly had found her own political compass spinning in the Reagan years. For many reasons, I find *Miami* one of the most challenging books I teach: students frequently find Didion's ethnocentrism off-putting, her literary style baffling, and her politics—my desperate classroom devices notwithstanding—virtually un-locatable on any political spectrum familiar to them.

Much of that reception is understandable, paralleling as it does assessments of *Miami* coming from some of our most respected theorists, critics, and working journalists. As Sandra Hinchman has shown, despite the widespread praise the book received in the mainstream national press, many other commentators were offended by what they regarded as a nativist streak in Didion's thinking, by her fondness for conspiratorial thinking, and by her characterization of Miami as a "tropical" political zone threatening the cooler, supposedly more rational civic sphere of the U.S. Ricardo Ortiz likewise observed that *Miami* had "riled" Didion's critics, adding himself that she might well be grouped in the "Cuba-bad *juju*" school of hemispheric analysis. Nicolas Lemann, meanwhile, observed that Didion had left the "impression that Cubans are mad dogs who would resort to the Uzi as readily as you or I would blow our nose."<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, negative reactions to *Miami* often merely followed the template already established by the reception of its prequel *Salvador* (1983), and by the general suspicion of Didion as a conservative, post-colonial pundit unfairly importing Joseph Conrad's dark interior into Central America.<sup>2</sup> Thus it was perhaps unsurprising that Edward Said chimed in, taking particular aim at *Miami*'s style—which, let it be said, other reviewers would find "Jamesian" at best and "arabesque" or "lazy" or "serpentine" at worst. Calling her "manerred and highly self-conscious prose ungainly and even downright ugly," Said wrote that Didion's style was a "symptom" of larger "failures in grasp and vision" that were plainly political. "Clarity here is just a word it might be nice to pronounce," he concluded. "And that is the problem with Didion's work. It offers no politics beyond its sometimes admirably crafted turns of phrase, its arch conceits, its carefully designed but limited effects."<sup>3</sup>

Of course, volatile responses like these are anything but uncommon in the reviewing business. In fact, the more surprising point was how often, whether

a critic came to praise Didion or to bury her, an implicit journalistic premium on cultural sympathy and plain-speaking clarity led so many reviewers to read *Miami* in rather unsympathetic, obfuscating, and even truncated ways. As I have been suggesting, the power of such premium was especially apparent in the ways that reviewers so frequently chose to read *Miami* as if it were simply a book profiling its title city, or its Cuban exile community as such. But this expectation, in turn, often led reviewers to downplay or even ignore the actually more newsworthy, contrapuntal elements of Didion's narrative: *Miami's* more oblique, "off stage" story about the ongoing Iran-Contra scandal, and the distortions in contemporary political speech and memory that event epitomized. In the end, ironically, by almost universally sidelining her more timely story, reviewers intent on assessing *Miami's* cultural politics overlooked Didion's most compelling cultural topic: the relation between contemporary politics and *rhetoric* which, after all, was what she said in several interviews had been her primary subject all along.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay, therefore, I want to invert the more familiar approach reviewers took to *Miami*, and draw out both of these subjects: the parts of her off-stage (or what Didion calls her "underwater") narrative that were manifested in Iran-Contra; and her experimental attempt to mold her voice and syntax to the contours of that political narrative's own script. I also mean to explore what Didion's reception suggests about an interpretive impasse that often haunts current discussions of literary journalism. There are indeed many quite valuable analyses of Didion's style in existence: I think particularly of Chris Anderson's and John Schilb's seminal work in this regard.<sup>5</sup> Yet *Miami's* reception, in contrast, is also evidence of how the critical vocabularies of cultural criticism, on the one hand, and literary journalism studies on the other—whether emanating from the fields of creative nonfiction, "fourth genre" studies, or even the commentary of professional journalists—can end up talking past one another. For example, *Miami's* representation of Cuban and/or Hispanic aspirations really *was* narrow and inconsistent, and Didion's nostalgia for putatively "American" civic values quite palpable—on these grounds Said and others were surely right. For such readers, therefore, it will not do to paper over Didion's lapses—one can imagine the familiar "New Journalism" label, so ineffectively, rising to the cause—by invoking the brittle defense that her writing simply reflects her own subjectivity, creates a mood, and so on.<sup>6</sup> But by the same token, it seems equally mistaken to disqualify *Miami* as cultural analysis by an exclusive recourse to these failings, either by separating *Miami's* style from its analysis, or by implicitly holding the book to a preemptively rigid set of aesthetic or journalistic standards Didion never intended to follow in the first place.

To put the matter more directly: *Miami* is not, despite the apparently locatable, empirical, geographic place-name of its title, an exercise in either cultural or journalistic immersion that means to capture an ethnicity or city or even an exile community whole. Rather, it is a book built on what we might call an “inferential” technique that explores the rhetorical structures of competing political *stories* in a transnational ground. And rather than being an exposé unearthing previously unseen documents, *Miami* re-looks at the structures of such documents (memoirs, political position papers, investigative reports from Congress) that come to represent and memorialize historical events. I call this technique “inferential” because by repeatedly pointing to her “underwater narrative,” Didion means to draw out currents of belief and political portent that flow underneath supposedly solid or empirical architectures of ethnicity, policy, and place. Like my classroom device, she aims to plumb currents that make seemingly fixed things fluid, transposable, or even reversible. Miami is thus present in Didion’s analysis, but not in the ways we have suggested. Rather, her primary approach is to see Miami both as a junction point between Caribbean and Central American politics and U.S. foreign policy, and yet also as a cultural-rhetorical zone where the memories, speeches, and testimonies—the expressive ways of recording and remembering such encounters—are constantly rewritten.

To unpack these dimensions of Didion’s work, I will first try to sift out the legitimate and, alas, often conventional expectations of which *Miami*’s literary and journalistic practices frequently ran afoul. Then—in part, by comparing her work to another Iran-Contra exposé, Theodore Draper’s encyclopedic *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (1991)—I will discuss how Didion’s insinuation of that scandal, along with her attention to rhetoric and especially syntax, helps us decipher the rationales behind her own techniques.<sup>7</sup> In closing, I want to suggest a few ways we might rethink Didion’s cultural-rhetorical analysis, including its limitations, in light of the subjects that even her most sympathetic reviewers often kept underwater.

## I

From the above, it should be clear that Didion’s detractors, like her supporters, read *Miami* as a mixture of travel narrative and political exposé: a story about political corruption emanating from a border city in the American tropical zone. Even a cursory look at Didion’s footnotes showed that she drew considerably upon the muckraking zeal (and satirical venom) of local Miami columnists and reporters like Carl Hiaasen and Alfonso Chardy, the latter of the Pulitzer-Prize-winning *Miami Herald* team on Iran-Contra.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Didion’s argument that tropical, authoritarian politics now permeated the

U.S. political right, even so far as to ghostwrite Reagan policy statements (181), often seemed to echo long-standing, sensationalist fears of the Spanish “Black Legend.”<sup>9</sup> Didion thus seemed, to many, trapped in the conventions of Victorian travel correspondence, where the role of the journalist had often been to sift, judge, and even lecture foreign nationals on the meaning of U.S. democracy.<sup>10</sup> *Miami* did discuss strife between rival factions within the exile-Cuban community, and it did mock local ignorance of the Cuban cultural traditions that Miami’s Anglo elites preferred to regard as the stuff of exotic “color” (61). But otherwise, Didion depicted the cause of “*la lucha*,” a cause she casts as politically ambidextrous, as reflecting a style of politics “indigenous” (13) to the Caribbean and Central America: prone to operatic gesture, overvaluing personal honor, and characterized by extremist intolerance of dissent or dialogue. Whether she was right or not about intolerance in these exile groups, Didion’s dichotomy between the “tropics” and the U.S. political tradition surely reflected the implicit ethnocentrism long present in the tradition of muckraking exposé.<sup>11</sup>

Didion will certainly never disappoint those who would continue to read her as a moralist and (failed) muckraker. Yet what was interesting was how even divergent opinions of her work testified to surprisingly firm, shared assumptions about what made for more effective journalistic and cultural analysis in the first place. Said’s response to *Miami*, in fact, was particularly striking because it seemed as if his own frequent crossovers into public reviewing had, in this instance, led him to dispense with academic positions he might have otherwise adopted. Here we had a leading literary theorist disavowing a work on the grounds that its “literariness” was precisely what disqualified it from being good journalism—and moreover, acting as if plain-style “clarity” and journalistic forthrightness were incontestable goods in their own right. Intentionally or not, Said’s assumptions echoed standards in the journalistic mainstream that often found Didion’s departures from longer, deeply documented exposé—again Draper’s book is a fitting counter example—as indicative of her supposed indifference to legwork and in-depth reporting. Since Didion made no apologies for reexamining documents other investigators had already found, she was also accused of offering “nothing new.”<sup>12</sup> Didion’s style thus had a decided proof-in-the-pudding place in responses like Said’s: substantiating her supposed rejection of “deep” cultural reporting, her overly stylized prose seemed to testify to a dual failure of journalistic and ethnographic insight.

I use the word “ethnographic” (rather than, say, “cultural” or “social”) quite intentionally here, to flag a particular set of preconceptions about the *writing* of narrative reportage that *Miami* repeatedly thwarts. That is, our



default setting to reportage has long been not only to put feet-on-the-ground, direct witnessing at a premium, or to privilege “distance from” personal subjectivity or political extremism (the rituals of objectivity, balance, or impartiality famously delineated by scholars like Gaye Tuchman).<sup>13</sup> Mainstream norms have also venerated, usually, the creation of a three-dimensional, holistic portrait of a given cultural milieu or habitat, or “a people” under journalistic scrutiny. Under these expectations, journalists are supposed to balance sympathy for their in-cultural informants against professional, empiricist skepticism. Even as countercultural as immersion journalism can claim to be, the method can actually be tailored to suit these mainstream norms quite easily. Immersion writing typically values a process of cultural initiation, where the participant-observer claims to break through into the culture or sub culture about which she or he writes. This is a style, to use a term James Clifford has coined, of “ethnographic realism”: a style which breaks through illusion or hype or simplistic judgment in favor of the detachment, roundedness and completeness that commonly replicates the experience of reading realistic fiction. In the long-form book, journalists therefore prefer even-incidental details of setting, the use of omniscient or third-person perspective, and the reconciliation of divergent testimonies or dialogue into a consensual view, often of retrospect.<sup>14</sup>

This essay is not the place for a wholesale critique of these journalistic assumptions—even though, as I have argued elsewhere, their impact on even celebrated examples of narrative nonfiction has not always been as uniformly beneficial as we think.<sup>15</sup> The narrative illusion of novelistic wholeness can obscure, for instance, the absence of out-migrants from a cultural scene; it can create sentimental attachments to native informants while demonizing unnamed social and economic forces; for all its beneficial attention to concrete detail, empirical witnessing cannot always illuminate less visible matters like institutional racism, economic power lines, or privately held or unspoken beliefs. Novelistic seeming dialogue or even third-person narration can obscure fundamental questions of journalistic sourcing and evidence. But really, the pertinent point here is simply that *Miami* flies in the face of just about every one of these expectations. For example, Didion emphasizes her own estrangement from, rather than her initiation into, her Miami milieu; she seems fully at ease relying upon the local reporting of others rather than foregrounding her own direct witnessing; and she tends to present her historical documents not as evidence that allows the reader to see behind events, but as rhetorical illusions that stand between the journalist and actual knowing. (She even sometimes confesses that her stories may be “intrinsically impossible to corroborate” [201]—to some, a startling admission for a writer of journalistic exposé).

These and other elements make plain why *Miami* can frustrate those readers expecting a fuller ethnographic account and even, I think, the conservative moral critique commonly attributed to Didion herself. As I have suggested, *Miami* instead prefers to make the ground move underneath us. It is not only that Didion writes about Miami's historical epilogues coexisting with its prologues (12); that a character like Bill Novo, a local CIA agent (or is he?), is given the gift of "materializing and dematerializing sideways" (154); that JFK is made to sound like Ronald Reagan ("We may well be . . . well, none that I am familiar with . . . I don't think as of today that we are" [96]); or that real-life characters turn out to have surreal names like Commander Zero or Orlando Bosch. It is also that Didion's syntax seems to spin her own history with many of the same dizzying results. Plain speaking declarations are replaced by fragments, dropped clauses, moments when key terms are left stranded (or abandoned) at the ends of sentences; journalistic attribution collapses in on itself, imploded with scare quotes and hyper-qualifications; metaphors are mixed wildly, making paragraphs seem like labyrinths. Take this passage on the spirit of *la lucha*:

In the passion of *el exhilo* there are certain stations at which the converged, or colliding, fantasies of Miami and Washington appear in fixed relief. Resentments are recited, rosaries of broken promises. Occasions of error are recounted, imperfect understandings, instances in which the superimposition of Washington abstractions on Miami possibilities may or may not have been, in a word Washington came to prefer during the 1980s, flawed. (14)

Here, Didion transmutes what reviewers often anticipated as colliding cultures (again, an ethnographic reading) into colliding fantasies, while the faith of exile politics is measured out like stations on the cross, or beads on a rosary. Didion's imagery, meanwhile, is displaced by deeply passive sentence structures—and above, by the byplay of superimposed "abstractions" (no word itself is more abstract) upon "possibilities" (unnamed), the ambiguity of "may or may not have," and having the keyword to the entire summary ("flawed") arrive, as if abandoned, at the end of its sentence.

Didion's rendering of her journalistic "backgrounding" can seem equally complicated. For example, she recounts the moment when, after the failure of the Bay of Pigs, Cuban exile leaders had been flown to Washington, where they met with John Kennedy at the White House. Beyond putting everything at a second or third remove—we can't tell if the scare quotes below signal Didion's own disbelief, direct quotation, or a fictional invention by her main source—she also puts the past tense right alongside the present, and then jumps ahead in time. Her verb tenses, as well, seem intended to repli-

cate an ongoing “script” or plan, something prior to the historical actors and wholly inauthentic. In D.C., she tells us,

[the exiles ] would sit by the fireplace and hear the President speak of the responsibilities of leadership, of the struggle against communism on as many fronts and of his own commitment to the “eventual” freedom of Cuba; a meeting which in fact took place, and at which, according to Schlesinger, the President spoke “slowly and thoughtfully” (“I had never seen the President more impressive”), and the members of the Cuban Revolutionary Council had been, “in spite of themselves,” “deeply moved.” (168)

Again, one can appreciate how these passages could baffle reviewers accustomed to exposés that debunk or demystify. Here Didion’s use of the future tense and indirect quotation, instead, make the fireside-chatting President speak only in artificial clichés of second hand scripts; she then uses a scare quote to qualify “eventual”; then, she follows her historical reconstruction by what is apparently another qualified attribution (“according to Schlesinger”). Arthur Schlesinger, in the meantime, is made to trot out ridiculously general honorifics that are, we assume, not direct quotations of the players themselves. These quotes are themselves interrupted by the historian’s own parenthetical asides that seem absurdly hollow, especially since they are followed by what seem like third-remove attributions of the exiles’ emotional state, which Schlesinger cannot have possibly known. In such a rendering, Didion’s single observation of fact, that this was “a meeting which in fact took place” seems—well, out of place itself.

And finally, there are the most vivid but difficult passages from *Miami* where Didion imparts “conceits,” as Said would term them, from architecture and the visual arts. If the title *Salvador* punned maliciously on Christ, on salvific political fantasies of Washington (left and right), and also on the surrealism of Salvador Dali, *Miami* ventures into dream-narrative forms of Chagall, the postmodern architecture of the Miami firm *Architectonica*, and the performance art of Christo. Using these aesthetic templates as her guide—and especially their blurring of depth, the shifting of foreground, the floating detail—Didion speaks of “cultures not exactly colliding but glancing off one another, at unpromising angles” (104). In other words, political abstractions (even nations) become geometric shapes, designs of shimmering surfaces, planes and fronts, and most of all “angles.” But angles and surfaces themselves dissolve into perhaps Didion’s dominant conceit, that of liquidity. She elaborates on this quality in a long meditation on Miami’s skyline:

A certain liquidity suffused everything about the place. Causeways and bridges and even Brickell Avenue did not stay put but rose and fell, allowing the masts of ships to glide among the marble and glass façades of the un-

leased office buildings. The buildings themselves seem to swim free against the sky: there had grown up in Miami during the recent money years an architecture which appeared to have slipped its moorings, a not inappropriate style for a terrain with only a provisional claim on being land at all. Surfaces were reflective, opalescent. Angles were oblique, intersecting to disorienting effect. . . . Skidmore, Owings and Merrill managed, in its Southeast Financial Center, the considerable feat of rendering fifty-five stories of polished gray granite incorporeal, a sky-blue illusion. (30)

The capitol scene of her underwater narrative, this is hardly a world of hard facts unveiled by a voice seeing behind events. Instead, like Didion's style as a whole, this landscape lingers in the provisional, evoking material superstructures that become unmoored, and surfaces only partially penetrable if at all.

## II

If we continue to read passages like the three I have selected above solely in ethnographic-realist terms—the rendering of *la lucha*, the exiles' field trip to JFK's fireside, and the city skyline—*Miami's* rather marginal reputation, even within scholarly assessments of Didion's own oeuvre, will probably persist. Yet we might begin that noticing that all three are not, precisely, “grounded” in the fixed locale so many reviewers of the book seemed to expect. The first positions el exhilo not so much as an ideology as a space where Miami and Washington fantasies collide; the second shows Cubans being dislocated to the White House, in an account itself filtered second hand through a Presidential historian; the third delineates a skyline remade by foreign capital and globally ambitious architectural firms. In a similar inversion, in the narrative arc of *Miami* itself, Didion's “prologue”—history about Cuban exiles is counterpoised against a more timely “epilogue” of Washington ambitions; her analysis, as one of her *NYRB* installments put it, is as much about “Washington-in-Miami” as Miami *per se*.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, one way of rethinking the relationship of Didion's style to her cultural analysis, as I've suggested, is to look backward from the last third of *Miami*, and to tease out the parts of her underwater narrative about Iran-Contra. Indeed, even when we turn to an account like Draper's *A Very Thin Line*, we discover how unstable the traditional grounds of political exposé had themselves become.

Like most exposés, of course, Draper's prefers to anchor us in the real. Expressing the more familiar documentarian confidence that the “facts” could “speak as much as possible for themselves” (x), Draper's book was a thoroughly documented, 670-page chronicle crafted in the chronological, long-narrative, character-driven form we respond to as realist history. It primarily traced the unraveling of the Reagan White House, by following a path from an initial and quite public moral stand against bargaining for hostages to the

extravagant measures Reagan's cohort, notably John Poindexter and Oliver North, took to insulate the President from culpability and political fallout. And true to its genre requirements, *A Very Thin Line* began by setting wider political contexts and its terminology; it always introduced key players with capsule biographies; then it marched through the institutional steps of the arms-for-hostages scheme, from planning to fund-raising and so on. Draper's account also aimed to go beyond the grainy "who told what to whom when" demands of news coverage. To offset the suggestion that the scandal was simply the work of a group of bad apples, Draper argues that the planners of Iran-Contra not only exhibited individual hubris or sheer incompetence (though there was plenty of both to go around). He also shows that their plan could not have gone forward without the cooperation or obeisance of other agencies: primarily, Casey's CIA—which built its operations around a holy trinity of compartmentalization, deniability, and secrecy, Draper argued—but also ambassadors and officials in the Department of State (notoriously Elliott Abrams) and Department of Defense, the latter having sold the CIA the missiles eventually ending up in Iranian hands (576). In other words, Draper used the power of his more three-dimensional narrative to show "persons" and "agendas" acting in concert with larger institutional forces.

Nevertheless, in the middle of this magisterial rendering—which, we might add, began like Didion's in the *New York Review of Books*—we might easily forget that one peculiarity of Iran-Contra was that it did not, to many observers' eyes, seem to be a scandal driven by the standard moral or monetary benchmarks of a more traditional corruption story. As various analysts at the time argued, Iran-Contra's Washington malefactors were not driven by a desire for financial or personal gain, but by the more nebulous goals of acquiring greater political capital and hemispheric influence. In addition, liberal exposés at the time might be said to have struggled for traction in response to a scandal in which some of the key players (Poindexter most vociferously) only gave voice to the functionalism already beginning to inhabit various academic fields: the claim that what the mainstream press saw as a violation of law—the White House circumvention of Congress—was merely a dispute between Constitutional branches of government over legitimate political differences. That functionalism, or that rationalization, or that cover-up—whatever one might call it—allowed some to regard the affair as merely a byproduct of "People with Their Own Agenda." (The phrase was Caspar Weinberger's, and it migrated right into the pages of some political-science analyses.)<sup>17</sup> In point of fact, Draper's invaluable contribution was his upending of the historical revisionism that, as a reading of *Miami* would also suggest, was already immanent *in* the scandal's cover-up as such.

Now, when we return to *Miami* itself, it seems less surprising that the Iran-Contra dimension was so often underplayed by Didion's reviewers. Leaving aside the obvious point that Didion locates us outside the Beltway, she also does not track the more prominent Bay of Pigs veterans, exiles such as Rafael Quintero and Felix Rodriquez, who were so crucial to the illegal contra-supply network. Indeed, the initial sections of *Miami* leave the scandal virtually unmentioned, only allowing off-stage details to peek through. We might barely notice, for instance, that divisive political rallies in Miami were over contra funding (70-71); it is mentioned merely in passing that Southern Air Transport, again so central to the affair, was the CIA's Miami airline (91); or that one local exile authored an article attacking Sandinista agitprop (118). Collaterally, Didion also chooses to radically background or eliminate the prevailing place-holders that, particularly inside the Beltway, had proved so riveting to the public eye: telegenic personalities like Oliver North, the melodrama of Congressional testimony, and the specific policy disputes over separation of powers, violations of first or second Boland Amendments, and so on. Again suspending the character-driven plot of exposés like Draper's, in *Miami* the "protean" (195) North is mentioned only three times; Richard Secord and Robert McFarlane only once; John Poindexter not at all. Meanwhile, acronyms like SAVAK (the Iranian secret police), or bit-player names like Eugene Hasenfus, brush by us, as if they are phantoms of some other storyline we are not really following. Just as, we might say, the CIA resonance of seemingly-tropical, hydraulic, financial terms like "channeled" (32) or "diverted" (32), or the PR term "floated" (86), remain just out of hearing. *Miami* thus becomes, for Didion, a kind of political *Pentimento*, in which a potential first-draft exposé is deeply subordinated, or has superimposed upon it, a longer history of hemispheric folly extending back to JFK.

Conversely, however, Didion's broader historical tale spins several aspects of the more familiar, conventional Washington-Beltway framing of Iran-Contra on their axes. Even my own resorting to the label "Iran-Contra affair" recalls the way that mainstream journalists more typically chose to "balance" the story. While this default catch-phrase served to connect two different international fronts, and follow the illicit money trail, it also frequently left local angles like Miami's out of the story. (Didion's title, we might say, broaches one missing domestic terrain within the hyphen of Iran-Contra.) Rather than foregrounding the "Affair," a word suggesting a hidden body of players, or perhaps only a scandal of the moment, Didion's longer-historical view also embeds this offstage narrative in structural relationships that Draper himself documented. *Miami* asks us, for example, to make inferences that connect Walt Whitman Rostow's "track two philosophy" (94) in Vietnam to

William Casey and Oliver North's notion of "The Enterprise" (the private-funding network that North called, in his Congressional testimony, "a really neat idea"). In a similar linking of global fronts, North himself dematerializes from Iran-Contra, only to reappear as the "briefer of choice" in the Outreach group that addresses helping the muhajadeen in Afghanistan (190-191, 195). Didion's more fragmentary, oblique narrative form does all this while still playing ingeniously upon the quite-peculiar characteristics of Iran-Contra as such: a political scandal built upon layers of obfuscation, diversions of funds and private players; staff over-reaching and the resorting to plausible deniability; the destruction of evidence, and (ultimately) failed prosecutions—all of this, while exhibiting what Didion calls the "autointoxication" (189) of a White House fixated on its own political mythmaking. And perhaps most of all, Didion's experimental account of the affair captures the elusiveness of a President whose own mastery or memory of events seemed "detached" (as his defenders kindly put it)—or worse yet, downright aphasic. Quite appropriately for Didion's own syntax, Reagan's claim to have originated the whole Iran-Contra mess (a claim he contradicted on other occasions) is left abandoned, as if we are in one of Didion's long sentences, to a nonsensical last line-phrase of her book as a whole. An unmoored, provisional, perhaps misremembered historical prologue is thereby made into the ultimate epilogue of Didion's book: "My idea to begin with" (208).

Indeed, Reagan's infamous inversions of idea and action, memory and Hollywood scripts, tell us much about the synergy between *Miami's* interest in political rhetoric and its own style. By "rhetoric" as such, Didion seems to have meant primarily two things. On the one hand, she focuses on what scholars commonly call "the rhetorical Presidency": broad rhetorical flourishes and symbol-making, and the moral or political "poetry" such flourishes express.<sup>18</sup> On the other, she investigates the vocabularies of what elsewhere she calls "insider politics," the informal, "wink wink" of everyday strategizing and political gamesmanship so dominated by the art of public relations, and its languages of "signals," relevant "audiences," and so on.<sup>19</sup> It will hardly surprise scholars of political rhetoric to say that John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan are regarded as the two mainstays of the first line of inquiry—or, conversely, that what scholars call (in a more flattering formulation than Didion's) the "administrative" dimensions of rhetoric are, on a second front, often counterpoised against the more grandiose forms of the first.<sup>20</sup> In part, Didion herself means to show what happens when these two dimensions converge or coalesce—especially, I think, in moments when domestic public relations and political audience management intersect with geopolitical symbol-making. But mostly, Didion is interested in the mismatching (or, again, "collisions")



created by these two dimensions of rhetoric: moments when, for instance, an audience like the Cuban exiles mistakes Presidential poetry for a literal promise, or when they skim over the rhetorical qualifications that, inside the Beltway, expresses administrative nuance, evasion, or cynicism. Even more to the point, Didion is interested in how these various rhetorical strategies and miscues leave what she likes to call “residues”: traces in *syntax*, in what rhetorician Richard Weaver describes as the “net effect” of the “accumulation of small particulars” between speakers’ intentions and the language they use.<sup>21</sup> In *Miami*, Didion’s goal is to mirror, retrace, make us feel the effects of these historical and political residues in her *own* syntax—and thus to capture their enduring, or recursive impact on future hemispheric follies and even on history writing about such events.

Let me cite three main stylistic strategies in *Miami* that reflect these complex intentions. First, although of course Didion’s notoriously long and over-qualified sentences and paragraphs appear in the rest of her work, here they are neither simple expressions of an idiosyncratic personal style, nor solely reflections of “tropical” malaise. Rather, they are adroitly plotted to fit the labyrinthine contours of scandals of which Iran-Contra was but the most recent manifestation. That is, *Miami*’s syntax follows the grain of interlocking stories in which original, colliding intentions of collaborators so often led to blind alleys: feelings of abandonment by former co-conspirators, evasion of Congress, and lying to the press. Rather than, say, making the angst of Reagan’s inner circle the center of a singular realist portrait, *Miami* allows us to see the recurrent structures of these groups’ rhetorical evasions—both in a specific moment and in histories past and future. We also see residues (of distrust, or political disillusionment) that often follow upon such evasions.

In turn—and here is the second effect I would isolate—much like her spatial analogies, Didion’s syntax asks her readers to experience the “gaps” and “angles” within political abstractions and rationalizations when they are imposed upon hemispheric conflicts. Quite often, a Washington nuance, a policy rationale, a word like “flawed”—arrives too late for the show, or proves insufficient to modifying (in both senses) the explosiveness of a structurally flawed engagement between parties with very different interests. Iran-Contra, we come to see, was but one of many situations where clandestine plots had superimposed upon them certain abstractions, geopolitical plans or rationales (like Reagan’s preferred “freedom fighters” upon the contras themselves). Accordingly, it is misleading to complain that Didion’s documentation contains “nothing new.” The point is that she treats her documents as second-order acts of rhetoric and memory: she assumes, from the start, that such documents are often only posing as records, of what were often clandestine opera-

tions to begin with. Indeed, this last technique also suggests why Schlesinger's memoirs about the Kennedy clan, texts that Didion characterizes as "essentially antihistorical" (89), become the locus of her ire. If Draper's narrative was the periodical complement to Didion's more oblique exposé, Schlesinger's might well be said to be the primary foil to her theory of history.

All of the above allows us, thirdly, to reexamine Didion's complicated use of tenses, as in the exiles' White House field trip I cited earlier. Rather than writing a history exposé as such, Didion instead takes a past event and asks us to look closely at the rhetorical structure of its memorialization, primarily because she knows such events will later be turned into yet another justification for ill-advised policy.<sup>22</sup> In her view, in other words, Washington's memory usually only compounds its past mistakes. In the field trip passage, for example, the exiles are being chaperoned into a story of democratic aspiration and tragic death that, of course, Schlesinger implicitly folds into the larger JFK legend. The passage has the feel of ritual and reiteration, again like a rosary. On the one hand, the moment of memorialization is actually part and parcel of a cover-up, in its own moment. ("We have a disposal problem," as Didion quotes Allen Dulles so ungracefully putting it after the Bay of Pigs fiasco [83]). And yet, by then being transposed from cover-up to Presidential history, the event is turned once again into a promise or article of faith that can breed another cycle of betrayal or abandonment. *Miami* is full of such Janus-like moments, events, storytellers: the paired Orange Bowl speeches of JFK and Reagan, who make future promises to the exile community, both by looking back at the failure of the Bay of Pigs; the arrival of Washington congressmen "fresh from the continuing debate" over Contra funding (16), to memorial celebrations in Miami; and finally in the entire contemporary entanglement of that former Bay of Pigs battalion, the so-called 2506, members of which end up fighting alongside the contras in Nicaragua. In Didion's view, the earlier mission of the 2506 unwittingly provides the "narrative bones" of the entire D.C. gambit of designating surrogates as freedom fighters but ultimately abandoning them (141).

In moments when exiles read themselves into what White House communications director David Gergen calls Presidential "folk art" (158), much is often lost in translation. Take this emblematic moment, which Didion cut-and-pastes from a prior time-frame, and from a report by the House Select Committee on Assassinations:

"... There is a third point, which was not directly made by any of those we interviewed, but which emerges clearly from the interviews and from reviews of files. The point is that of frequent resort to synecdoche—the mention of a part when the whole is to be understood, or vice versa. Thus,

we encounter repeated references to phrases such as ‘disposing of Castro,’ which may be read in the narrow, literal sense of assassinating him, when it is intended that it be read in the broader, figurative sense of dislodging the Castro regime. Reversing the coin, we find people speaking vaguely of ‘doing something about Castro’ when it is clear that what they have specifically in mind is killing him. In a situation wherein those speaking may not have actually meant what they seemed to say or may not have said what they actually meant, they should not be surprised if their oral shorthand is interpreted differently than was intended.” (qtd. on 95).

The inner rhetoric of this report, we might notice, might well have been written in Didion’s own syntax; comically and tragically, it also seems itself pasted in from a decidedly different subculture, that of the American Mafia (of course, deployed in plots against Castro). But in *Miami*’s fluid canvas, if this is yet another instance of “the superimposition of the Washington dream-work on that of Miami” (95), it also shows us the “angle of deflection” (96) in that superimposition. In other words, the gap between. (By looking ahead to a “Free Havana,” one exile notes bitterly, perhaps Kennedy was referring to a bar in Miami [98].) The report leaves us hanging, rather than providing what we are accustomed to calling finality, illumination, or exposure. “Plausible deniability” becomes not just a cover story or political tactic after the fact; it becomes a description of the failed political grammar with which *Miami* tries to come to terms.

### III

One cannot, of course, completely account for particular reviewers’ responses to an individual writer’s style, nor extricate Didion’s syntax from every legitimate charge of obfuscation or over-reaching. And while I have suggested that we need to account for Didion’s inferential rhetorical technique in any evaluation of her cultural analysis, that technique certainly has its own limitations. When, for instance, she writes that “Miami stories were low, and lurid, and so radically reliant on the inductive leap that they tended to attract advocates of an ideological or a paranoid bent” (202)—well, one only becomes aware of how dependent Didion herself forces her reader to be, *on* such inductive leaps. While it is invaluable for Didion to trace, as she does in *Miami*, the syntactical residues linking radically different historical moments or political crises, the technique also leaves open the task of describing the substantive *differences* between those events. Moreover, it leaves unanswered what political powers, economic interests, or social groupings *outside* the immediate political players benefited from Cuban-Miami-Washington transactions, or from the bigger geopolitical script such players hope to foment. In this particular sense, the “tropical” trope again leaves too much unsaid. On the other

hand, those readers who remain legitimately uncomfortable with Didion's use of this trope might also look back at *A Very Thin Line*, where one can also discover references, for instance, to a "junta-like cabal" inside the Presidency. The conclusion that Reagan's aides "made themselves into yet another guerrilla force [and] adopted a guerrillas' [sic] attitude when dealing with Congress and its demands," or that "Secret Governments" had taken over the Presidency, were actually commonplaces in media coverage and political critique of the time.<sup>23</sup>

To say all of that, of course, is not to minimize Didion's own failures on this count, many of which were structural to *Miami*, not incidental. In her tropical excursions, Didion only invites what ethnographers and sociologists call a "primordial" notion of ethnicity, especially when she calls the exile style of politics "indigenous" (13) to the Caribbean and Central America. Indeed, she seems to have departed from her own work in *Salvador*, which in its most striking moments had analyzed El Salvador's authoritarian politics not by reference to temperament or ethnicity. Rather, *Salvador* pointed to a failed state, and to an evacuated indigeneity, largely due to U.S. patronage of violent, fascist surrogates for its own hemispheric ambitions.<sup>24</sup> (As one exile reminds us in *Miami*, Cuba grew sugarcane, not C-4 [207]). By the same token, it is easy to forget that complaints about *Miami's* "condescension" or ethnocentrism came from the right wing as well as the left—for example, from those who took offense at Didion's explicit mockery of Miami's Anglos. Or, from those who would have preferred that she had heralded the "Cuban success story" as proof of U.S. ethnic harmony. Similarly, those who complained about *Miami's* "conspiratorial" thinking avoided the rather tricky complication that a conspiracy—one in a series, in fact—had just taken place.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, I have also meant to suggest, *Miami* itself offers paths around the impasse that often occurs when a working literary journalist departs from the implicit expectations of ethnographic realism. Of course, any number of important, and justly venerated, nonfiction narratives partake of that realist tradition, as the recurrent "top 100" or "century's best nonfiction" lists attest. But the point is that books like *Miami* ask to be read quite differently: not because they are mood experiments, but because they represent different *journalistic* approaches to social conflict, power, and even ethnicity itself. As I've said, Didion certainly does view her border zones partly as a clash of "cultures" as we customarily understand this term—as reservoirs of value, belief, or practice that we usually regard as bounded wholes. But when she moves into the political realm, Didion is usually intent on depicting these conflicts more as a series of glancing collisions between *discourse communities*—and it is here where often tragic results, both domestic and hemispheric, repeatedly

arise. Indeed, if we grant *Miami's* central interest in syntax, rhetoric, and ritual, then Didion's account of Anglo, Cuban, and "Washington-in-Miami" conflicts might bear comparison with those of recent ethnographers, for example, who see ethnicity not as primordial at all, but as transacted within particular policy contexts and fought over in the U.S.-domestic sphere. In this sense, "unmoored" ethnicities actually become, to many citizens on the ground, competing realities with real-world consequences.<sup>26</sup> In *Miami's* retelling, for example, a *majority* culture remains virtually unseen even in Miami's famously muckraking newspaper (the *Herald*).

As such, *Miami's* recourse to second-order documents—from the *Herald* itself, to Schlesinger's Kennedy memoirs, to Senate Committee memos—also bears reconsideration. The technique reflects not only her argument that on-the-ground cultural or political encounters are eventually incorporated into media mythologies, spin-doctoring, and political self-aggrandizement. She also shows how *quickly* they are incorporated, in crises where the scandal and the cover-up are practically simultaneous events, and thus inextricable from each other. No wonder that one of Didion's favorite words is "angle," a term connoting both the partiality of journalistic storytelling and the inevitable influence of power games, illusion-making, and public relations upon any task of representing such events. Even exposés like Draper's, after all, necessarily become retrospective histories and second-order accounts themselves, making choices about chronological bracketing, narrative point of view, cause and effect, and change over time—that is, stories with their own angles. It would be unfortunate, I think, if the current journalistic veneration of "narrative" or "storytelling"—or, as I have argued in Didion's case, "in-depth reporting"—turns out to be a way of *not* facing up to the interpretive choices that are embedded even in the seemingly most commonsensical or realist of forms.

Moreover, it is hardly that Didion would disagree with Draper's conclusions. If anything, *Miami's* inferential canvas might be said to offer its own complement to Draper's, in the way that Didion traces the longer, but equally flawed institutional histories behind the specific news frame of Iran-Contra. In Didion's hands, the domestic policy advisors, CIA operatives, and exile allies of the Imperial Presidency certainly do work together, as Draper demonstrates. But they often do so, in *Miami*, only to create absurdly incoherent results: to collide and glance off one another, rematerialize inside each other's identities, go into cover-up mode, create new schemes that aim to redress the failures of old ones, only to fail again. Didion asks us to re-see the rhetorical signals and scripts dispersed by the amalgam of interests competing for insider power in Washington, and to reexamine the rhetorical transactions

that have resulted in botched communications with both enemies and friends abroad.

Ultimately, *Miami* may even ask us to confront the serial betrayals forced upon U.S. collaborators outside the Miami-Cuba axis *per se*: democratic forces in other countries who read themselves into our domestic “folk art”; exiles who are chaperoned on field trips to scenes of political theatre by politicians who do not have their interests, *pace* Schlesinger, at heart. Or, at a more obtuse angle, terrorists who claim U.S. betrayals are as catastrophic as those of their authoritarian rulers at home. Sadly, as *Miami*’s own residue reminds us, the muhajadin of Afghanistan *were* just around the bend, waiting for audience in Washington. Or Iraqi exiles named “Curveball.” Or Presidents who would remain convinced that it was their idea to begin with.<sup>27</sup>

---

*Christopher P. Wilson is Professor of English at Boston College, and has authored four books on American literature and culture: The Labor of Words: Literary Professionalism in the Progressive Era (1985); White Collar Fictions: Class and Social Representation in American Literature: 1885-1925 (1992); Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in 20th Century America (2000); and Learning to Live with Crime: American Crime Narrative in the Neoconservative Turn (2010). His current research is concerned with crime, social memory, and political authority; contemporary narrative journalism; and vernacular modernism. In past years, Wilson has served on the editorial boards of American Literature and American Quarterly.*

---



## NOTES

The author would like to thank Greg Conti, Greer Hardwicke, Lad Tobin, Nirmal Trivedi, and the anonymous readers of *LJS* for their contributions to this essay.

1. Sandra K. Hinchman, "Didion's Political Tropics: Miami and the Basis for Community," *The Critical Response to Joan Didion*, ed. Sharon Felton (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), note 3, page 239. Ricardo L. Ortiz, "Café, Culpa, and Capital: Nostalgic Addictions of Cuban Exile," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 10 (1997): 63-84. Nicholas Lemann, "The Mirage of Miami," *New Republic*, 23 November 1987, 37-42. All citations of *Miami* in text are from the Pocket Books (New York: 1988) edition.

2. See, for instance, the famous dissection of *Salvador* in Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 225-27; compare the dismissal of Michael Massing, "Snap Books," *New Republic*, 4 May 1987, 21, 24-25.

3. Even more remarkably, Said did not make the inductive leap I discuss in my conclusion, writing that Didion acted "as if the Cuban exiles of Miami were the only such group with émigré interests at work in the US government . . ." Compare footnote 27 below. Said, "Miami Twice," *London Review of Books* 10 December 1987, 3-6. <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v09/n22/edward-said/miami-twice>. For similar characterizations of Didion's style, see the following book reviews: Ruth Walker, "Didion's 'Miami' and Multiple Realities," *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 November 1987; Geoffrey Moorhouse, "Miami Voice," *The Guardian* 25 March 1988; Don Anderson, "The Miami Jungle Screams Beneath," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 1988; R. Z. Sheppard, "Books: Urban Razzle, Fatal Glamour," *Time* 28 September 1987.

4. In an interview with James Chace, Didion said one of her main goals was to write a comparison of "the rhetoric of the Kennedy Administration and the rhetoric of the Reagan administration." "Betrayals and Obsessions," *New York Times* 25 October 1987. In a *Paris Review* interview with Hilton Als, "The Art of Nonfiction No. 1," Didion describes her growing interest in political rhetoric this way: "I started to get [at] this [point] in *Salvador*, but not fully until *Miami*. . . . I could get the overall picture, but the actual words people said were almost unintelligible to me. . . . I realized that the words didn't have any actual meaning, that they described a negotiation more than they described an idea. But then you begin to see that the lack of specificity is specific in itself, that it is an obscuring device." <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5601/the-art-of-nonfiction-no-1-joan-didion>.

5. Chris Anderson, *Style as Argument* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 133-173; John Schilb, "Deconstructing Didion: Poststructuralist Rhetorical Theory in the Composition Class," *Literary Nonfiction: Theory, Criticism, Pedagogy*, ed. Chris Anderson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), 262-286.

6. Even Anderson's incisive work, to which I am indebted, runs the risk of discounting Didion's work as *reportage*, arguing that it is primarily a point of departure for personal reflection (142).



7. Theodore Draper, *A Very Thin Line: The Iran-Contra Affairs* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1991). All further citations in text.

8. See *Kick Ass: Selected Columns of Carl Haissen*, ed. Diane Stevenson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999); see also Alfonso Chardy's article from the 5 July 1987 *Miami Herald*, "Reagan Aides and the Secret Government," [http://thereaganyears.tripod.com/martial\\_law.htm](http://thereaganyears.tripod.com/martial_law.htm).

9. Citing the literary antecedents of that Legend, Didion connects the exile obsession with "*la lucha*" (the struggle) back to José Martí, and from Martí back to the Spanish Inquisition (75). Didion focuses on the so-called Santa Fe Document, also known as *A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties*, published by the Council for Inter-American Security in 1980. On the Black Legend, see Maria DeGuzmán, *Spain's Long Shadow: The Black Legend, Off-Whiteness, and Anglo-American Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005.)

10. I discuss these conventions in "Plotting the Border: Pancho Villa, John Reed, and *Insurgent Mexico*," *Cultures of U.S. Imperialism*, ed. Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 340-64.

11. On this Achilles' heel, see James J. Connolly, "The Public Good and the Problem of Pluralism in Lincoln Steffens's Civic Imagination," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4 (April 2005): 125-47.

12. See Lemann. Moorhouse called *Miami* "lazy" because instead of offering the expected "well-rounded account," the book putatively focused *only* on Cuban exile politics; another called it less a book than a failed film treatment: Geoffrey James, "In the City of Exiles; *Miami*," *Maclean's* 9 November 1987.

13. Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of News-men's Notions of Objectivity," *American Journal of Sociology* 77 (1972): 660-79.

14. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21-54.

15. See my "'Out There': Transnationalism and the Other America," *Through the Looking Glass: American Studies in Transcultural Perspective*, ed. Hans Krabben-dam and Jaap Verheul (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1999). 244-257.

16. Didion also added: "'Miami,' its title notwithstanding, is mainly about what I think is wrong with Washington" (interview with Chace).

17. On this score, see especially Peter DeLeon, *Thinking about Political Corruption* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993). DeLeon's own chapter title on Iran-Contra draws from Weinberger's assessment.

18. See, for instance, Jeffrey K. Tulis, *The Rhetorical Presidency* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

19. Joan Didion, "Insider Baseball," *Political Fictions* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 19-59.

20. See, for example, Vanessa B. Beasley, "The Rhetorical Presidency Meets the Unitary Executive: Implications for Presidential Rhetoric on Public Policy," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 13 (Spring 2010): 7-35.

21. The idea that rhetorical structures provide a ground for the creation and exchange of symbols is a commonplace in rhetorical studies; see, for instance, David Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press). On syntax as a "net effect," see Richard Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1953), 116.

22. Cf. Ortiz on the "two-way toxin" depicted in Miami's account of the Cuba-Washington relationship (77-78).

23. See the assessments quoted in DeLeon 193; and Chardy.

24. Cf. *Salvador* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1983), 52-56, 75-76.

25. For one critique on this score coming from the right, see the review in *Commentary* by George Russell, "Mooning over Miami," January 1988, 69-72.

26. See Sheila Croucher, *Imagining Miami: Ethnic Politics in a Postmodern World* (Charlottesville, NC: University Press of Virginia, 1997).

27. "Curveball" was the code name given by German and U.S. handlers to the Iraqi exile who claimed he knew of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. See "Curveball Deserves Permanent Exile for WMD Lies, Iraqi Politicians Say," *Guardian* 16 February 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/16/curveball-exile-wmd-lies-iraq-politicians>. Didion's account of Iran-Contra certainly bears comparing, for example, with the final pages (210 ff.) of Frank Rich's account of the Iraq war's origins, *The Greatest Story Ever Sold: The Decline and Fall of Truth from 9/11 to Katrina* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006). Cf. Dexter Filkins' portrait of Ahmad Chalabi in *The Forever War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).



# Radio and Civic Courage in the Communications Circuit of John Hersey's "Hiroshima"

Kathy Roberts Forde  
Matthew W. Ross  
University of South Carolina, Columbia, U.S.A

*Radio played a critical role in expanding the readership and amplifying the messages of John Hersey's "Hiroshima," a landmark work of literary journalism published in 1946.*

On August 6, 1945, many Americans first learned of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima from their radios. That radio was a ubiquitous mass medium during the 1940s, both in and out of wartime, is beyond dispute. But what is little known is that radio introduced many Americans to the graphic human details of the atomic destruction a little more than a year later when John Hersey's iconic "Hiroshima" was published in the *New Yorker* the final week of August in 1946.<sup>1</sup> Radio news announcers and commentators widely discussed Hersey's story on the air as soon as it appeared on newsstands, and within weeks the American Broadcasting Company aired a reading of the story across four successive evenings. Radio thus played a critical role in amplifying the messages of Hersey's article and expanding its audience and readership by millions.

This study seeks to recover that history. Doing so is important for three reasons. First, it contributes to our understanding of the remarkable success of a work of journalism and literature that has been characterized, at least in one highly regarded quarter, as the most important work of American journalism in the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Second, and more far-reaching, the history of radio's role in drawing attention to "Hiroshima" enhances our un-

derstanding of how Americans reoriented themselves to a radically altered world because of that bombing, one in which Cold War politics and social sensibility were dominated by anxiety about nuclear holocaust. Third, there is a lesson to learn from the civic courage the *New Yorker* and the broadcast media demonstrated in publicizing a work that put a human face on the terrible destruction at Hiroshima.

In recovering the history, this study will review the existing literature and examine the role of radio in the context of the communications circuit of "Hiroshima." It will also explore the public interest requirements of broadcast during the era; provide the backdrop for the civic courage displayed by the *New Yorker* in publishing the article; and examine how the broadcast media built on that civic courage in publicly discussing the work. These events, it should be emphasized, took place during a time when the U.S. government attempted to limit, control, and shape the information that reached the American public about the atomic bomb and Hiroshima. Perhaps most important, these historical events produced consequences with which we still deal today.

#### SCHOLARS, "HIROSHIMA," AND THE COMMUNICATIONS CIRCUIT

Scholars have written a great deal about "Hiroshima" across the years. Literary scholars have explored it as a seminal work of American literary non-fiction; journalism historians have documented Hersey's reporting strategies and his work with *New Yorker* editors to develop and revise the story for rapid publication; and literary journalism scholars have discussed the literary and narrative elements of Hersey's report.<sup>3</sup> The publication history of "Hiroshima" has previously been told, but usually as a brief background narrative in works with other primary concerns.<sup>4</sup> Two historical studies have addressed the publication of "Hiroshima" as a primary topic. Michael Yavenditti explored the reception of Hersey's literary reportage when it first appeared, focusing on the reactions of particular print journalists, public officials, and readers with little mention of the role radio played in the reception.<sup>5</sup> The most recent publication history explores how Hersey, the *New Yorker* editors, Alfred A. Knopf and his publishing house, and other individuals and institutions involved in the publication and republication of "Hiroshima" largely disregarded profit concerns in order to better serve the public interest.<sup>6</sup> As we will see, radio was one of these institutions.

What has been missing is a fuller examination of the role of radio broadcasting in disseminating and commenting on the article and subsequent book. In exploring the issue, this article uses documents from the *New Yorker* records at the New York Public Library and the John Hersey papers at the Beinecke Library at Yale University.<sup>7</sup>

Within a larger critical context, this article examines radio as one aspect of Robert Darnton's communications circuit.<sup>8</sup> It is true that some scholars of the history of print culture have criticized Darnton's circuit metaphor as privileging the author and "the idea of communication" while neglecting or marginalizing the work of other social actors "who were less interested in the meaning" of a cultural product and more interested in their own particular social, economic, cultural, or ideological concerns.<sup>9</sup> While this critique is valid in many historical instances dealing solely with print culture, the circumstances regarding "Hiroshima" are different because the information and ideas the text communicated—and the public conversation this information engendered—shaped the concerns and actions of social actors in the communications network. One of the social actors was the medium of radio. Darnton's model of the communications circuit, developed to explore the social workings of texts in periods and societies before the advent of electronic and digital communications, must be updated if book historians are to account adequately for the "life cycle" of a printed text when electronic media emerged in the twentieth century. In 1946, the relatively new medium of radio became an important part of the life cycle of "Hiroshima" in America.

#### AMERICAN RADIO AND REGULATION: PUBLIC INTEREST AND CIVIC COURAGE

During the early 1930s American radio emphasized entertainment and paid little attention to public affairs. But major events, such as the kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby in 1932 and Hitler's annexation of Austria in 1938, proved radio's potential as a news medium. Radio executives began to relax an initial hesitancy about devoting airtime to news as it became clear that radio's immediacy provided radio news a competitive edge over newspapers.<sup>10</sup>

A related issue arose regarding social responsibility for broadcasters using airwaves owned by the public. The Federal Communication Commission was late to adopt New Deal reformist attitudes. But the situation changed in the 1940s due to the appointment of new regulators and growing public concerns about the supposed tendency of commercial radio to ignore those issues.<sup>11</sup> Critics on the left condemned radio news for its general neglect of the public interest and the power that advertisers wielded in shaping news. A newly progressive FCC issued the *Blue Book* in March of 1946, a policy document that mandated the public interest obligations of commercial broadcasters. Among other things, the report required that to retain their licenses broadcasters must sustain innovative programs in the public interest that could not attract commercial sponsorship. The *Blue Book* was meant to institute a substantive reform of commercial media. When he read the finished draft, the chairman

of the FCC penned a comment reflecting, in its own way, how the world was reorienting itself to the nuclear age. “I know now,” he wrote to an FCC staff member, “how Truman felt when they told him he had an atom bomb.”<sup>12</sup> Not surprisingly, broadcasters fought back, accusing certain FCC members of being in league with communist infiltrators, and the *Blue Book* initiative was effectively destroyed by 1948.<sup>13</sup>

Hersey’s report on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was published during the years when the *Blue Book* was in effect, and American radio producers and commentators seized the opportunity “Hiroshima” provided to serve the public interest. Indisputably, there was drama to the story which made it attractive as news. This was not a public interest story on how to grow radishes for better health. Nonetheless, it was the call for more social responsibility in the public interest that motivated radio’s coverage of Hersey’s article.

First Amendment theorist Vincent Blasi has famously highlighted the central role of civic courage as a foundational principle in First Amendment jurisprudence, particularly in the arena of free expression.<sup>14</sup> In an article published in 1988, he focused on Justice Louis Brandeis’s influential opinion in the 1927 U.S. Supreme Court case *Whitney v. California*.<sup>15</sup> Brandeis wrote of the vital role courageous speech, inspired by civic commitment, played in the robust public debate and discussion necessary to the sustenance of democracy. In Brandeis’s view, the pursuit of truth demanded civic courage, and the First Amendment was meant to protect the right to publish and speak on controversial matters that often required substantial courage in the face of the “occasional tyrannies of governing majorities.” The revolutionary founders of the country “valued liberty both as an end and as a means,” Brandeis wrote. “They believed liberty to be the secret of happiness and courage to be the secret of liberty.”<sup>16</sup>

It is Justice Brandeis’s view of the First Amendment that shaped and informed the public interest standard in government regulation of the public airwaves from the 1927 Radio Act forward.<sup>17</sup> That was reconfirmed when a 1998 presidential commission study of the public interest obligations of digital television providers stated that broadcast regulation in the public interest has sought, from the very beginning, “to meet certain basic needs of American politics and culture, over and above what the marketplace may or may not provide. It has sought to cultivate a more informed citizenry, greater democratic dialogue, diversity of expression, a more educated population, and more robust, culturally inclusive communities.”<sup>18</sup>

Those who participated in the writing, publication, and circulation of “Hiroshima” in 1946—including players in both broadcast and print media—were engaging in courageous expression that gave the American public



critical new information and fueled public discussion about the atomic bomb and its use in Japan. They did so in a climate of repression and uncertainty with an abiding faith that the First Amendment protected their expression. During the war, the U.S. Office of Censorship had asked all print and broadcast news outlets not to publish any information about atomic science or secret weapons but rescinded the request after the bombing of Hiroshima.<sup>19</sup> After the war, the reports and photographs of American journalists covering the “employment” of the bomb “remained under strict review,” according to Hiroshima historians Robert Lifton and Greg Mitchell.<sup>20</sup> In September of 1945, President Harry S. Truman sent a confidential request to American editors and broadcasters asking them not to publish information about the atomic bomb, including its employment and effects, without consulting with the War Department.<sup>21</sup> Just days before the *New Yorker* published Hersey’s report, the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 was signed into law. Among other things, the act restricted the dissemination of information about atomic energy, exacting a criminal penalty for violations.<sup>22</sup> General Douglas MacArthur, who oversaw the occupation of Japan, tightly controlled the movement of information—including information about the destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki—from Japan to the United States.<sup>23</sup> Thus, when magazine and newspaper editors and radio news producers and commentators published, republished, and discussed Hersey’s report, they were exercising significant civic courage in the face of governmental efforts to control and censor information about the atomic bomb and conditions on the ground in Japan.

Given these largely successful attempts by the U.S. government to limit public access to information about what Albert Einstein called the “appalling effect on human beings” of one fairly primitive atomic bomb, it is not surprising that people across America wanted to learn more about what had happened, and was continuing to happen, in Hiroshima.<sup>24</sup> When the *New Yorker* published “Hiroshima” one year after the bombings, Americans had already learned some basics about atomic science from coverage in magazines, newspapers, and radio broadcasts.<sup>25</sup> This public coverage and discussion produced what historian Paul Boyer described as an “intense fear and a somewhat unfocused conviction that an urgent and decisive public response was essential.”<sup>26</sup> The scientists’ movement, which involved many scientists who had worked on the Manhattan Project, emerged almost immediately after the bombings with the purpose of shaping public policy to avoid atomic war in the future. Some influential religious leaders publicly condemned the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, variously describing them as “mass murder,” “morally indefensible,” and a “supreme atrocity.”<sup>27</sup> Most Americans, however, approved of their country’s use of the bombs.<sup>28</sup> And this public opinion was

likely shaped by the U.S. government's successful efforts in controlling the information the American public received about the effects of the bombs. For example, Americans knew little about radiation sickness and had little to no understanding of how it was affecting many in Hiroshima who had survived the bomb's blast. Few appreciated that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not truly military targets but were home to large civilian populations.<sup>29</sup> General Leslie R. Graves, who had directed the Manhattan Project, told reporters that the atomic bombs detonated above the Japanese cities produced little to no residual radioactivity on the ground.<sup>30</sup> He gave this information knowing it was false.

The mass media in these early years of atomic awareness in America shaped, reflected, and participated in the public conversation about atomic realities, atomic fears, and possible solutions to the problems atomic weaponry posed for human affairs. In this historical moment, as James Baughman has noted, "Americans did not rely disproportionately or exclusively on one medium over another" for news and information.<sup>31</sup> They relied instead on all the constituent parts of a complex, interconnected media system, or, the communications circuit.

Radio had its role as part of that system. The so-called "golden age of radio" was enjoying its final years before the rise of television, a time when radio news commentary was mature and contributed richly to the country's democratic life.<sup>32</sup> An invention of the war itself, radio broadcast journalism had pushed Americans out of an isolationist perspective and led them to engage the world beyond their national borders.<sup>33</sup> More than ninety percent of American households had radios during this period, and seventy-three percent of Americans relied on the radio for news.<sup>34</sup> The war had encouraged Americans to develop a news-listening habit—to accompany the long-extant news-reading habit—and the increased programming for news and commentary demonstrated to the FCC that radio could indeed serve the public interest. Radio news shows garnered large audiences, often upward of fifteen to twenty million.<sup>35</sup> As multiple surveys at that time suggested, most Americans also continued to read newspapers habitually.<sup>36</sup> Media industries and their cultural products worked together to heighten public awareness and readership of "Hiroshima" through commentary, publicity, and republication in the weeks following its appearance in the *New Yorker*.

#### THE STORY OF "HIROSHIMA"

To understand the significance of the civic courage of radio in publicizing "Hiroshima," one must understand the significance of the civic courage the *New Yorker* demonstrated in taking on the project.

A seasoned war reporter, John Hersey traveled to Japan in May of 1946. William Shawn, an editor at the *New Yorker*, subsidized the trip. He had sent Hersey to get the story of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima from the perspective of those who had lived through it.<sup>37</sup> A mere three months later, Hersey's report appeared in the *New Yorker* as the only editorial content in the August 31 issue.

For American readers who had long been denied information about the effects of the bomb, the narrative decision to tell the story from the point of view of six survivors—from the moment the bomb detonated through the harrowing year that followed—proved revelatory. Moreover, Hersey told the survivors' stories with little authorial moralizing or editorializing. The result was a report that humanized a wartime enemy many Americans had come to view as brutal, militaristic “Japs”—a slur so common in the era that its use was widespread in everyday conversation and even in the media.<sup>38</sup>

*New Yorker* editors Harold Ross and Shawn believed “Hiroshima” was a document of contemporary and historical significance, and they published it with a note to readers asking that they “take time to consider the implications” of the “all but incredible destructive power” of the atomic bomb.<sup>39</sup> On a query sheet drafted while editing the piece, Ross noted, “This will be the definitive piece [or] the classic piece on what follows a bomb dropping for some time to come.”<sup>40</sup>

Yet, despite their confidence in the importance of the piece, the editors published Hersey's report believing their actions were risky.<sup>41</sup> They feared that advertisers might find the story objectionable and drop the magazine as an advertising venue. Potentially much worse, they feared that the U.S. government might object to the report's content and initiate a criminal prosecution. Having lived through the wartime era of voluntary self-censorship called for by the Office of Censorship, and no doubt aware of the Truman directive to news editors and broadcasters to handle news reports of atomic weapons and energy with great care, Ross and Shawn were both concerned that Hersey's report might break federal law or be susceptible to the charge of being “un-American.” Ross asked Milton Greenstein, the magazine's in-house counsel, whether the *New Yorker* should submit the article to federal censorship. “Mr. Shawn and I don't want to,” Ross wrote, “but we don't know whether the law is that we shall do so.”<sup>42</sup>

While wartime censorship was clearly over, the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 could prove a problem for publication of “Hiroshima.” Signed by President Truman on August 2, just one day after Ross queried Greenstein, the law controlled “the dissemination of restricted data . . . to assure the common defense and security.”<sup>43</sup> Legal experts have discussed at length the extraordi-

nary breadth of the act's information control provisions. As one scholar put it, "practically all information related to nuclear weapons and nuclear energy is 'born classified': it is a government secret as soon as it comes into existence."<sup>44</sup> The act required that information or "restricted data" remain secret unless the government actively declared it otherwise.

Greenstein had the unenviable job of not only interpreting a new law during a moment of heightened national security concerns and secrecy about atomic technology, but also reviewing Hersey's report for information restricted by the Atomic Energy Act. In his reading of the law, Greenstein concluded that the act did not define "data" but used the term to refer to "scientific and technical matter." (In the years that followed, experts interpreted "data" to encompass even information compiled by journalists from public documents and official sources.)<sup>45</sup> While a "few observations reported by Hersey might be called scientific," Greenstein wrote in response to Ross, it was up to the *New Yorker* to determine whether Hersey's account violated the act. In other words, the act did not create an official censor that would require prior review. If the publisher believed it "far-fetched" to consider the information in a report to contain "restricted data," Greenstein suggested, he was free to publish it. His ultimate counsel: "I do not think there is any 'restricted data' in Hersey's report. But Greenstein did not stop there. In what might have been an attempt to make clear to anyone in the federal government who might later question the magazine's decision to publish "Hiroshima," he summed up by noting that the *New Yorker* "of course" did not publish Hersey's report "with intent to injure the United States."<sup>46</sup>

The *New Yorker* sent press releases announcing the publication of Hersey's report to newspapers all over New York City as well as major wire services the day before the magazine appeared on newsstands.<sup>47</sup> These releases served multiple purposes: to provide professional and legal cover and to increase magazine sales by heightening public interest through publicity. On the day of publication, the magazine sold out quickly as newspaper editorials and radio news and public affairs programs publicized and discussed Hersey's account of the bombing of Hiroshima. Within one hour, 300,000 copies disappeared from newsstands; 200,000 subscribers received their copies of the issue in the mail. At that point, the entire print run was in the hands of readers all over the country.<sup>48</sup>

The controversy the *New Yorker* management feared never materialized, although a few isolated but powerful opinion-leaders criticized Hersey's report for failing to confront directly what they perceived to be the immorality of the U.S. bombing—again, Hersey restrained the moralizing or editorializing inclination—and to convey adequately, at least in their eyes, the horror of

it all.<sup>49</sup> The publicity that followed the *New Yorker's* press release snowballed as initial newspaper announcements and editorials on the article's publication sparked widespread and prolonged media commentary. A printed text first published in an elite periodical with an elite readership, "Hiroshima" quickly became known to millions of Americans across socioeconomic groups through the pronouncements and exhortations of media opinion leaders. For example, as early as September 3, 1946—just a few days after the article's publication—the director of acquisitions for the Library of Congress called "Hiroshima" one of "the notable documents of our time" and asked *New Yorker* editors and Hersey to consider donating the original manuscript to the national library.<sup>50</sup> (The manuscript ultimately went to the Beinecke Library at Yale University, where Hersey's papers are archived.)

Six weeks after the article appeared it was clear that it was a major journalistic and literary success. Ross went so far as to mail several copies of "Hiroshima" to Truman's press secretary. It is unclear whether Truman himself ever read the article.<sup>51</sup>

#### RADIO COMMENTARY ON "HIROSHIMA"

Part of the journalistic and literary success of "Hiroshima" must be attributed to radio. A survey of radio commentary in five major radio markets conducted the week the article was published—New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit, and New England—estimated that in the course of the week "roughly half of all U.S. stations" carried commentary on Hersey's story. Although some of the radio spots simply reported the fact of publication and the basic topic of the story, many commented on the story's content and meanings. The transcripts of these radio broadcasts suggest the urgency of the media response and the astonishingly wide purchase the article clearly claimed on public attention. The interpretation of any work of print culture is, of course, a social activity, and "Hiroshima" provides a fascinating case study of how readers—including radio commentators—constructed meaning within a complex web of cultural, social, and political relationships. The radio response to "Hiroshima" was overwhelmingly favorable. Only one commentator criticized Hersey's report, and in this case it was not because he dared to write about the bombing but because the account did not convey "an overall conception of the destruction of Hiroshima."<sup>52</sup>

The earliest radio commentaries appeared the evening before the "Hiroshima" issue of the *New Yorker* was released on newsstands. Bill Leonard, then anchor of New York's WABC (soon to be renamed WCBS) news program "This is New York" and later president of CBS, profiled both the *New Yorker* and Hersey's reportage in a protracted comment calling attention to the magazine's departure from its routine editorial approach.<sup>53</sup>

In a well-bred way, the New Yorker has always been actively aware that life in this world and this city is more than just a mellow laugh—but in spite of many a piercing comment on the state of both union and universe—it's remained primarily a funny magazine. A very funny magazine. There is nothing funny about this week's magazine, however.<sup>54</sup>

After describing in capsule form the story Hersey told, Leonard asked his listeners to read the story as if it were the story of their own beloved New York City:

The structure of the atom which we have finally split is hard for me to understand. The structure of human society we have also split is just as hard to understand, and maybe more important. The New Yorker has devoted its entire issue to help that understanding. Read it, and then read it again, because this is New York's story.<sup>55</sup>

This trope—the idea that New York City or some other major city in the United States might one day suffer the same fate as Hiroshima—was oft-repeated in the broadcast and print commentary on Hersey's story. Hersey never made this point explicitly in his article, but his humanization of those in Hiroshima who experienced the bombing invited the comparison.

Gabriel Heatter, the wildly popular, outwardly hopeful but inwardly tormented national commentator for the Mutual Network, known for his tagline "There's good news tonight!," was also often called the "voice of doom" because many of his broadcasts dealt with topics of disaster and human tragedy. Yet he filled his stories with sentimental optimism; he was known for his emotionalism (he sometimes cried on air), his popular human interest stories, and a close, bordering on obsequious, relationship with his sponsors.<sup>56</sup> But when he reported on "Hiroshima," he found nothing uplifting to highlight.<sup>57</sup> He merely saluted Harold Ross for devoting an entire issue of his magazine "to make certain that his readers . . . get the facts, and understand their terrible implications."<sup>58</sup> During World War II and throughout the postwar years, he had an audience of an estimated eleven to fourteen million people that ballooned to an estimated twenty million during major events.<sup>59</sup> Thus it is clear that many millions listened to his "Hiroshima" report.

In Chicago, Myron ("Mike") Wallace, a former Navy communications officer turned news reporter for WMA who would later become a celebrity journalist for the CBS television news magazine *60 Minutes*, described Hersey's reportage for area listeners as the "most exhaustive work produced on Hiroshima." (He also noted that Hersey estimated that the bomb killed 100,000 "Japs.")

The first radio reports on Hersey's article tended to be exactly that: reports in the form of breaking spot news. They informed listeners that a long

news story on the bombing of Hiroshima was to be published in the *New Yorker* and suggested that it was important to read. More radio commentary appeared the day the “Hiroshima” issue of the *New Yorker* appeared on newsstands, with the tone and content becoming notably more political in nature. Many radio news announcers and analysts had been thinking and talking about atomic realities for more than a year, and discussing “Hiroshima” allowed them to consider with their listeners the social and political implications of the bomb and the moral issues of the bomb’s use. When Cecil Brown, popularly known as one of “the Murrow Boys” during the war, commented extensively on the Mutual Network about “Hiroshima,” he also took up the problem of an imminent atomic arms race.<sup>60</sup> “[E]ither we do away with war or we engage in an atomic bomb race,” Brown argued. An arms race would lead to nuclear annihilation “here in America and elsewhere.” Expressing the then-familiar idea that world government was the solution to atomic problems, Brown told listeners the solution was for America to invest time and resources in the United Nations to bring an end to war. Brown’s comments demonstrated the relaxing of restrictions against editorial commentary that took place in the industry after the war. Moreover, they demonstrated—and encouraged—the altering social sensibility as America began its drift into a cloud of Cold War anxiety about nuclear holocaust.

Similarly, political specialist Quincy Howe, who was widely considered one of the more intellectual news commentators, told WABC listeners that “[s]tatesmen who cannot outgrow balance-of-power politics, or think beyond the sphere of influence, will do well to consider the example that the editor of The New Yorker Magazine has just set all of us.”<sup>61</sup> That example, according to Howe, was “the enterprise, the intelligence and the courage” simply to publish the article—to “cut loose from precedent”—a sentiment many in the publishing and news industries expressed directly to Ross.<sup>62</sup> Howe’s references to “balance-of-power politics” and “the sphere of influence”—terms used in the hackneyed bromides of international diplomacy—were suggestive of one explanation for the U.S. decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan: the idea, adopted by revisionist historians in later years, that the bombs were used not to force an imminent Japanese surrender, as Truman had told the American people, but to demonstrate U.S. superiority and dominance of the international stage to the Soviet Union. A War Department study of strategic bombing published just months prior to the publication of “Hiroshima” had suggested that a Japanese surrender was imminent before the atomic bombings.<sup>63</sup> This claim undermined the credibility of the official narrative and left observers to fill in the blanks on their own. Whether Howe intended to suggest that American leaders used the bombs against Japan as a form of atomic



diplomacy in the U.S. relationship with the Soviet Union is unclear, but at the very least he was suggesting that American leaders could no longer adopt and act on outdated notions about international relations. In Howe's estimation, the dawn of the atomic era had rewritten the rules of foreign relations.

The day after "Hiroshima" appeared in print, radio commentary became less objective and more ideological, expressing in some cases the deeply personal reactions of the commentators and in others, as noted in the case of Cecil Brown, near messianic fervor for world government as a solution to a potential nuclear holocaust. Regarding the deeply personal, Martin Agronsky, a political analyst for ABC, reported and commented extensively on his own reaction to reading Hersey. "It's a story that moved me," he told listeners, "and, I'll admit, frightened me so much that I want to report it to you as fully as I possibly can this morning." That is exactly what he did. He described in some detail the horrors Hersey documented in his story, and he then exhorted his audience to imagine "New York, Washington, Duluth, Detroit" being hit with an atomic bomb. "At the risk of sounding like a NEW YORKER advertisement," he finished, "I feel the most important thing I can report to anyone this morning is this. Read Mr. Hersey's story, then think as hard as you can what you can do about it. Men can't survive a war in which one bomb can do this to a city."<sup>64</sup>

The popular ABC political commentator H. R. Baukhage saw in Hersey's reportage and the *New Yorker's* decision to publish it "the beginning of an effort to change the course of world diplomacy. That can be done if the people of America shake off their indifference."<sup>65</sup> These were strong words from Baukhage, the one-word name he used to identify himself on air. The well-traveled, multilingual, and politically moderate broadcaster was regarded by his listeners as objective and well-informed. Regarded as a public intellectual, he was known to read widely and carefully examine both sides of a controversial issue before he would comment on it with his signature baritone.<sup>66</sup> Baukhage's warning—"if we're indifferent [to atomic weapons], we shall perish"—carried with it the full weight of his professional credibility and integrity. And his suggestion that the *New Yorker's* decision to publish "Hiroshima" was an "effort to change the course of world diplomacy" was a new and bold interpretation of the magazine's purpose in public discussion.

Raymond Gram Swing, estimated to have thirty-seven million radio listeners around the world during the war and known for his informed commentary and distinctive speaking style, "was so horrified by the danger of nuclear bombs," one radio historian wrote, "that he abandoned any effort to be objective."<sup>67</sup> After the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he began devoting his Friday broadcasts to the subjects of atomic weapons and world government. In the mid-1940s, he became chairman of the board of direc-



tors for Americans United for World Government, a group that proposed a United Nations charter that would establish a delegated world agency with adequate sovereignty to enforce world peace.<sup>68</sup> On Friday, August 30, 1946, Swing discussed Hersey's "Hiroshima" on air, suggesting that it "should give great numbers a sense of having a personal stake in what is done behind the walls of the State Department and the Pentagon Building and in the conference rooms of the White House."<sup>69</sup> His comments lauded Hersey's article for its lucidity and detail, but most of all he focused heavily on the implications of atomic warfare that the story revealed. Swing took the opportunity to warn his listeners that we are "to be governed by air-power and atomic bombs if we do not govern them."<sup>70</sup> However, his strong editorial commentary on the need for world government did not take long to attract the scorn of the American right wing. Editorial pages in the Hearst newspapers the *Brooklyn Tablet*, the *New Leader*, and *Counterattack* began decrying Swing as a communist, or at the very least, a communist dupe.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Max Lerner on New York's WOR station described the Hersey article in ominous tones. He advised his audience to consider the implications of Hersey's narrative: "Don't say it can't happen here. It can. What Hersey didn't and couldn't do was interview the hundred thousand who died at Hiroshima."<sup>72</sup> Lerner was one of many public intellectuals who realized that America's monopoly over atomic weapons was destined to be short-lived. A prominent journalist and scholar, Lerner's occasional radio commentaries only added to his prominence as a popular newspaper columnist for *PM* and the *New York Post*.<sup>73</sup> During the peak of his influence, his column was syndicated in more than seventy newspapers in almost every major city in the U.S.<sup>74</sup> His radio comments on Hersey's story appear to allude to the 1935 Sinclair Lewis novel *It Can't Happen Here*, in which a newly elected populist American president turns dictator, overturning democratic processes and establishing a totalitarian, militaristic regime.<sup>75</sup> The implicit comparison of Lewis's novel with Hersey's story suggests that just as fascism could come to America, so could the atomic bomb. In a book he published in 1949, Lerner wrote, "The bomb at Hiroshima was the bell that tolled for us all. Its message rang out clearly: world state or world doom."<sup>76</sup>

This sampling of several days' worth of the voluminous radio commentary on "Hiroshima" demonstrates how radio served both as a powerful agent of publicity for Hersey's report and as a spur to public conversation about the frightening problems the development of atomic science had introduced in human affairs. Doubtless, millions were exposed to the commentary. Radio commentators discussed "Hiroshima" in multiple ways and for multiple reasons. In some cases, their comments were a form of boosterism for the

profession of journalism; in lauding the courage and wisdom the *New Yorker* demonstrated in publishing Hersey's article, they were simultaneously drawing attention to their own courage in publicly discussing the article on the airwaves. In this way, radio broadcasters joined forces with their print counterparts in the news profession to circle the wagons and provide protective cover for all should charges of anti-Americanism or improper dissemination of atomic information ensue (no such charges were made). The commentators also discussed the likelihood and problems of a global nuclear arms race, suggesting that such a race would lead to nuclear holocaust. The solution, many suggested, was world government. Some suggested that American citizens should demand that their government join forces with other nations to control nuclear power through cooperative action.

Such documented radio commentary, taken in its entirety, provides a window into a historical moment in which Americans were discussing the meanings, problems, and solutions of the new atomic weapons. During this moment, critical decisions about atomic weapons production, control, and use, international relations, and the freedom of the American press to provide atomic information to the public were being made. "Hiroshima" added new information to this critical discussion.

#### "HIROSHIMA" READ ON THE AIRWAVES

Broadcast coverage of "Hiroshima" did not end, however, with radio commentary. Hersey's story was also republished in the ether, with the printed text read over the airwaves. Since the *New Yorker* issue containing the article sold out its first day on the market, the public clamored—and radio and news commentators clamored—for reprints and republication. The *New Yorker* and Hersey allowed newspapers around the United States and the world to republish "Hiroshima" in full for a nominal fee, with proceeds to go to the American Red Cross.<sup>77</sup> Another far-reaching form of republication was a broadcast reading of the story over a national radio network.

The radio networks had long experimented with various types of programming tied to book publication and book reading. "NBC University of the Air," a program of serial dramas portraying classic novels, was launched in 1944. Other contemporary radio programs, such as Mutual Network's "A Book a Week," presented book readings, which often condensed and serialized popular novels.<sup>78</sup> "Hiroshima" could thus be used to fulfill not only an existing broadcasting need but also the public interest needs mandated by the *Blue Book*. When Robert Saudek, the director of public service programming for the American Broadcasting Company, approached the editors of the *New Yorker* with the idea of broadcasting a reading of "Hiroshima" on the radio, he was appropriating existing radio genres for a genre of print cul-

ture that radio had yet to explore: a nonfiction magazine article. Saudek was an outspoken proponent of the public interest ideal in radio broadcasting, even as he worked with the limited budget ABC could provide as an upstart radio network recently divested by NBC in a federal anti-monopoly action. "People—millions of people—must know a great deal more than they do about the needs and resources of America and the world," he said. In addition, broadcasters need to have more "courage, both in the selection of topics and in the production techniques" they used.<sup>79</sup>

Saudek arranged to broadcast half-hour readings of Hersey's article—slightly shortened for radio with Hersey's approval of every edit—on four successive evenings, September 9-12. Hersey, apparently familiar with radio's typical dramatic treatment of novels, would only allow the readings if they were to be commercial free and nondramatic, with no music or sound effects in the tradition of radio soap operas of the day. Thus, it was to be minimalist in nature, setting itself off from the rest of the radio medium. ABC bore the production costs, while Hersey and the *New Yorker* allowed ABC to broadcast "without fee as a service to the people of America."

Before the airing of the first segment, an announcer explained to listeners ABC's purpose in broadcasting a reading of Hersey's article: "This chronicle of suffering and destruction is not presented in defense of an enemy. It is broadcast as a warning that what happened to the people of Hiroshima a year ago could next happen anywhere."<sup>80</sup> As Saudek noted in a letter written to the *New Yorker* editors after the broadcasts, "[T]his simple reading of a text for four successive nights" was "a rather bold experiment in broadcast technique." In fact, the ABC Hersey reading received the highest rating a public interest radio broadcast had yet received.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, Americans had tuned in. The following spring, ABC and Saudek received a Peabody Award for this bold experiment.

### CONSEQUENCES

Although radio was a transformative medium that circulated ideas more widely and with greater speed than print media, print held a higher cultural status than radio at the time "Hiroshima" was published.<sup>82</sup> In a pioneering study on American radio published in 1940, Paul Lazarsfeld found that radio had not displaced newspaper and magazine reading but had actually stimulated such reading: "Print is the lever, we have come to feel, that can move the world."<sup>83</sup> The emergence and growth of radio broadcasting thus occurred in what Michael Stamm has called "a vibrant reading culture."

One consequence of that higher cultural status for print is that in the months following the publication of "Hiroshima," two articles defending the U.S. decision to drop the bomb appeared in influential American magazines,

one in the *Atlantic Monthly* by the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and one in *Harper's* by former secretary of war Henry Stimson.<sup>84</sup> These articles presented what became the orthodox explanation for the U.S. decision to use the atomic bombs against Japan: the bombs were used to force the Japanese surrender earlier rather than later and thus avoid the loss of perhaps a million American lives in an invasion of Japan. These articles appear to have been written, at least in part, as a response to Hersey's article and what some officials viewed as a growing public questioning of the wisdom of U.S. actions in response to Hersey's story.<sup>85</sup> Historians have suggested that the Stimson article in particular presented such a powerful case for the necessity of the bombing that it silenced questions the Hersey narrative had raised for many Americans about the morality of dropping the bomb.<sup>86</sup>

Still, there were far-reaching repercussions from the "Hiroshima" media event. In the years following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, anxieties about atomic warfare and emerging Cold War sensibilities penetrated and shaped the American national consciousness. A broad array of Americans—including ordinary citizens, writers, editors, journalists, publishers, media producers, scientists, intellectuals, religious leaders, and policy makers in the highest levels of government—documented, discussed, and sometimes questioned their nation's use of atomic warfare against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. National communication networks conveyed the information shaping this conversation. One voice in that conversation was clearly Hersey's *New Yorker* article. Another part of that conversation was radio's response in broadcasting to millions Hersey's and the *New Yorker's* accomplishment.

### CONCLUSION

From the standpoint of scholarly inquiry, one lesson to draw from this examination of the relationship between print and broadcast is that historians must develop new conceptual approaches to understand how competing or conflicting narratives interact with each other in overlapping circuits of communication with readers moving in and out of different circuits across time. To what degree did readers and listeners of "Hiroshima" in print and radio also read the Stimson article, for example? How did commentary about these various texts inform readers' and listeners' understanding? How did readers craft meaning out of multiple texts derived from multiple media forms, and with what effects for readers as individuals and citizens of a nation and the world? These are the kinds of challenging questions that historians of journalism and print culture must begin to ask and to answer as we seek to understand how different media cultures shaped our world.

What we can detect is that in 1946 the American media landscape was deeply structured by print culture. But when the *New Yorker* published “Hiroshima” in 1946, radio interacted with this reading culture to publicize, republish, and provide commentary on what came to be known in America as the most important work of journalism of the twentieth century. John Hersey’s “Hiroshima” gained not only millions of readers but also millions of listeners. And the national conversation about the problems of the atomic age—and possible solutions—expanded.

American readers and radio listeners did not mobilize in large numbers against a potential oncoming nuclear threat after exposure to “Hiroshima,” nor did they challenge in significant numbers their country’s decision to use the bomb.<sup>87</sup> Yet they used “Hiroshima” to inform a robust national conversation about the moral, political, and psychological problems posed by the development and use of atomic weapons. “Hiroshima” dramatized more fully than any previous account known to Americans at the time what the atomic bomb had done and could do to a human community. Those who discussed “Hiroshima” over the airwaves demonstrated a civic courage one rarely sees today in a period when broadcast (and print) are focused on the bottom line, and broadcasting’s requirements for public interest commentary have been significantly reduced. It is impossible to measure what has been lost as American media have retrenched and new technology has fractured the audience for news, but a national conversation of the scale and import that “Hiroshima” inspired seems all but impossible in the contemporary moment.

---

*Kathy Roberts Forde is the author of the critically acclaimed Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment (University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), as well as numerous articles on literary journalism and the history of the book. Her articles appear in journals such as Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, Book History, and American Journalism. She is associate editor of American Journalism and teaches at the University of South Carolina, Columbia.*



*Matthew W. Ross is a master's student in the mass communication program at the University of South Carolina. He studies the political economy of media and the history of communication.*




---

## NOTES

1. John Hersey, "A Reporter at Large, 'Hiroshima,'" *New Yorker*, 31 August 1946.
2. In a contest sponsored by New York University's journalism department in 1999, Hersey's "Hiroshima" was chosen by expert judges as the best work of journalism produced in the United States in the twentieth century. See Felicity Barringer, "Journalism's Greatest Hits: Two Lists of a Century's Top Stories," *New York Times*, 1 March 1999, C1.
3. Mary F. Corey, *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994); John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 184-87; Dan R. Jones, "John Hersey," in Thomas B. Connery, ed., *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 213-221; David Sanders, *John Hersey Revisited* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990); Patrick B. Sharp, "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's 'Hiroshima,'" *Twentieth Century Literature*, 46, no. 4 (Winter 2000), 434-52; Michael Ben Yagoda, *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made* (New York: Scribner, 2000); Michael J. Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience: The Reception of 'Hiroshima,'" *Pacific Historical Review*, 43, no. 1 (Feb. 1974), 24-49.
4. Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), originally published 1985, 203-10; Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half Century of Denial* (New York: Avon Books, 1995), 86-92; Yagoda, *About Town*, 2000, 183-194; Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience," 1974.
5. Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience," 1974. In 1948, two psychologists interested in analyzing "reactions to the human aspects of atomic warfare" conducted a content analysis of reader responses to the *New Yorker's* "Hiroshima" during the two weeks following its publication. Yavenditti relies on this study as a source: Joseph Luft and W. M. Wheeler, "Reaction to John Hersey's 'Hiroshima,'" *Journal of Social Psychology*, 28 (1948), 135-40.

6. Kathy Roberts Forde, "Profit and Public Interest: A Publication History of John Hersey's 'Hiroshima,'" *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88, no. 3 (Autumn 2011), 562-79.

7. *New Yorker* Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations (hereafter NYR); John Hersey Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library (hereafter JHP).

8. Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?" in *Reading in America: Literature & Social History*, Cathy Davidson, ed., 27-52 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 30. Originally published in *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (Summer 1982). The "communications circuit" represents the "life cycle" of a printed book or text. The cycle begins with authors and publishers; moves on to printers, shippers, reviewers, and booksellers; shifts to the reader; and then circles back to the author.

9. Carl F. Kaestle and Janie A. Radway, "A Framework for the History of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940," in *A History of the Book, Volume 4, Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*, 18-20 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 18.

10. Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 378.

11. Victor Pickard, "The Battle over the FCC Blue Book: Determining the Role of Broadcast Media in a Democratic Society, 1945-8," *Media, Culture, and Society* vol. 33, no. 2 (2011), 178-79.

12. Pickard, 182, quoting Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, vol. 2: 1933-1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 229.

13. *Ibid.*, 182-84.

14. Vincent Blasi, "The First Amendment and the Ideal of Civic Courage: The Brandeis Opinion in *Whitney v. California*," *William & Mary Law Review* 29:4 (1988): 653-97.

15. *Whitney v. California*, 274 U.S. 357 (1927).

16. *Whitney*, 274 U.S. at 375.

17. Anthony E. Varona, "Changing Channels and Bridging Divides: The Failure and Redemption of American Broadcast Television Regulation," *Minnesota Journal of Law, Science & Technology* 6:1 (December 2004): 53-54.

18. Varona, "Changing Channels and Bridging Divides," 53-54, quoting the Gore Commission's report, *Charting the Digital Broadcast Future: Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters* at 21 (18 December 1998).

19. Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 196-201; Margaret A. Blanchard, *Revolutionary Sparks: Freedom of Expression in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 223.

20. Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: A Half Century of Denial* (New York: Avon Books, 1995), 46-53.



21. Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, 55, quoting Truman note to editors: A. D. Surles (War Department) to Charles Ross (White House), 13 September, and Truman statement, 14 September 1945, Truman Library, Official File 692-A. See also Jeffery A. Smith, *War and Press Freedom: The Problem of Prerogative Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 167.

22. Richard G. Hewlett, "'Born Classified' in the AEC: A Historian's View," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, December, 1981, 21.

23. Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, 49-61.

24. Albert Einstein to unnamed scientists, September 6, 1946, Box 50, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.

25. Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), originally published 1985, 30-31.

26. Boyer, 32.

27. Ibid., 33, 49, and 200-03.

28. A *Fortune*/Roper poll found that 85% of Americans approved. See "The Quarter's Polls," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 9:3 (Autumn 1945): 385. See also Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience," 26.

29. Sharp, "From Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland," 444.

30. Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience," 27, quoting multiple news reports published in August and September of 1945.

31. James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture: Journalism, Filmmaking, and Broadcasting in America since 1941*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 1.

32. Irving Fang, *Those Radio Commentators!* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977), 14.

33. Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 162.

34. Herta Herzog, "Radio—The First Post-war Year," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, X (1946): 297-313; Gerald Nachman, *Raised on Radio* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 400.

35. Gerd Horten, *Radio Goes to War: The Cultural Politics of Propaganda during World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 32-33.

36. James Baughman, "Wounded But Not Slain: The Orderly Retreat of the American Newspaper," in David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin, and Michael Schudson, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, Vol. 5: *The Enduring Book, Print Culture in Postwar America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 119.

37. Yagoda, *About Town*, 185-186; Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, 86-87.

38. Popular magazines like *Life* used the term extensively. See Dolores Flaminio, "Japanese American Internment in Popular Magazines: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in World War II Photojournalism," *Journalism History* 36:1 (Spring 2010): 23.



39. "Hiroshima," *New Yorker*, 31 August 1946, 17 in Box 1315, Folder "Hersey, John 'Hiroshima' 1946," NYR.
40. Yagoda, *About Town*, 188.
41. Forde, "Profit and Public Interest," 564.
42. Harold Ross to Milton Greenstein, August 1, 1946, Box 50, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.
43. Milton Greenstein to Harold Ross, August 12, 1946 (emphasis in original), Box 50, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.
44. Mary M. Cheh, "The *Progressive* Case and the Atomic Energy Act: Waking to the Dangers of Government Information Controls," *George Washington Law Review* 48:2 (January 1980): 163.
45. Cheh, "The *Progressive* Case," 170-71.
46. Greenstein to Ross, quoting the Atomic Energy Act (emphasis in original). See also Forde, "Profit and Public Interest," for an account of Greenstein's counsel about whether the magazine should submit "Hiroshima" to censorship.
47. *New Yorker* Press Release on "Hiroshima," 28 August 1946, Box 50, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.
48. Press clipping, Gene De Poris, "'Hiroshima' Hits Jackpot," P.M. (New York), 26 September 1946, in Box 1371, Folder 4, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. Records, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin; Mary F. Corey, *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 21.
49. Two famous examples are Dwight Macdonald's commentary in his leftist journal *Politics* and Mary McCarthy's response in a later issue of the same journal. Dwight Macdonald, "Hersey's 'Hiroshima,'" *Politics*, October 1946, 8, and Mary McCarthy, "The Hiroshima 'New Yorker,'" *Politics*, November 1946, 367.
50. Letter to *New Yorker* editors from Verner W. Clapp, Director, Acquisitions Department, Library of Congress, 3 September 1946, Box 21, Folder 9, JHP.
51. Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America*, 90.
52. "A Survey of Radio Comment on the Hiroshima Issue of the New Yorker," Radio Reports, Inc., 6 September 1946, Box 966, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.
53. Bill Jaker, Frank Sulek, and Peter Kanze, *The Airwaves of New York: Illustrated Histories of 156 AM Stations in the Metropolitan Area, 1921-1996* (McFarland, 2008), 51.
54. John Leonard to Harold Ross, 4 September 1946, enclosing script of "This Is New York" program broadcast on WABC (New York) 30 August 1946, Box 50, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Jacqueline Foertsch, *American Culture in the 1940s* (Manchester: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 66-68.
57. Irving E. Fang, *Those Radio Commentators!* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977), 283. 291-92.
58. "A Survey of Radio Comment," NYR. 190 stations carried this broadcast.
59. Fang, *Those Radio Commentators!*, 302.

60. "Murrow's Boys" was the group of journalists recruited to the CBS radio network by Edward R. Murrow. Together, Murrow and his colleagues produced some of the most distinguished American broadcast reporting of World War II. They were very popular among American listening audiences. See Lynne Olson and Stanley W. Cloud, *The Murrow Boys: Pioneers on the Front Lines of Broadcast Journalism* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1996).

61. Fang, *Those Radio Commentators!*, 329-30.

62. Forde, "Profit and Public Interest," 568-69.

63. United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), *Summary Report* (Pacific War), 1 July 1946, 26.

64. 135 ABC stations carried the Agronsky broadcast.

65. 150 ABC stations carried the Baukhage broadcast.

66. Fang, *Those Radio Commentators!* 279.

67. *Ibid.*, 169.

68. Clyde Eagleton, "The Demand for World Government," *American Journal of International Law* 40 (April 1946), 391. The dream of world federation and its connection to UN reform died. Norman Cousins, an editor of the *Saturday Review of Books*, who viewed John Hersey's "Hiroshima" as a historic work of public importance, became a cofounder of Americans United for World Government. See Joseph Preston Baratta, *The Politics of World Federation: United Nations, UN Reform, Atomic Control* (New York: Praeger, 2004), xi.

69. 135 ABC stations carried the Swing broadcast.

70. "A Survey of Radio Comment on the Hiroshima Issue of the New Yorker," Radio Reports, Inc., 6 September 1946, Box 966, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.

71. Fang, *Those Radio Commentators!* 169.

72. "A Survey of Radio Comment on the Hiroshima Issue of the New Yorker," Radio Reports, Inc., 6 September 1946, Box 966, Folder "Hersey, John," NYR.

73. Sanford Lakoff, *Max Lerner: Pilgrim in the Promised Land* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), xi.

74. *Ibid.*

75. Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1935).

76. Max Lerner, *Actions and Passions: Notes on the Multiple Revolution of Our Time* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), 257.

77. "Newspapers in Which Hiroshima Has Been or Is Being Reprinted," internal *New Yorker* report, 23 October 1946, Box 1076, Folder "Hiroshima-Master List," NYR.

78. Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 316.

79. *Ibid.*, 80.

80. Matthew C. Ehrlich, *Radio Utopia: Postwar Audio Documentary in the Public Interest* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 29, quoting *Hiroshima*, part 1, originally broadcast 9 September 1946, recording

available at Paley Center for Media, Beverly Hills.

81. Robert Saudek to R. Hawley Truax, 3 September 1946, Box 1077, Folder "Hiroshima Radio," NYR.

82. Michael Stamm, *Sound Business*, 4.

83. Ibid., 4, quoting Paul Lazarsfeld, *Radio and the Printed Page: An Introduction to the Study of Radio and Its Role in the Communication of Ideas* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1940), 4. See also Michael Stamm, "Paul Lazarsfeld's *Radio and the Printed Page*: A Critical Reappraisal," *American Journalism* 27:4 (Fall 2010), 37-58.

84. Karl T. Compton, "If the Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used," *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1946; Henry L. Stimson, "The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb," *Harper's*, February 1947.

85. Corey, *The World through a Monocle*, 36.

86. Robert P. Newman, "Hiroshima and the Trashing of Henry Stimson," *The New England Quarterly* 71:1 (March 1998): 30. See also Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience," 43-44.

87. Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light*, 209-10.





# Making Overtures: Literature and Journalism, 1968 and 2011—a Dutch Perspective

Thomas Vaessens  
University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands

*Between the 1960s and now one can detect in the work of Harry Mulisch and Arnon Grunberg a shift in Dutch literary journalism in which aesthetic ambition finds greater legitimacy through journalism.*

In the build-up to the 2010 national elections in the Netherlands, the leading Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* published a series of forty-two front-page articles about the most important politicians running for public office. A series of six daily articles was devoted to each leader of the seven major parties. What was remarkable about the articles was that none of them were written by journalists. For this occasion, the editor invited seven Dutch writers and novelists individually to shadow a politician for a week and to give a daily account of their experiences. These invitations resulted in a series of rather unconventional portraits of the politicians concerned. The reader was not only informed about the position and views of the top political actors, but also about the more human aspects of politics: the man or woman behind the politician, his or her character, personality, and so on. In the newspaper, the series was not only highlighted with recurring illustrations, but the articles also stood out on the front page thanks to an eye-catching heading: “Uit de stolp.” The Dutch word “stolp” can be literally translated as “cheese cover” (a bell-shaped glass cover we use to cover the cheese), but metaphorically it refers to the idea of the “ivory tower”: in Dutch there is the expression “de Haagse stolp”: the political ivory tower in The Hague which is the parliamentary capital of the Netherlands. Those using the expression “de Haagse stolp”

tend to see the political system in the Netherlands as isolated: politicians who are unaware about what is really going on outside their bubble, meaning outside of their glass cover. So, in the English translation, the title of the series reads something like “Out of the Glass Cover,” say, or, somewhat more imperatively: “Get out from under the glass bell!” (subtitle: “Writers Shadowing Politicians”).

At first sight, the cheese-cover metaphor in this title seems to refer to the politicians portrayed in the series. It reminds us of the cliché of the political ivory tower.<sup>1</sup> The suggestion is that the disconnected, somewhat unworldly politicians have to be brought down to street level, that they have to be re-connected to the real world, to the world of ordinary newspaper readers. And the suggestion is also that we need writers and novelists to do so. As a literary historian I find the implications of the title very interesting for this reason: It would appear that the editor of one of the leading newspapers in the Netherlands thinks that writers and novelists are more able to break through the barriers erected by politicians than journalists. Or maybe even that writers and novelists are more closely connected with the everyday world. In this interpretation of the metaphor in the title, the writer is held to be, in a way, superior to the conventional mainstream or newspaper journalist.

But there is an additional interpretation. The idea of disconnectedness that is implied in the cheese-cover metaphor can also be applied to the writers and novelists. If the idea of politicians under a glass cover is a cliché, the image of the writer as someone who lives in an artistic bubble is not unfamiliar either. Complaints about the ivory tower mentality of writers and literary specialists are as old as modern literature and every now and then the literary debate is revived by writers or critics who accuse their colleagues publicly of being disconnected or uncommitted. This could also be the message of the editor in giving the series of articles this title. In that case, “Get out from under the cheese cover” is an incitement to political and social involvement of writers and novelists. It is a cry for literary engagement.

Last year’s publication of the series of newspaper articles on politics written by writers and novelists was not a unique event. All of us can easily think of recent examples of the same overlap of the domains of journalism and literature. Writers, not only in the Netherlands, write journalism about current social and political issues—think of Martin Amis and David Foster Wallace in the English-speaking world, Juan José Millás in Spain, Frédéric Beigbeder in France, Abdelkader Benali and Arnon Grunberg in the Netherlands, or Tom Nagels and Tom Lanoye in Belgium. Their literary journalism of the last two decades examines the “lostness” of Generation X.<sup>2</sup>

One could also point in this respect to the many contemporary novelists worldwide who have recently started to write nonfiction, or to the considerable number of recent novels based on true stories. To sum up with just a few examples: Dave Eggers (*What Is the What*, 2006; *Zeitoun*, 2009), and Jonathan Safran Foer (*Eating Animals*, 2009) in the United States; Aifric Campbell (*The Semantics of Murder*, 2007) in Ireland; Thomas Brussig (*Wie es leuchtet*, 2004) in Germany; François Bon (*Daewoo*, 2004) in France; and Anton Dautzenberg (*Samaritaan*, 2010) and Joris van Casteren (*Lelystad*, 2009) in the Netherlands. All these novelists decided to leave the field of fiction, some of them for an indefinite period, others just for the duration of one book. Whether using their authorial imagination or not, they all entered the domain of an external reality, a domain that is usually the territory of the journalist.

What we see therefore in contemporary literature is a considerable number of writers becoming journalists. This has been around for a while, of course (Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, Truman Capote, among others). Yet the cross-border traffic between literature and journalism also goes in the opposite direction. There are journalists who think that sometimes fiction can be a more useful instrument to investigate reality than the methods of journalism. Recently I came across the example of Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Lorraine Adams, who switched from investigative reporting at the *Washington Post* to writing fiction because she felt it allowed her to tell more of the truth. "Fiction is much more equipped to capture the complexity of our lives than the missives and reports that come out of newspaper organizations," she says.<sup>3</sup>

So, what we see is novelists inclined to write journalism in order to enrich their writing, and journalists seeking out fiction and other literary techniques to make their journalism more effective. Writers and journalists are making overtures. The borders between fact and fiction are once again being reexamined and challenged. The recent phenomenon of the so-called "New New Journalism," as Robert Boynton has characterized it, underlines this observation. American writers and journalists such as Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Michael Lewis, or Susan Orlean write research-based, narrative-driven, long-form nonfiction, using all sorts of innovative immersion strategies.<sup>4</sup> Their work exemplifies the process of cross-fertilization between journalism and literature that is clearly of the moment.

The current heavy traffic on the borders between journalism and literature raises several important questions about both disciplines. As a scholar of literature I am first and foremost interested in the literary aspects of this interaction. That means that I ask questions like these:

- What do we expect from writers (writing journalism)?
- (Why) do we think that writers can cure politics/politicians from “disconnectedness”?
- (Why) do writers feel the need to leave their ivory tower?
- Are writers writing journalism because they feel that the old reproach of their supposed other-worldliness and disconnectedness makes sense at this point in history?
- What makes writers opt for a more literary journalism?
- Are they trying to reinforce literature?
- Is literary journalism a sign of the times?

This last question is a historical one. The current literary interest in journalism is certainly not a new phenomenon. When Boynton coined the term “New New Journalism” he was, of course, referring to the New Journalism of the late 1960s. Forty years ago writers were also attracted to journalism. The similarity between those moments in recent literary history—two moments in which authors came out from under their glass cover—provokes a series of historical questions as well, questions concerning the similarities and the differences in the Netherlands between 1968, a critical year historically among the Western European democracies, and today, 2011. In exploring the subject, I will do so by examining two Dutch authors I would suggest serve as exemplars among their peers during each period, first Harry Mulisch (1927-2010), and then Arnon Grunberg (1971-).

### 1968: HARRY MULISCH AND NEW JOURNALISM

Let us first have a quick look at the Dutch literary journalism of the 1960s and Mulisch. Then an up-and-coming novelist, he was a Dutch representative of the New Journalism movement (although I’m not sure whether or not he was aware of the American version at the time). In the period between 1952 and 1960 he published four successful novels, but after this promising start a lean period ensued and it was not until 1970 that his next one was published. This absence of new work represented a conscious choice by the writer, as he deliberately chose to write nonfiction. In 1962, he published *De zaak 40/61* [Criminal Case 40/61], a reportage of the Adolf Eichmann trial; in 1966, he gave an analysis of Dutch Provo—a counterculture movement in the mid-1960s that focused on provoking violent responses from authorities using nonviolence as bait—and the disturbances in Amsterdam during 1965 and 1966 (*Bericht aan de rattenkoning*); in 1967, he collected a number of political and satirical pieces (*Wenken voor de jongste dag* [Suggestions for the Youngest Day]); and in 1968 gave his sympathetic view of the Cuban revolution in *Het woord bij de daad* [Suit the Word to the Action]. Not much



of Mulisch's nonfiction is translated into English but his book on Eichmann is. Mulisch witnessed the Eichmann trial in Israel and wrote a series of articles that first appeared in a Dutch weekly *Elseviers Weekblad*. The entire collection was then published as a book in 1962. Six years ago, the English translation came out under the title, *Criminal Case 40/61: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann, an Eyewitness Account*.

Mulisch's switch to nonfiction was a well-considered choice. He had come to the conclusion that writing fiction at this point in history was not what a writer should do. He even accused his fiction-writing colleagues of conservatism, saying that "a writer who agrees with the theory of *l'art pour l'art* chooses the side of the reactionaries." He continued by saying that objectivity is an illusion, and that writers should speak from their own unconcealed consciousness.<sup>5</sup>

This emphasis on consciousness fits in with the established patterns of New Journalism as part of a historically broader literary journalism.<sup>6</sup> In his book *True Stories* Norman Sims gives very similar definitions for the New Journalism and literary journalism. According to Sims, "The New Journalism movement . . . sought to return the voice and consciousness of the writer to journalism." And "literary journalists recognize the need for a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered."<sup>7</sup> Both definitions emphasize the fact that writers give up their ambition to be objective and that they do so because they think it is important that journalism is written from the position of a writer's individual consciousness. "Writers should let their consciousness speak," said Mulisch in 1968, emphasizing this crucial concept in the discourse of New Journalism or literary Journalism.

The idea is that writers can let their consciousness speak by using the technical instruments of the novelist and by using their imagination. Mulisch provides the reader with a novelist's perspective on the trial and utilizes literary devices, particularly the use of imagery, to complete his picture of Eichmann. The image that the reader takes away is that the most frightening enemy might be the average man walking down the street or even the face in the mirror (an image that reminds one of Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil" to be found in the average and normal). As a writer, Mulisch says he is "less concerned with what he [Eichman] has done than with who he is,"<sup>8</sup> and he doesn't use historical facts, but rather his psychological insight and his imagination to find out "who he actually is."

Throughout the work, Mulisch relies on imagery, a useful tool given the graphic nature of the subject. The descriptions of Israel, the Holocaust, the city of Berlin during and after the war, and of Eichmann, provide the reader with constant and lasting images. In describing Eichmann, Mulisch provides

a series of photos of Eichmann. The real photograph, the one in the middle, is divided in half. Each half is reproduced and matched against itself to create two additional photos.<sup>9</sup> One photo is the two left sides put together and the other photo contains the right side of the face in its mirror image. The first one portrays an average, inoffensive-looking, middle-aged man. The latter shows an image not unlike a monster, or as Mulisch describes him: a beast. Thus, we have the “two faces of Eichmann,” one good, the other evil. This emphasis on imagery plays a major role in providing a portrait of Eichmann, at least from the perspective of Mulisch, the novelist and witness.

In 1968 Mulisch believed that nonfiction would in the end replace the novel. Like Tom Wolfe, spokesman of the American New Journalism, he claimed that the kind of literary nonfiction he was writing displaced the monumental literary form of the novel.<sup>10</sup> His literary journalism was, in Maitrayee Basu’s words, meant to be a response to an issue raised by the novel in the nineteenth century, namely, the correspondence between literary illustration and the reality that it imitates.<sup>11</sup> This supports Wolfe’s rationale in the 1970s for the New Journalism as the rightful successor to the novel, which he claimed was in a “retrograde state,” stagnant for over half a century. But it also supports Mulisch’s claim that literary journalism was a superior form of journalism as well as a superior form of historiography. In an interview, he said that his nonfiction would be used in the future by people who would really want to know about the 1960s. “They will not nose around in old newspapers,” he claimed. And he triumphantly stated that his nonfiction books would have become a replacement for reality by then: “That means that my book has become reality.”<sup>12</sup>

What Mulisch does here is frame traditional journalism as the antithesis of literature. His new literary form is thus presented as a synthesis in which the virtues of journalism (its seeming closeness to an external reality) and of literature (consciousness, imagination) come together.

#### 2011: (NEW) NEW JOURNALISM AFTER 9/11—AMIS, EGGERS, GRUNBERG

Before crossing over to present-day literary journalism, I would like to return to the metaphor of the glass cover for a moment. In 1968, explaining to a journalist why he stopped writing novels, Mulisch said that it was time for literary writers to leave their ivory towers. At that moment in history, fiction to Mulisch was something of a renunciation of the world and a waste of time. “It is war,” he said, referring to Vietnam first of all, but also to the Cold War. “In times of war one should not waste one’s time writing novels. There are more important things to do.”<sup>13</sup>

Although the nonfiction Mulisch published in the 1960s was not about Vietnam, nor about the Cold War, for him there was a clear connection between topical matters—current events in the world—and his decision to stop writing novels. Other things were more important.

One could say that the same goes for many literary writers writing nonfiction and working as journalists today. I have chosen Martin Amis as a spokesman for these writers. This is what he wrote in the *Guardian*, looking back upon 9/11 and its effects.

After a couple of hours at their desks, on September 12, all the writers on earth were considering the course that Lenin menacingly urged on Maxim Gorky: a change of occupation. . . . An unusual number of novelists chose to write some journalism about September 11. . . . I can tell you what those novelists were doing: they were playing for time. The so-called work in progress, the novels they were working on, had been reduced, overnight, to a blue streak of autistic babble.<sup>14</sup>

It is not my intention to reduce the revival of nonfiction and the current fascination with “true stories” to a mere reaction to the War on Terror that started on September 11, 2001. Then again, the fact is that Amis certainly was not the only writer who made a connection between a writer’s inclination to journalism and the turbulent times they are living in.<sup>15</sup> For Amis, as for Mulisch forty years ago, unrest and turmoil are the catalysts for literary journalism.

Many of Amis’s colleagues, most of them novelists, have chosen to write nonfiction in the last few years. All these writers account for their switch to nonfiction as a kind of social service for writers. Apparently they seem to think that sometimes writing a novel is not enough, even for a novelist. Or, in Mulisch’s words, sometimes there are more important things to do than writing a novel.

Clearly, another point of similarity between 1968 and the present is that novelists writing nonfiction use their typically literary skills and qualities. By doing so, these writers claim that their nonfiction is of a higher order than conventional journalism or other forms of factual writing. To support this claim, let us have a quick look at two authors, one American and one Dutch.

American Dave Eggers’s *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, a Novel* is one example. The double subtitle of this 2006 book combines fictional with nonfictional elements: it refers to the life of a real person, the Sudanese refugee Deng (nonfiction); but in the second part of the subtitle the book is qualified as a novel (fiction, or the suggestion is that the book contains rhetorical strategies normally associated with fiction, such as richly colored description).

Eggers started to write the book as a factual report of Deng's life. In an interview he said that he wanted America to know what every immigrant to the U.S., whether legal or not, is going through now.<sup>16</sup> But then he gradually realized "that he'd have to fictionalize it, for the fullest effect."<sup>17</sup> "Fictionalizing," then, means something like making it lively, compelling, affective. I quote Eggers:

All these things in the book—the facts of the war, the movement of people and troops—are historically accurate, but what's necessary to make a book compelling is shaping it in an artful way. . . . I wanted . . . the book to come alive, and not be dry, so . . . I decided the important thing was to tell the story well and bring an audience that might not otherwise come to it if I had written only what Deng could remember, and only what we could prove. Only maybe 433 people would've read that book. So I made it a novel.<sup>18</sup>

Eggers does use fictional elements in the sense of made-up details, as well as the techniques of the literary writer, to broaden the impact of his writing, just as Mulisch did back in the 1960s. Although forty years later it has been given, in my view, a contemporary touch of commercialism, it is still imbued with the same principle.

Eggers obtained a degree in journalism from the University of Illinois and he credits that training, along with his experience in daily journalism, with giving him the tools to report real-life stories, for instance the interviews he did for *What Is the What*, and the immersion journalism he undertook to report *Zeitoun*.

Eggers's Dutch colleague and contemporary Arnon Grunberg has no degree in journalism, but apart from that, there are many points of agreement between his work and that of Eggers. Grunberg is a novelist, yet to an increasing degree his novels are based on journalistic fieldwork. In his novel *Onze oom* [Our Uncle] (2008), for instance, he incorporated the results of research into illegal arms trade and interviews with imprisoned women in Peru.

In 2010 Grunberg published *Kamermeisjes en soldaten* [Chambermaids and Soldiers], a collection of recent pieces written for *NRC Handelsblad*. In his introduction, he characterizes this new journalistic work by contrasting it with his earlier contributions to newspapers:

For 10 years I have been writing for the newspaper every two weeks. I wrote about my life and my traveling. Now I feel the need to write about other people's lives. I want to go get out and about, to see people, following the advice that Maxim Gorky gave to Isaac Babel.<sup>19</sup>

The reference to Babel as a role model is significant in the introduction to a collection of journalistic work that includes pieces of immersion reporting

about military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. In 1920, Babel joined in a campaign of the Red Army against Poland in the Russian Civil War. He wrote about his experiences, not only for the army's newspaper, but also in his novel *Red Cavalry* (1926). For that reason, his biographer called him an embedded journalist *avant la lettre*.<sup>20</sup> Grunberg follows Babel's example: he becomes embedded in the Dutch and American armies, he writes about it for several Dutch newspapers, and he incorporates this journalistic material into his novels.

Keywords for the description of Grunberg's immersion strategies are embedding, grounding, and participation. In several recent interviews he declared that, as an author, he wanted to really be part of something: "Sure, there are writers who stay in their study all the time," he says, "but I don't want to be such a writer. . . . I want to be in contact with people, I want to be part of the world."<sup>21</sup> Grunberg, who started his career as a politically unconcerned writer of ironical novels, now clearly feels the need to get out from under the glass cover, just like his predecessor Mulisch in 1968. And his new work, based as it is on journalism and fieldwork, reminds one of Mulisch's literary journalism.

Grunberg's beliefs about his new, journalistic style of writing are congruent with what scholars in the field of journalism studies have said about the power and purpose of literary journalism.<sup>22</sup> A primary characteristic has to do with the idea of literary journalism as a kind of social service by the author. Sims, referring to Kenneth Burke's definition of literature as "equipment for living," wrote: "Whether or not literary journalism equips me for living differently than other forms of literature, I read it as if it might."<sup>23</sup>

Grunberg also thinks that literary journalism, and the novels that are based on it, are very special styles of writing. Both the reader and the writer are likely to find answers to their key question: how to live? For Grunberg, literary journalism is the art of everyday living. "It is my task to find answers to the question how to live," says Grunberg in his introduction to the collection *Kamermeisjes en soldaten*.<sup>24</sup>

Other scholars emphasize the subjectivity of literary journalism, a subjectivity that doesn't distort the truth, but instead provides the facts with new, literary perspectives. John C. Hartsock claimed that literary journalism's "purpose is to narrow the distance between subjectivity and the object, not divorce them."<sup>25</sup> Grunberg confirms this line of thought every time he emphasizes that he is not just a journalist in search of objective facts but also a novelist. In an interview with Frank Harbers he said that as a journalist he has no shining example: "In my literary reportage I have only been guided by novelists."<sup>26</sup> Grunberg here seems to imply that a reportage written by a

novelist is of a higher order and is richer than mere journalism, thanks to the subjectivity and the imagination of the novelist.

The third characteristic of literary journalism that is often mentioned is the idea that literary journalism realizes a relationship between art and politics.<sup>27</sup> If literary journalism is not about “objective truths,” maybe instead it is about working toward the discovery and presentation of pragmatic truth (or truths). Grunberg also confirms this idea. To him, conventional journalism is about conventional truth. In an interview he said that he tries to pursue “a higher truth,”<sup>28</sup> not only in his novels but also in his literary reportages.

### 1968 AND 2011: DIFFERENCES

What have we seen so far? If we accept Mulisch and Grunberg as exemplars of their periods in the Netherlands, we can see that there are considerable similarities between the literary journalism of 1968 and of 2011. Harry Mulisch, forty years ago, and Arnon Grunberg, today, switch to non-fiction and literary journalism because as writers with a growing awareness of their social task they feel the need to leave the comfort zone of the writer, to get out from under the glass cover. They place their ambitious literary journalism in the service of big questions (equipment for living, how to live, and so on); they feel that the world is in need of their subjective views and they deliberately enter the domain of politics.

Inevitably, however, there are differences too, and I will consider three of them.

#### 1. THE DEVALUATION OF LITERATURE

The first difference has to do with the declining standing of literature. Much has been written about what William Marx called “the devaluation of literature,”<sup>29</sup> and I am not going to add another pessimistic statement to the endless series of proclamations on the death of literature. What I will do is merely record the fact that a novelist like Mulisch, in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, was credited with all manner of virtues. His position as a prominent novelist earned him a good deal of respect, not only in literary circles, but in all walks of life. In the public domain he was a well-known intellectual and television personality. He owed his vast reputation to his novels, the novel being an art form that had little competition.

Today, Arnon Grunberg is the undisputed *jeune premier* of Dutch literature. His award-winning novels are prominently reviewed in all the newspapers in the Netherlands and Flanders. Yet Grunberg is not Mulisch and he probably never will equal his predecessor’s fame and prestige. Grunberg would not complain about this, of course, but that does not mean that he is not worried about the social impact of the novel or the novelist. I believe he

is for the following reason: His characterization of literary journalism as “the novelist’s oxygen mask,”<sup>30</sup> in the above-mentioned interview with Harbers, suggests that to him the switch to journalism and research-based novels is a survival strategy: You require oxygen to survive.

After his nonfiction period in the 1960s, Mulisch returned to the novel in the early seventies, saying that war was now over, and that it was time to tell stories again. And right he was: In the years that followed, the American press compared him to Homer, Dante, and Goethe.<sup>31</sup> He did not need his nonfiction to be the distinguished and influential public intellectual that he was. But, whereas the journalists once felt humbled by the novelist, we now live in an age in which the novelist lives in a state of anxiety about nonfiction, as Michael Lewis puts it.<sup>32</sup> This reversal of fortune may have come about because news has become the “de facto literature of our times,” which is used by many people for distraction and entertainment as well as information.<sup>33</sup>

Grunberg works in a world that ascribes more authority to the writer of nonfiction than to a novelist. In his manifesto *Reality Hunger*, David Shields writes that “urgency attaches itself now more to the tale taken directly from life than one fashioned by the imagination out of life.”<sup>34</sup> And Hartsock said in an interview that his students are always startled when they read literary journalism. The work of literary journalists always makes them hungry to read more, he says, and that is no small accomplishment with today’s young people: “I think it’s all because it’s about real life.”<sup>35</sup>

In the 1960s Mulisch made an excursion outside his discipline, after which he returned to the novel permanently. Today Grunberg lives in another world. His rapprochement with reality can be considered as part of a strategy against the devaluation of literature. In order to regain the authority that was once self-evident for a literary author Grunberg places himself in the position of the journalist. To be more precise: as an embedded writer he places himself in the position of a war journalist, adopting a role that—according to Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer, two experts in the field of war journalism—is perceived as even more authentic and more authoritative than an average journalist.<sup>36</sup>

## 2. THE RISE AND “FALL” OF POSTMODERNISM

Now we move on to the second difference between the literary journalism of Mulisch and his contemporaries on the one hand, and Grunberg and company on the other. That second difference has to do with the colorful history of postmodernism between 1968 and today. Back in the sixties, Mulisch’s New Journalistic distrust of the novel was consistent with early postmodernism. He had passed beyond the essentially modernist view of the



world that considered it possible to determine the nature of reality by the scientific method of objective observation. Mulisch was a child of his (post-modern) time in part, but only in part. He made the shift from scientific belief in the progressive elimination of uncertainty and ambiguity, to a belief in the indeterminate nature of reality. On the other hand, Mulisch at the time clearly distinguished facts from fiction. For him, those were two ontologically divided categories, and that is what sets him apart from postmodernism. While Mulisch resorted to nonfiction, postmodern writers developed a kind of writing that implied that reality only existed in the language that described it, with meaning inseparably linked to writing and reading practices.

Forty years later, well after the heyday of postmodernism, Grunberg would not dare to distinguish facts and fiction so decisively anymore. To him it is more self-evident that one cannot think of a reality outside of the fictions we create when we try to describe it. Unlike Mulisch in the sixties, Grunberg knows and emphasizes all the postmodern clichés, that there is nothing outside the text and such. However, like so many other writers today, he also holds the opinion (at least in most recent years) that postmodern discourse, half a century after its appearance, has got bogged down in *cul-desac* relativism and detached irony.<sup>37</sup> Grunberg admits that postmodernism, in demolishing the essentialist cultural ideal of liberal humanism, has had an important cultural function, yet he is left wondering what answers postmodernism can give to today's questions. And one of the questions that is of special importance to him is the question of how we can speak about reality (external phenomenal reality) again, after postmodernism deconstructed the distinction between reality and fiction.

Mulisch and Grunberg made the same move by switching to literary journalism and leaving the glass cover of literature but each had different opponents. Mulisch was opposed to the art-for-art's-sake idealism of his colleagues, whereas Grunberg is fighting the noncommittal attitude of postmodernism. In doing so, he sometimes returns to statements about fiction and reality that remind us of Mulisch's distinction between fact and fiction. Here is an example of such a remark, in which Grunberg makes fun of the alleged postmodern denial of reality:

Doubt and skepticism about what constitutes reality are very healthy, but denying the distinction between fiction and reality just like that points to an attitude that results from a lack of skepticism and doubt. Reality offers a few "truths," which leave not a lot of room for skepticism. Go and stand on a rail track for instance, and wait for the train to come.<sup>38</sup>



Grunberg is not attacking postmodernism here, but an idea commonly associated with postmodernism. Just like Mulisch, he embraces external reality, and he resists popular relativism—a relativism that was not there when Mulisch decided to stop writing novels. What we're seeing here are similar responses to different critical idealizations or hegemonies during different historical periods.

### 3. MEDIA REVOLUTION

The third and last difference between 1968 and now that I want to discuss has to do with the fundamentally changed context of the media in which nonfiction and literary journalism manifest themselves today. Let's have another look at the manipulated photographs of Adolf Eichmann that Mulisch used. This handiwork shows us that, back in the sixties, Mulisch was already very well aware of the power of images and how perception could be manipulated. In this sense, the somewhat naïve and amateurish photographs used in *Criminal Case 40/61* are a fast-forward, a prophecy even, of one of the most prominent themes of present-day literary journalism. For Grunberg and many of his colleagues, living in a world dominated by mass media, images, signs—and any other simulacra, mediation, and the steering of our perception by media industries—are at the very centre of attention. In his pieces of immersion reporting, for instance, Grunberg ceaselessly questions the discursive authority that is, as we have seen earlier, ascribed to embedded journalists such as himself. In today's climate, to write as if one's writing were neutral and unbiased is sufficient to show that it is anything but. Instead, there is widespread suspicion that any such "independence" of the writer is nothing but an institutional voice steeped in specific ideologies that benefit the mainstream news industry.<sup>39</sup>

Shields, in the above-mentioned manifesto *Reality Hunger*, offers a background against which the current attention of literary journalists to the theme of hyper-reality can be understood. His book is about the inclination of present-day writers and artists of putting as much reality in their work as they can. Shields claims that the incorporation of "raw material, seemingly unprocessed, unfiltered, uncensored" is one of the hallmarks of today's culture.<sup>40</sup> We live in a time dominated by innumerable forms of extra-literary fiction, Shields argues, and he mentions politics, advertising, the lives of celebrities, and the world of professional sports. Everything on television is fiction, whether it is packaged as such or not.<sup>41</sup>

In his journalism, Grunberg frequently shows his fascination for the ways in which, in today's hyper-reality, facts and fiction merge into one another. One of the pet notions in his newspaper articles about military missions is

the idea that for soldiers there isn't that much difference between their actual situation in the army and the military video games they used to play at home. And he notices that when we think about war our frame of reference is determined by war movies, not by reality or any real experience:

What we see of war are often movies about war. . . . Soldiers imitate such movies, and it is . . . nice to show how that works. You need a frame of reference, even when you are in a war zone for the first time, and when it concerns me that frame is the war film. . . . With that, fiction and reality can still be separated from each other, but some kind of interaction does take place.<sup>42</sup>

He concludes by saying that not only "reality influences fiction" but that "fiction influences reality" as well.<sup>43</sup>

"Our age has a great liking for true stories," says the Dutch writer Christiaan Weijts, "even though we keep coming across fiction all the time."<sup>44</sup> For Weijts, as for Grunberg and the other contemporary writers of nonfiction, it is clear that today, more than ever, we are aware of the fact that seemingly harmless fictions can shape reality. We are more than ever aware of the manipulative character of rhetoric, journalism, and nonfiction. We have to be, in our current world in which we combine collective dependence on mass media with a very lively, individualized activity in social media like Facebook and Twitter. This mediated world is the context from which the current popularity of memoirs, New New Journalism, and other nonfiction draw their meaning. It is also the context in which we have to deal with the striking popularity of journalistic forms and television formats in which the illusion of reality plays an important role. Although the formula of the reality television series *Big Brother* was not entirely new when Dutch producer John de Mol invented and developed it in the late nineties, the success of this format all over the world clearly indicates a considerable amount of reality hunger.

#### CONCLUSION: THE WRITER'S RESPONSIBILITY

Today's literary journalism continues an ongoing tradition that can be detected at least as far back as the New Journalism of the sixties and seventies. Nevertheless, we can also see remarkable differences. Since 1968 we have seen the devaluation of literature, the rise and fall of postmodernism, and, above all, the fundamental changes in the way news is brought to and perceived by the public. Because of these developments, the current practice of literary journalism must be viewed in a dramatically changed context.

Many novelists and writers of nonfiction today are fascinated by the role of fiction and imagination in our global media industries. The relation between fact and fiction is an appealing theme for writers. It seems to me that they are very much aware of the increasing precariousness of that relation,

and also that they claim their own role as writers in those processes of fiction that shape reality. Recently, the Dutch novelist and nonfiction writer Anton Dautzenberg caused a controversy in the Dutch press. In a magazine, the *VPRO-gids*, he published a series of three interviews with Lemmy Kilmister, leader of heavy-metal rock band Motörhead, about the global financial crisis. The interviews, however, turned out to be faked. Dautzenberg never actually spoke to Kilmister, and every word in the series originated from his imagination. The hoax was much talked about. Journalists accused the author of trifling with the interview format, this unique mode of professional journalism, and, indeed, of doing away with reality—to a deadly sin for a journalist.

Dautzenberg defends himself on his website by calling into question the very concept of “reality.” He refers to the war in Iraq to support that remarkable move. We were not dragged into the war because of reality, Dautzenberg says. We got involved because Bush, Blair, and (former Dutch prime minister) Balkenende told us there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which of course was not true. What happened therefore is that, once again, fiction shaped reality: the fiction of a few politicians precipitated the harsh reality of real people risking their real lives (and actually dying!) because of a real war. And at that point, Dautzenberg writes: “I conclude that inventing fictions now is the exclusive domain of politicians. Writers may no longer enter this domain. I do not take the slightest notice of that.”<sup>45</sup>

I don’t think Mulisch was right when he said that in times of war one should not waste one’s time with fiction. By saying so he downplayed the role of the novel and the role of the writerly imagination in some way. Contemporary writers like Grunberg and Dautzenberg attempt to escape the isolated position in which Mulisch had left the novel. Today’s overtures between journalism and literature indicate that contemporary writers feel responsible for the current discussion about the role of fictions in contemporary politics and in the public debate. They want their work to play a role in that discussion, whether it is fiction or nonfiction.

It is no wonder then that in the 2010 Dutch national elections there were attempts to break the glass bubble of political and mainstream journalistic rhetoric that tend to perpetuate the fiction. Only the integrity of a personal voice can do that, a David with sling and stone confronting a Goliath of group-mind-think—a flung stone is capable of breaking a glassine brittleness. After all, in the reality hunger, everybody wants a piece of the cheese. What we are seeing are similar responses to different critical idealizations or hegemonies during different historical periods.

---

Thomas Vaessens is professor of Dutch literature and chair of the Dutch Department at the University of Amsterdam, and academic director of the Netherlands Graduate School for Literary Studies (OSL). His publications on Dutch literature include monographs about modernism (Circus Dubio & Schroom, 1998), postmodernism (Postmoderne poëzie in Nederland en Vlaanderen, with Jos Joosten, 2003), poetry and intermediality (Ongerijmd success, 2006), and late postmodernism (De revanche van de roman, 2009. Reprints 2009, 2011). Together with his colleague Yra van Dijk he edited the volume Reconsidering the Postmodern: European Literature beyond Relativism (Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming). He is a founding member of the editorial board of the Journal of Dutch Literature, and a regular contributor to newspapers, and radio and television programs in the Netherlands.




---

## NOTES

1. The equivalent in the U.S. would be "inside the Beltway."
2. Joshua Roiland, "Getting Away from It All: The Literary Journalism of David Foster Wallace and Nietzsche's Concept of Oblivion," *Literary Journalism Studies* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 96.
3. Interview on BBC4, 24 May 2010:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid\\_8700000/8700144.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8700000/8700144.stm).
4. Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 7.
5. F. Auwera, *Schrijven of schieten* (Antwerpen/Utrecht: Standaard uitgeverij, 1969) 96 (my translation, tv).
6. I follow John Hartsock here in not drawing a sharp distinction between those two forms, assuming that the boundaries between them are fluid. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst, MA.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000).
7. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 7.
8. Harry Mulisch, *Criminal Case 40/61: The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: An Eyewitness Account* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 111, 117.
9. See Rhonda L. Callaway's review of Mulisch 2005:  
<http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/lpbr/subpages/reviews/mulisch0106.htm>.

10. Tom Wolfe, in Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (eds.), *The New Journalism: With an Introduction* (New York, Harper & Row, 1973), 41.
11. Cf. M. Basu, "'New Journalism,' Subjectivity and Postmodern News," *Proof* 2, 2010. <http://www.proof-reading.org/2010-set-2-contents>.
12. W. Roggeman, *Beroepsgeheim 4. Gesprekken met schrijvers* (Antwerpen: Het Spectrum, 1983) 122-23.
13. Mulisch in Auwera 1969: 96.
14. M. Amis, *The Second Plane. September 11: 2001-2007*. London, Vintage Books, 2008, p.11.
15. Boynton, xxix.
16. G. Kirschling, [An Interview with Dave Eggers], *Entertainment Weekly*, 28 October 2007. <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20154178,00.html>.
17. Kirschling 2007.
18. Kirschling 2007. Eggers himself: "This is a work of fiction. Names characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously," in Eggers, *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng, A Novel* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), x.
19. Arnold Grunberg, *Kamermeisjes & soldaten. Arnon Grunberg onder de mensen* (Amsterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 2009), 8 (my translation, tv).
20. An interview with G. Freidin: <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2010/february15/freidin-babel-biography-021610.htm>.
21. Grunberg, 8 (my translation, tv).
22. Cf. Roiland on David Foster Wallace, 90.
23. Sims, 6.
24. Grunberg, 8.
25. Hartsock, 132.
26. Frank Harbers, "Between Fact and Fiction: Arnon Grunberg on His Literary Journalism," *Literary Journalism Studies* 2-1, 2010: 77.
27. Roiland, 90; Kathy Roberts Forde, *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 205.
28. Harbers, 78.
29. W. Marx, *L'adieu à la littérature. Histoire d'une dévalorisation xviii-xxe siècle* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2005).
30. Harbers, 76.
31. Dutch Foundation for Literature. <http://www.nlpvf.nl/book/book2.php?Book=782>.
32. Lewis, cited by Boynton, xii.
33. "de facto literature of our time": Seymour Krim, quoted by Boynton. See also Basu.
34. David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010), 200.
35. [http://blog.washingtonpost.com/story-lab/2010/04/narrative\\_journalism\\_a\\_convers.html](http://blog.washingtonpost.com/story-lab/2010/04/narrative_journalism_a_convers.html).

36. S. Allan and B. Zelizer, "Rules of Engagement: Journalism and War," in Allan and Zelizer (eds.), *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London: Routledge, 2004), 3-21.

37. Cf. Thomas Vaessens, "Realiteitshonger. Arnon Grunberg en de (non-)fic-tie," *TNTL* 126, 2010: 306-26; *De revanche van de roman. Literatuur, autoriteit en engagement*, 3rd ed. (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2011); "Dutch Novelists beyond 'Postmodern' Relativism," *Journal of Dutch Literature* 2-1, 2011, <http://journalofdutchliterature.org/>, forthcoming.

38. Harbers, 80.

39. Basu.

40. Shields, 5.

41. Cf. Luc Sante, "The Fiction of Memory," *New York Times*, 14 March 2010.

42. Harbers, 79.

43. Harbers, 79-80.

44. Weijts, *NRC Handelsblad*, 12 June 2010 (my translation, tv).

45. <http://www.ahjdautzenberg.nl/2011/03/a-h-j-dautzenberg-reageert-op-ophef-lemmy/> (my translation, tv).

# Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life

## Keynote address, IALJS, Brussels, Belgium

### May 13, 2011

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

*In his keynote address last May at the seventh annual conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies in Brussels, Belgium, John J. Pauly discussed the important role literary journalism can play in the discussion about civic engagement. His address, given at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, is republished here in the belief by the editors that Pauly contributes important new insights to the study of literary journalism as both a literature and journalism.*

*Pauly is the provost of Marquette University in Milwaukee. Moreover, he is a noted literary journalism scholar and regarded as one of the founders of the discipline, having made substantial contributions to the field as an area of academic inquiry. His publication credits include articles in such journals as Critical Studies in Mass Communication, American Quarterly, and Communication Research, and he is the former editor of American Journalism., the journal of the American Journalism Historians Association*



*The address is followed with an appreciation by Richard Lance Keeble, a noted scholar of literary journalism in the United Kingdom.*

---

The sociologist Erving Goffman once observed that human beings construct their identities by finding someone to be normal against. Such has often seemed the case in literary journalism's relationship to conventional journalism. Like the cathedrals of the Middle Ages, the apparatus of everyday journalism took centuries to build. It required revolutions in cultural and political authority, the steady incorporation of each new technology of production and distribution, the creation of markets and the encouragement of the social relationships that sustain those markets, the invention of bureaucratic

structures of management and control, and the formation of professional aspirations that were at once political, moral, and literary. At the end of that history there emerged an institution that robustly and confidently claimed this truth about itself: that it was in the business of creating a model of public reality each day, and that it would be back tomorrow to tell you more. It is not surprising that such an institution would come to see itself as the norm against which all variant literary and political practices should be judged, or that it would defend its reality franchise with such vigor.

Times change. A number of the cathedrals of news are boarded up or in foreclosure, and the institution of journalism puzzles its way through a moment when the availability and demand for news have never been greater, but the business model for permanently sustaining news organizations remains in doubt. But that is the topic for another day.

This brief history of journalism as an institution remains relevant to us because literary journalism has often defined itself against the normative assertions of the larger news profession. For example, conventional journalism unapologetically celebrates a version of what the literary critic Hugh Kenner once called the “plain style” and disdains more complex narratives that it considers partisan, mannered, or inefficient. Literary journalism, in its own defense, bemoans traditional news organizations’ indifference to in-depth cultural reporting and nuanced, long-form writing. One of the great virtues of IALJS is that its scholarship has complicated the triumphal tale I just told you. Literary journalism scholars remind us that the system of relations built around the press has been more culturally specific and local than we might have thought; that writers and readers are more unruly in their tastes for reality than news organizations would prefer; and that even routine daily news regularly draws upon a wider array of literary devices than we sometimes think.

Today I want to pose an ethical question that has not been fully addressed in our scholarship: What role, if any, should literary journalism play in our shared civic life? By civic life, I mean not the formal structures of representation, adjudication, and regulation studied by political scientists, but the imagined commons in which our hopes for humane, peaceful, and equitable social relations dwell. This question is important in part because I believe that literary journalism can do important work on behalf of civic life, and in part because this is exactly the domain to which conventional journalism has laid claim. If our arguments on behalf of literary journalism are to be given full weight, we must grapple more directly with news journalism’s civic franchise.



The back story to this argument will be familiar to you, but let me briefly summarize its main themes. In its self-descriptions, journalism firmly attaches its purposes, methods of research, structures of work, and modes of expression to the cause of human liberty and self-governance. The profession styles itself as a watchdog against tyranny and corruption and as a nonpartisan witness to controversy. It adopts a method that it takes to be rigorous and open to public scrutiny, examining documents, gathering evidence from all parties, and questioning leaders. News organizations commit themselves to permanence and seriality, vowing to remain on the scene day after day in order to update their accounts of reality in the service of the public good. Finally, journalism strives for a mode of address suited to the everyday work of democracy, cultivating a brisk, plain-spoken style of writing that makes its accounts intelligible to the widest array of citizens.

We may fault journalists' inability to live up to these aspirations, we may note the limitations of the organizations that employ them, and we may even critique the ideological assumptions built into journalism's style of representing reality. But we must come to terms with this civic tradition, for it constitutes journalism's most powerful claim about itself. The late James Carey used to describe journalism as the imaginative form through which democracy talks to itself about itself. I believe that literary journalism ought to aspire to just such social purposes, but that it has not yet found an entirely satisfying way to do so. Sometimes our explanations can seem self-congratulatory and isolating, as when Mark Kramer praises the liberatory voice of the literary journalist as cutting through the "obfuscating generalities of creeds, countries, companies, bureaucracies, and experts," and finding truth in the "details of real lives." It is hard to know how journalism could help us stitch together the commons when it so comfortably imagines itself as the romantic opposition, standing at the edge of society's institutions.

My own hope is that our studies help us resituate the craft, recognizing its deeper social and moral purposes, and that we come to think it important that literary journalism give voice to the drama of civic life. The historian of technology Lewis Mumford once argued in similar terms about the special value of the city as a "theater of social action." Cities contained and thereby gave shape to the activities of commerce, art, and politics, Mumford argued, making our experience of those institutions palpable and conversable. The Canadian journalism scholar Stuart Adam points us in a similar direction when he notes that modern life and journalism grew up side by side, and that journalists have mapped their work within the coordinates bequeathed by modernity, offering both political stories about the governance of the democratic state, and human interest stories about the community of citizens.

Adam's argument might lead literary journalists to resign themselves to working one side of that street, attending more closely to the details of lived social experience than to politics. But I continue to hope for a rapprochement. In my course on literary journalism, for example, one of my explicit goals is to demonstrate how it might help us understand the world's most difficult problems. I tell students that we can learn something important about prisons from Ted Conover, or war from David Finkel, or the forms of cultural memory from Jane Kramer, or the environment from John McPhee. In my class this spring, for the first time I fully recognized how often images of race have infused American literary journalism over the last half century, sometimes casually or in passing, but always complicating the journalist's effort to write in the voice of others. Carey used to urge us to think about journalism as a curriculum rather than a single course; the craft begins with simple techniques of interviewing and the inverted pyramid, but it cannot end there. Within that educational metaphor, literary journalism should surely be considered the capstone course of the curriculum, the far horizon where students glimpse what the profession at its best can accomplish.

So let me begin by exploring the reasons why literary and conventional journalism have sought to escape each other's company, and end with a couple of observations about what it will take to reconnect literary journalists to the needs and purposes of civic life, as I have defined it.

This much is true: literary and conventional journalism both believe in the power of stories. Whatever else divides these siblings, this remains their striking family resemblance. And there is much to divide them, even in their understandings of journalism as an imaginative, storytelling profession. News journalists often believe that they are capable of writing longer, more literary stories . . . if—if they were given the license to do so, if they thought their readers (or editors) were interested, if they thought that such reporting added real value to what they are already doing, if they thought that the topic actually required such lengthy treatment. On all these questions, news journalists continue to express skepticism: isn't literary journalism just a needlessly wordy version of the feature writing and depth reporting that the best reporters already do? News reporters also tend to assign points for degree of technical difficulty, expressing particular admiration for stories written under severe deadline pressure or filed amid dangerous circumstances (a belief memorialized in A. J. Liebling's boast that he wrote better than anyone who wrote faster, and faster than anyone who wrote better). Literary journalists believe that human experience is revealed most compellingly and authoritatively through artful storytelling, and in the name of that principle they devote themselves wholeheartedly to narrative as an end in itself. They prize

interpretive skill over speed. The vast majority of our scholarship on literary journalism starts from this premise as well, documenting the variety and sophistication of reporters' narrative strategies, and expressing admiration for the dogged thoroughness of an Adrian LeBlanc when others might see only obsession.

Truth be told, conventional journalism's loyalty to story is divided. News reporters worship twin gods, information as well as story, and they choose to honor one or the other depending upon the occasion. Describing reporting as the gathering of "information" allows news journalists to claim factual authority and political importance for their work. Although literary journalists also gather information in the course of writing their stories, they almost never describe their work in terms of information (at least I have never heard or read of one doing so). Conventional journalism strategically invokes the term "information" as a self-description in order to emphasize its scientific, dispassionate character, especially when it finds itself the object of partisan critique. On the other hand, when conventional journalism wishes to emphasize its practitioners' artfulness and moral insight, it describes itself in terms of "story."

The deepest divisions between the two traditions occur over matters of culture. By culture I mean the symbolic practices by which groups articulate their sense of meaning and purpose and celebrate their identity. The most vigorous forms of literary journalism in the U.S. emerge as an effort to interpret late twentieth-century culture. We can understand the New Journalism of the 1960s in the U.S., for example, as a turn toward questions of culture and away from standard categories of news coverage that no longer adequately captured that era's sense of its own experience. Issues such as race, feminism, peace activism, rock music, drugs, campus revolution, and sexual liberation never fit the beat system. Shrewd editors and writers recognized that fact. When *Esquire* magazine realized, by the late 1950s, that television had undermined the advertising model that had sustained the general interest magazine, it turned to nonfiction. The editor, Harold Hayes, knew that he could not beat daily news organizations to press, but he hoped to fashion *Esquire* as a kind of high-level briefing paper on contemporary culture, betting that a more hip generation of readers would be willing to trade immediacy for interpretive flair. Thus *Esquire's* decision to hire William S. Burroughs, Jean Genet, John Sack, and Terry Southern to cover the August 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, a story that would not appear until the magazine's November issue.

This interest in cultural interpretation runs all through the work of the writers most identified with that period, such as Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thomp-

son, Joan Didion, John Gregory Dunne, Norman Mailer, and Gay Talese. Their interest in culture expressed itself in four ways. First, these writers freely adopted all the available forms of literary invention, emulating the dense textures of the novel, as many scholars have noted. Talese, for example, described the short story as his model for feature reporting. Second, they sought opportunities to give voice to cultural difference. Groups who had been objects of passing attention or scorn in the mainstream press came in for sympathetic interpretation: witness Dunne's account of California farmworkers, Thompson's of motorcycle gangs, or Wolfe's of the Merry Pranksters. Third, these writers often deliberately blurred the categories of high and low culture, most notably in Wolfe's writing. His famous "Tiny Mummies" parody of the *New Yorker*, satirizing the magazine's stodginess and self-satisfaction, so deranged William Shawn that the magazine hired a clipping service to gather all the information that it could about this literary pretender. Fourth, magazines like *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, and *New York* encouraged more in-depth methods of reporting, achieving a level of engagement than was impossible through daily journalism and that over the years would come to resemble ethnography, as in the case of Thompson's reporting on the Hell's Angels.

This cultural turn energized the practice of literary journalism in the United States, opening nearly every domain of human experience to reporters and offering journalists a plausible alternative to newspaper work, making new styles of writing more available for emulation, and detaching the genre from the cosmopolitan stylistics of the *New Yorker*. This cultural turn has proved indispensable to the practice of literary journalism. Indeed, techniques that once seemed tentative and experimental now seem standard. By virtually every measure, we are living in a Golden Age of long-form reporting, in terms of the number of writers working in the genre, the range of topics being explored, and the quality of the work. Literary journalism has firmly secured its traditions over the last fifty years.

Everything comes at a price, of course. Literary journalism cannot be said to occupy the civic space that daily news once claimed as its own. Literary journalism's response to the speed, scale, multicultural complexity, and organizational density of the world in which we live is simply to apply its well-honed methods to whatever topic comes its way. Thus we have extraordinary individual works of reporting on virtually every domain of contemporary experience—sports, business, science, war, immigration, the environment, and much else—without much sense of how those works might make society as a whole available for analysis and conversation.

Conventional journalism had proposed a different pact with its readers, of course. Daily news historically described itself as a preferred account of

civic life, claiming that it encompassed the key features of society as a whole. Political parties, agencies of government, and organizations were the major players in that drama, and journalists needed to stay close to their sources in order to do their work. One need not endorse conventional journalism's system for producing reality; we know its limitations and contradictions all too well. The issue is whether literary journalism can in any meaningful way supplement that system of news. Can literary journalism sustain an alternative conception of civic life, or will it remain a somewhat idiosyncratic variation on the dominant forms of journalism? The British media scholar Anthony Smith once posed a similar question. He noted that the mass newspaper had sustained the illusion of a coherent social whole. Smith thought that such an illusion had real political value even when deep down we understood its fictitiousness. (And Carey, raised in the rituals of Catholicism, thought something rather similar.) Literary journalism, at least in the United States, has typically preferred the cultural to the civic. It discovers its most profound stories in humans' quest for meaning, rather than in the civic drama of news.

Let me admit that this argument may reflect an American perspective, not just in the political aspirations it imputes to journalism but in the opposition between literary and conventional journalism that it invokes. In a large, wealthy country such as the United States, with a long press history, the opportunities to specialize in one form or another, or to declare oneself normal against the other, are vast indeed. A smaller society with fewer opportunities for journalists, and literary traditions that less strenuously divide the factual from the fictional, might imagine journalism's relation to civic life differently.

With those caveats in mind, let us return to the question. What would it take for literary journalism to assert its relevance to public life? I believe that literary journalists will have to struggle more deeply with three problems in their current practice. These problems are both technical and theoretical. The first is the challenge of writing a decentered feature story. Literary journalism works within, and often significantly extends, the familiar conventions of feature writing. It builds its stories around individual personalities, allows itself a measure of narrative leisureliness, and imagines "human interest" as the source of its appeal. This person-centered approach deepens our engagement with subjects (and can even be considered humanistic in its orientation), but it may over-theorize the individual and under-theorize the group. Is it possible for literary journalism to describe a social field, in which individuals are not the entire focus but moments in a larger social process, in the way that cultural studies and sociology regularly attempt?

Second, literary journalism should probably pay more attention to organizational dynamics, given how much of the world's work is performed in such contexts. One can detect this absence in conventional journalism as well. Charles Peters, longtime publisher of *Washington Monthly* magazine, for years has argued that one of the major limitations of political journalism is reporters' lack of experience in the bureaucratic settings on which they report, making them more gullible and less understanding of organizational decision-making. There are certainly exceptions to this observation. Ted Conover's *Newjack*, an account of the work of correction officers in Sing-Sing prison, could be assigned in a class on organizational communication, to illustrate how members of a rules-based organization soften the edges of formal control. Even there, however, the focus remains on Conover's experience of becoming a corrections officer—a strategy necessitated by his choosing to disguise his identity in order to gain access to the system, thus making it harder for him to interview prisoners to understand their life as they see it. Indeed, journalists may report less on organizations because they are routinely denied access to many corporate and governmental settings, especially when they might be asking the organization to accommodate them for months at a time.

Third, group conflict is one of the most central and persistent facts of contemporary societies, but such conflicts are not much documented in American literary journalism. To be sure, the profession of journalism has a possessive investment in conflict, as many critics have noted. *Esquire* titled its anthology of work from the 1960s *Smiling through the Apocalypse*. But journalism's accounts of conflicts often center on events, and may not fully capture the group life behind the events. Even less common are stories that document the social processes that eventually resolve conflicts. Taken together, these instances point to a single problem: How could literary journalism report more effectively on group life? What stylistic or interpretive trade-offs would it have to make in order to do so?

I believe that literary journalism is capable of producing a more nuanced understanding of organizational life and group conflict, although some styles of literary journalism may find it more difficult to accommodate such purposes. This semester I taught, as I have for years, John McPhee's *Encounters with the Archdruid*. That book admirably exemplifies the clarity of McPhee's voice, the depth of his background research, his subtle management of his persona in the story, and of course his remarkable organizational skills. It is a book about conflicts over the environment in which David Brower, long-time head of the Sierra Club, is pitted against three "opponents": a mining engineer, a real estate developer, and a dam builder. McPhee's method requires

him, in this case, to personify group political positions, with Brower always playing the role of staunch defender of the environment facing down his critics. This approach adds color to what might otherwise be abstract political views, but it carries its own risks. In the first and third sections of the book, sparks fly between Brower and his opponents, and McPhee, having instigated the encounters, can simply stand back and record them as they happen. In the second section, Brower and the developer get along too well, and McPhee must supply more of the drama himself with some skillful writing and juxtaposition. His portrayal of group conflict over the environment depended, in other words, on his success in arranging a dramatic encounter between two individuals. Such radical forms of synecdoche, letting the single instance stand for the whole, seem characteristic of all journalism. It is a literary habit of long standing in the daily press, and one that literary journalism cannot fully escape.

We might well resign ourselves to that fact, saying that we have discovered the limits of literary journalism as a mode of understanding and style of dramatic narrative. We could admit that journalism will always prefer to frame the action in scenes, simplify the *dramatis personae* involved in a conflict, focus on a few key symbols, and prize the representative quotation. At some level, these traits seem true of much human storytelling. And yet, if journalism deserves a special place in our conception of civic life (and not everyone believes that; a political scientist colleague of mine once referred to it as an epiphenomenon), should we expect it to say more about the group and organizational worlds in which we spend so much of our lives? Are not the power and reach of those worlds critical to the problems of civic life we now face?

One writer who has consistently attacked these issues has been Jane Kramer, who has written the "Letter from Europe" for the *New Yorker* for many years. Even when her stories feature a main character, they shift from one character to another in a way that simulates the feel of group life. Her 1970s stories about migrant workers in Europe, for example, capture the sense that families are involved in those migrations. In effect, she decenters the feature story in order to describe how individuals move into the roles of "migrant workers" without seeming to diminish them as individual actors. In *Whose Art Is It?*, her account of a controversial public art installation in the Bronx, she explicates the meanings that the different groups attach to the art work while still offering a rich profile of the artist, John Ahearn. Her book of essays on Germany—*The Politics of Memory*—explores the cultural controversies through which Germans try to discern their country's future. Indeed, Kramer has even tried to profile cities, as she does with Berlin in *The Politics of Memory*, or with Zurich in *Europeans*, her 1980s collection of stories.



Kramer's ability to simulate the whole depends upon a particular stylistic invention. She uses direct quotation rather sparsely, and finds ways to incorporate the positions of her subjects into her own narrative voice in a way that retains their tone and import. She avoids bouncing back and forth between quotes from her individual actors in a way that would give the impression that the whole is nothing more than a messy aggregate of the parts. This method of authorial control can make her works resemble essays, even when she has produced the story using the same forms of reporting that other writers would. She willingly trades drama and immediacy for interpretive depth. One finds a similar tradeoff in the later work of Joan Didion, in which the severe compression of her diction creates a sense of social density.

I offer these comments not so much as a settled conclusion, but as an invitation for us all to go back and reread our favorite examples of literary journalism in a different way, in order to achieve more theoretical clarity about whether journalism, as a mode of understanding, is capable of portraying the life of groups and organizations with as much subtlety as it does individual characters and interpersonal relations. Perhaps all forms of journalism necessarily sacrifice some analysis for the sake of drama; that may be the price of creating a widely shared narrative of our common life. But we live these days in worlds of such organizational complexity that it would be interesting to see more examples of what literary journalism could make of that experience. Or perhaps that is just the way the world seems to a university provost. That is definitely a topic for another day.



## The 2011 Keynote: An Appreciation

Richard Lance Keeble  
University of Lincoln, U.K.

*Richard Lance Keeble is acting head of the Lincoln School of Journalism. He is the author and editor of twenty books, including The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter, London: Routledge. He is the winner of a 2011 National Teaching Fellowship—the highest award for teachers in higher education in the U.K.*



John J. Pauly's keynote at the annual conference of the IALJS, in Brussels this past May, amounted to a powerful and elegantly argued case for literary journalism as a moral and political pursuit at the heart of civic life. Focusing particularly on the United States, Pauly stressed that literary journalism had typically preferred the cultural to the civic: "It discovers its most profound stories in humans' quest for meaning rather than in the civic drama of news." In addition, Pauly contended that literary journalism was most confident when building stories around individual personalities—with "human interest" the source of its constant and enduring appeal.

Having identified the principal characteristics of literary journalism, Pauly moved on to call for a new set of priorities. Firstly, he suggested that it might direct its attention more at describing "a social field in which individuals are not the entire focus but moments in a larger social process, in the way that cultural studies and sociology regularly attempt." Literary journalists (as well as "conventional journalists") should also aim to highlight more organizational dynamics "given how much of the world's work is performed in such contexts." Finally, Pauly raised this crucial question: How could literary journalism report more effectively on group life and group conflict?

Pauly's field of literary journalism is not entirely barren since he is able to refer to a number of writers who are already capturing the essential drama of civic life: for instance, Ted Conover in *Newjack*, his account of the work of correction officers in Sing Sing prison; Jane Kramer, whose "Letter from Europe" over many years for the *New Yorker*, while often shifting from one character to another, manage to "stimulate the feel of group life"; and Joan Didion, whose later work created "a sense of social density."

John J. Pauly's critique of the "human interest" bias of literary journalism (and it could be extended to the mainstream media in general) struck me as particularly important and timely. Indeed, the hyper-personalization of the media serves an ideological function—over-simplifying enormously complex histories and diverting attention from other important social, political, geostrategic, religious, and environmental factors. As Colin Sparks argues: "The popular conception of the personal becomes the explanatory framework within which the social order is presented as transparent."<sup>1</sup> The media fail to convey the "social totality" comprising "complex mediations of institutional structures, economic relations and so on." And Steve Chibnall suggests that the personalization of politics and the media is "perhaps the most pervasive product of the cultural fetishism of modern society."<sup>2</sup> Issues are increasingly defined and presented in terms of personalities "catering for the public desire for identification fostered by the entertainment media."

Let us take just one example to highlight the relevance of Pauly's critique. Ian Jack, a columnist in the London-based *Guardian*, is rightly seen by many as an outstanding literary journalist. Yet in his recent profile of the celebrated English journalist Chapman Pincher<sup>3</sup>, now 97 years old, he highlighted, in typical elegant prose, Pincher's close links to the intelligence services—and his tendency to leak information, disinformation, and lies on behalf of the spooks into the media. But by focusing on just Pincher, Jack failed to highlight the close political and institutional links between the intelligence services and Fleet Street—with many journalists working far too closely with the spooks.<sup>4</sup>

I also found Pauly's emphasis on the need for literary journalists to move beyond the human interest to focus on organizational structures and group dynamics extremely pertinent. In my keynote to the association's 2009 conference in Chicago, I looked at George Orwell's war reporting as an example of literary journalism. But take a look again at his 1933 *Down and Out in Paris and London*, that extraordinary postmodernist *mélange* of fiction, autobiography, "human interest" character descriptions, social observation, eyewitness reporting, participatory journalism, and political polemic. (Indeed, should not more literary journalism be aiming at that eclectic mix of genres?)

While working as a *plongeur* in a Paris hotel, Orwell observes with a brilliantly acute eye the “elaborate caste system” operating there. He writes:

Our staff, amounting to about a hundred and ten, had their prestige graded as accurately as that of soldiers, and a cook or waiter was as much above a plongeur as a captain above a private. Highest of all came the manager, who could sack anybody, even the cooks . . . below the manager came the maître d’hôtel. He did not serve at table, unless to a lord or someone of that kind, but directed the other waiters and helped with the catering. . . . A little below the head waiter came the head cook, drawing about five thousand francs a month. . . . Then came the chef du personnel; he drew only fifteen hundred francs a month, but he wore a black coat and did no manual work and he could sack plongeurs and fine waiters.<sup>5</sup>

And so on until Orwell arrives at his fellow *plongeurs*: “We of the cafeteria were the very dregs of the hotel, despised and *tutoied* by everyone.” In a few paragraphs, hasn’t Orwell highlighted “organizational complexity” as sought by Pauly?

There are a lot more contemporary examples to celebrate. The German Günter Wallraff, who is best seen as both an investigative and literary journalist, went undercover (with the pseudonym, Hans Essler) to work for the tabloid *Bild Zeitung* in Hannover to explore its organizational structures and many unethical practices.<sup>6</sup> And most famously Wallraff posed as a Turkish guest worker to expose mistreatment at the hands of employers, landlords, and various authorities.<sup>7</sup>

**I**n the United States, Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dime* (2001) highlights the plight of people in low-paid jobs—and the social and political factors impacting on poverty in the U.S.<sup>8</sup> Here in the U.K., journalist Polly Toynbee similarly went undercover, working as a hospital porter in a National Health Service hospital, a dinner lady in a primary school, a nursery assistant, a call-center employee, a cake factory worker, and a homecare assistant (during which time she contracted salmonella). Out of these experiences came *Hard Work: Life in Low-Paid Britain* (2003).<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the *Washington Post*’s Rajiv Chandraeskaran captures all the surreal craziness of life in Baghdad’s Green Zone (and beyond) in his award-winning *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* (2007).<sup>10</sup> Like Orwell’s *Down and Out*, it weaves together a vast tapestry of different genres: there’s historical background, eyewitness reporting, colorful descriptions of U.S. officials and Iraqi locals, short narrative sections heavy with symbolism—and a vital investigative edge.

Perhaps I am suggesting here that one way of achieving Pauly’s ambition of creating a literary journalism more sensitive to organizational and group complexities is to highlight the challenges of investigative (and often under-

cover) work for our students and the ways in which literary techniques can help add both color and moral urgency to these reports.

One of Pauly's central arguments is built around his stress on the differences between "conventional journalism" and "literary journalism." The former, he says, "unapologetically celebrates a version of what the literary critic Hugh Kenner once called 'the plain style' and disdains more complex narratives that it considers partisan, mannered, or inefficient." Elsewhere, he says, "literary and conventional journalism have sought to escape each other's company" while "there is much to divide them, even in their understandings of journalism as an imaginative, storytelling profession."

My own emphasis would rather be on stressing all journalism as a literary form. Journalism and literature are too often seen as separate fields (one "low," the other "high"). While complex factors (historical, cultural, ideological, political) lie behind journalism's low literary—and academic—status, is there not a danger of literary journalism advocates formulating another hierarchical order of journalistic value? At the top would be "literary journalists" and beneath them "conventional journalists."

But how can such oppositions be maintained in the teaching context? When I am running workshops on news or investigative reporting I want to be able to tell my students that there are opportunities there for the journalistic imagination to flower—through the use of descriptive color, deep background details, fascinating dialog, scene setting, insightful analysis, eyewitness evidence, and so on.

Pauly at one point acknowledges this, commenting that "even routine daily news regularly draws upon a wider array of literary devices than we sometimes think." Let us build on that observation—and encourage all our journalism students to explore the literary dimensions of journalism—not just those hived off into "literary journalism" programs.

---

## NOTES

1. Colin Sparks, "Popular Journalism: Theories and Practice," in *Journalism and Popular Culture*, ed. Dahlgren, Peter, Sparks, Colin (London: Sage, 1992), 24-44.
2. Steve Chibnall, *Law and Order News* (London: Tavistock, 1977).

3. Ian Jack, "Chapman Pincher Was Fleet Street's Spycatcher. His Secret? A Good Lunch," *Guardian*, 1 July 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentis-free/2011/jul/01/ian-jack-chapman-pincher-fleet-street>; accessed 2 July 2011.
4. Richard Keeble, "Hacks and Spooks—Close Encounters of a Strange Kind: A Critical History of the Links Between Mainstream Journalists and the Intelligence Services in the U.K.," in *The Political Economy of Media and Power*, ed. Klaehn, Jeffery (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 87-111.
5. George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (London: Gollancz, 1933; reissued by Penguin, 1966 and regularly reissued).
6. Günter Wallraff, *Der Aufmacher* (The Lead Story), (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1977).
7. Günter Wallraff, *Lowest of the Low* (London: Methuen, 1988).
8. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001).
9. Polly Toynbee, *Hard Work: Life in Low-Paid Britain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).
10. Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).





# Book reviews . . .

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

---

## A Woman Scorns

*Iphigenia in Forest Hills*

by Janet Malcolm

*Reviewed by Brian Gabriel . . . . . 92*

## A Pox on Your Olympics

*Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report*

by Iain Sinclair

*Reviewed by Nick Nuttall . . . . . 95*

## The Literary Journalist as Savior

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

by Jacob Wheeler

*Reviewed by Melissa Nurczynski . . . . . 98*

## Studs Terkel, Meet Your Chinese Counterpart

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

by Liao Yiwu

*Reviewed by Willa McDonald . . . . . 101*

## The Great Migration, Reimagined

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

by Isabel Wilkerson

*Reviewed by Kathy Roberts Forde . . . . . 105*

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

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

by Gabriel Thompson

*Reviewed by Isabel Soares . . . . . 109*

## The Documentary Novel and Its Many Theories

*Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel*

by Leonora Flis.

*Reviewed by John J. Pauly . . . . . 113*

## How to Write a Long-form Story

*Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*

by Jack Hart

*Reviewed by Mark H. Massé . . . . . 116*

## Literature—What Is It Good For? Absolutely Something

*The Use and Abuse of Literature*

by Marjorie Garber

*Reviewed by Michael Robertson . . . . . 119*

*Literary Journalism Studies*

Vol. 3, No. 2, Fall 2011

## Stepping Down from the Book Watch

Thomas B. Connery,  
University of St. Thomas, U.S.A.

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

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

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



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

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

---

*Thomas B. Connery is a professor of Communication and Journalism at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and former dean of its College of Arts & Science. His book on journalism as a form of realism in nineteenth century America, Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life (Northwestern University Press) was published this past July. In addition, he wrote and edited A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism (Greenwood) and co-authored Writing Across the Media (Bedford/St. Martin's). He is a past-president of the American Journalism Historians Association and the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists. He has taught a course on literary journalism almost every academic year for the past twenty-two years.*

---



# A Woman Scorns

## *Iphigenia in Forest Hills*

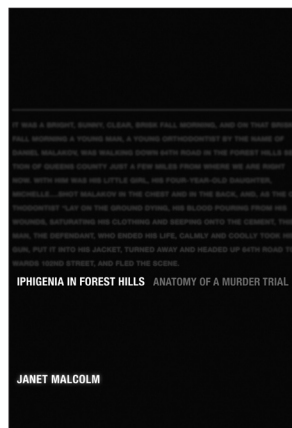
by Janet Malcolm. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011. Hardcover, 155 pp., \$25.

Reviewed by Brian Gabriel, Concordia University, Canada

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

1. Janet Malcolm, "The Journalist and the Murderer, Part 1," *New Yorker*, 13 March 1989, 38.
-

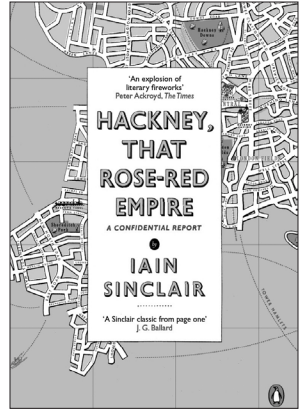
## A Pox on Your Olympics

*Hackney, That Rose-Red Empire: A Confidential Report*

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

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



## The Literary Journalist as Savior

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

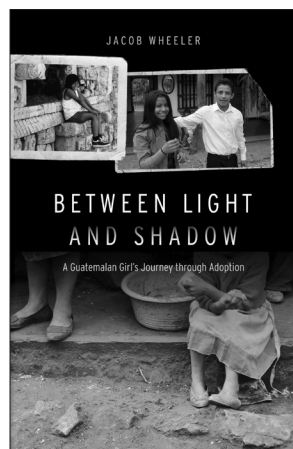
Reviewed by Melissa Nurczynski, Kutztown University, U.S.A.

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

## Studs Terkel, Meet Your Chinese Counterpart

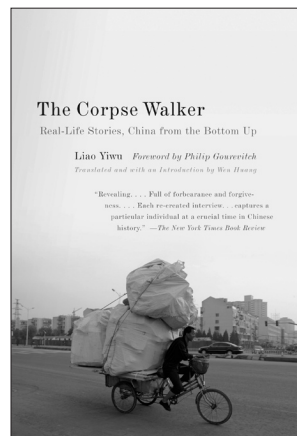
*The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories, China from the Bottom Up*

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

Reviewed by Willa McDonald, Macquarie University, Australia

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

## The Great Migration, Reimagined

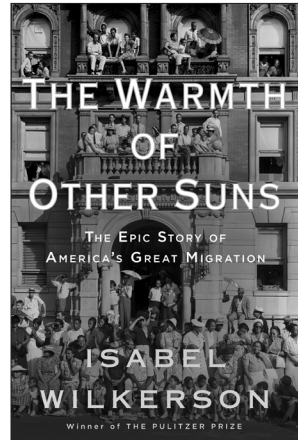
*The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*  
by Isabel Wilkerson, New York: Random House, 2010. Hardcover, 622 pp., \$30.

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

2. Ibid.

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

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

---

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

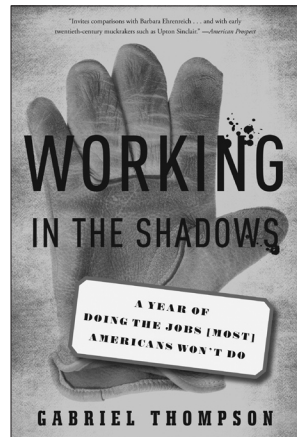
*Working in the Shadows: A Year of Doing the Jobs [Most] Americans Won't Do* by Gabriel Thompson. New York: Nation Books, 2010. Hardcover, 298 pp., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Isabel Soares, Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

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

# The Documentary Novel and Its Many Theories

*Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel*

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

---

## How to Write a Long-form Story (Revised)

*Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*

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

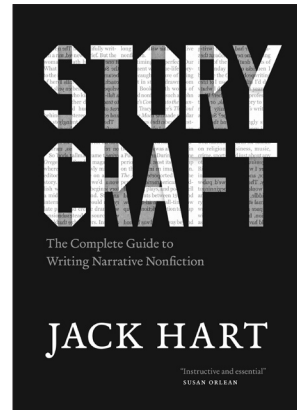
Reviewed by Mark H. Massé, Ball State University, U.S.A.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## NOTES

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

# Literature—What Is It Good For?

## Absolutely Something

*The Use and Abuse of Literature*

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

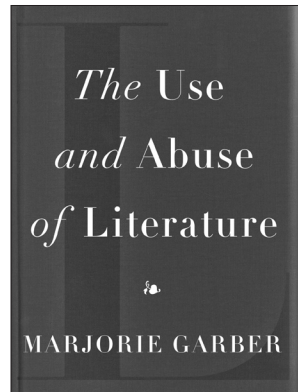
Reviewed by Michael Robertson, The College of New Jersey, U.S.A.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





# Building a bibliography for the study of literary journalism

*A note from . . .*

Miles Maguire and Roberta Maguire,  
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh  
Associate editors for bibliography

This issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* includes the first installment of what is planned to be a regular feature—a listing of bibliographic entries that both documents the growing scope of new scholarship and recognizes earlier scholarship that is coming to light now as the field matures and expands to encompass more work outside of English. These new listings will build on the bibliography that was published in the spring 2011 issue, and the goal is to develop a fully searchable, Web-based database.

We have developed a structure for each bibliography entry that begins with basic citation information and then adds further descriptive terms. Our goal is for each item in the bibliography to be described by at least three terms, starting with country/region and era (according to century). Other possible descriptors include authors discussed, form (including such terms as sketches, long form, gonzo), venue (referring to the kind of publication where work has appeared, e.g. magazines), and topics, such as race, politics, culture, and poverty.

We believe that this bibliography, whether in print or online, will be a valuable tool for scholars as they pursue their own research. We hope that it will help to streamline the research process by guiding scholars to research on, for example, particular authors or forms of literary journalism. Also, by showing where previous studies have already addressed particular issues, the bibliography can help to reduce duplication of efforts. In addition we hope that the bibliography will help to raise the profile of our disciplinary field and attract even more research and scholarship.

To reach these goals, we are going to need a lot of help. That's why we spoke at IALJS-6 in Brussels about forming a bibliography committee. One role for members of this committee will be to identify and provide bibliographic information for scholarship that is not yet in the database. We are

particularly interested in having members who are fluent in languages other than English who can both suggest works for inclusion and serve as referees to help us evaluate scholarship that is beyond our expertise.

We expect this committee to operate fairly informally and inclusively. If you are interested in helping us with this effort, please contact us by email. Even if you are not interested in participating over the long term, please do let us know of any suggestions for or concerns about our approach. We welcome, and need, your input.

A final note on the bibliography being compiled here. The first installment published in the last issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* is now available online at the journal's website, [www.literaryjournalismstudies.org](http://www.literaryjournalismstudies.org). The new listings in this issue will be added to the online site in the near future.

In related news, we are happy to note that the publisher of this journal, the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, has recently entered into an agreement to have the content from *Literary Journalism Studies* included in EBSCO Publishing's Communication & Mass Media Complete database, a widely used research tool that contains articles from many of the leading scholarly publications in media studies. Because this is a nonexclusive agreement, we hope to develop similar arrangements with additional database providers. Your suggestions about other databases where the content from this journal should appear are most welcome. Please let us know.

Miles Maguire, [maguirem@uwosh.edu](mailto:maguirem@uwosh.edu)

Roberta S. Maguire, [maguire@uwosh.edu](mailto:maguire@uwosh.edu)



## *Literary Journalism Studies*

### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF SCHOLARSHIP AND CRITICISM EXAMINING LITERARY JOURNALISM: NEW ADDITIONS

#### INTERNATIONAL

Abrahamson, David. "The Counter-Coriolis Effect: Contemporary Literary Journalism in a Shrinking World." In *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, 79-84. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. 21st century; Literary journalists of the late 20th & early 21st centuries; Magazines, books; Geopolitics.

Sims, Norman. "The Evolutionary Future of American and International Literary Journalism." In *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, 85-91. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. 21st century; Literary journalists of the 20th & 21st centuries; Literary journalism; Magazines, books; Changes in economics and technology.

#### AUSTRALIA

Joseph, Sue. "Recounting Traumatic Secrets." *Journalism Practice* 5, no. 1 (February 2011): 18-33. 21st century; Narrative; Empathy.

#### CANADA

Reynolds, Bill. "The Edge of Canadian Literary Journalism: The West Coast's Restless Search for Meaning Versus Central Canada's Chronicles of the Rich and Powerful." In *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, 61-78. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. 21st century; Members of the "FCC"; Literary journalism; Magazines; Regional journalism.

#### ITALY

Puche, Javier Serrano. "Leonardo Sciascia, Escritor En Prensa: Sus Colaboraciones Con Diarios Italianos (1955-1989) [Leonardo Sciascia, a Writer in the Press: His Contributions to Italian Newspapers (1955-1989)]." *Comunicación y Sociedad* 24, no. 1 (June 2011): 167-87. 20th century; Leonardo Sciascia; Literary journalism; Magazines, books; Italian politics, Sicilian Mafia.

#### THE NETHERLANDS

Dingemanse, Clazina, and Rutger de Graaf. "Dutch Literary Journalism: From Pamphlets to Newspaper (Ca. 1600-1900)." In *Literary Journalism across the*

*Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, 95-117. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. Pre-20th century; M. J. Brusse; Literary journalism; Pamphlets, newspapers; Literary techniques.

## SPAIN

Rodríguez, Jorge Miguel Rodríguez. "El Origen De Los Estudios Modernos Sobre Periodismo Y Literatura En España: El Aporte Fundacional De La *Gaceta De La Prensa Española* (1942-1972) [The Origin of Modern Studies about Journalism and Literature in Spain: The Institutional Contribution of the *Gaceta De La Prensa Española* (1942-1972)]." *Comunicación y Sociedad* 23, no. 2 (December 2010): 203-33. 20th century; Literary journalism; Journals; History of literary journalism.

Parratt, Sonia. "Literary Journalism in Spain: Past, Present (and Future?)." In *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, 134-47. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. 19th and 20th centuries; Creative nonfiction, nonfiction narrative, reportage; Newspapers, books; Journalism, literature.

## UNITED KINGDOM

McKay, Jenny. "Reportage in the U.K.: A Hidden Genre?" In *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, 47-60. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. 21st century; British literary journalists; Reportage; Books.

## UNITED STATES

Berger, Arthur A. "Am I a Siamese Twin?" *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 162/64-67/69. 20th century; Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese; New Journalism; Magazines, newspapers; Popular culture.

Brady, John. "Nude Journalism." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 153/55-61/63. 20th century; Hugh Hefner; Magazine journalism; Magazines; *Playboy*.

Culbert, David H. "Tv/N.J." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 168/70-73/75. 20th century; New Journalists; Television.

Dennis, Everette E. "Journalistic Primitivism." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 122/24-34/36. 20th century; Tom Wolfe, Philip Meyer; New Journalism; Magazines, newspapers; Journalistic methods.

English, John W. "What Professionals Say." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 232/134-40/42. 20th century; Magazines, books; New Journalists' views on New Journalism.

Fishman, Donald. "Norman Mailer." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 174/76-82/84. 20th century; Norman Mailer; New Journalism; Novels, essays.

- Fishwick, Marshall. "Editorial." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 247/149-249/151. 20th century; Magazines, books; Interaction of New Journalism and popular culture.
- . "Popular Culture and the New Journalism." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 99/1-105/7. 20th century; Tom Wolfe; New Journalism; Books, magazines; Popular culture.
- Green, James. "Gonzo." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 204/106-210/112. 20th century; Hunter Thompson, Tom Wolfe; Magazines; Strengths and weaknesses of gonzo style.
- Jacobson, Kent. "The Freaking New Journalism." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 183/85-96/98. 20th century; New Journalism; Books, magazines; Social alienation.
- Johnson, Michael L. "Wherein Lies the Value?" *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 135/37-41/43. 20th century; Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote; New Journalism; Magazines, newspapers; Popular culture.
- Kallan, Richard A. "Entrance." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 106/8-13/15. 20th century; Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese; New nonfiction; Books, magazines; Popular Culture.
- Landreth, Elizabeth. "There Shall Be No Night: Las Vegas." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 197/99-203/105. 20th century; New Journalism; Books, magazines; Las Vegas.
- Nocera, Joseph. "How Hunter Thompson Killed New Journalism." *Washington Monthly*, April 1981, 44-50. 20th century; Hunter Thompson; Gonzo journalism, New Journalism; Books, magazines.
- Sommer, Robert. "New Journalism & New Sociology Compared." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 241/143-46/48. 20th century; Tom Wolfe, Erving Goffman; New Journalism; Magazines, books.
- Sternbergh, Adam. "How James Salter Wrote an Eleven-Page Biography of A. J. Liebling." In *The 6th Floor* (blog). *New York Times*, 21 April 2011. <http://6thfloor.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/21/how-james-salter-wrote-an-eleven-page-biography-of-a-j-liebling/?ref=thenewyorker>. 20th century; James Salter; Sketches; books; A. J. Liebling.
- Van Dellen, Robert J. "We've Been Had by the New Journalism: A Put Down." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 219/121-31/33. 20th century; New Journalists; Magazines, books; Dishonesty of New Journalism.
- Weber, Ronald. "Moon Talk." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 142/44-52/54. 20th century; Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth, John Updike; New Journalism; Books; Space exploration.
- Weirather, Larry. "Tom Wolfe's Snake River Canyon Jump." *Journal of Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (Summer 1975): 211/113-18/20. 20th century; Tom Wolfe; Magazines, books; Popular reception of New Journalism.

## MISSION STATEMENT

### *Literary Journalism Studies*

*Literary Journalism Studies* is an international, interdisciplinary blind-reviewed journal that invites scholarly examinations of literary journalism, a genre also known by different names around the world, such as literary reportage, narrative journalism, the New Journalism, *nuevo periodismo*, reportage literature, literary nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, and creative nonfiction that focuses on cultural revelation. 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 aesthetic sensibility. Ultimately, the emphasis is on the aesthetics of experience.

## INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies is a multidisciplinary 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>.

### IALJS OFFICERS

Alice Donat Trindade, President  
Universidade Técnica de Lisboa  
Instituto Superior  
de Ciências Sociais e Políticas  
Pólo Universitário do Alto da Ajuda  
Rua Almerindo Lessa, 300-663  
Lisboa, Portugal  
+351-213-619-430  
fax +351-213-619-442  
[atrindade@iscsp.utl.pt](mailto:atrindade@iscsp.utl.pt)

Bill Reynolds, Vice President-  
Treasurer  
Ryerson University  
School of Journalism  
350 Victoria St.  
Toronto, Ontario M5B 2K3,  
Canada  
+01-416-979-5000 x6294  
fax +01-416-979-5216  
[reynolds@ryerson.ca](mailto:reynolds@ryerson.ca)

Norman Sims, Second Vice  
President  
University of Massachusetts,  
Amherst  
Department of Journalism  
Bartlett Hall #108  
Amherst, MA 01003, U.S.A.  
+01-413-545-5929  
fax +01-413-545-3880  
[sims@journ.umass.edu](mailto:sims@journ.umass.edu)

David Abrahamson, Secretary  
Northwestern University  
Medill School of Journalism  
Evanston, IL 60201, U.S.A.  
+01-847-332-2223  
fax +01-847-332-1088  
[d-abrahamson@northwestern.edu](mailto:d-abrahamson@northwestern.edu)

John Bak, founding president, 2006-2008

