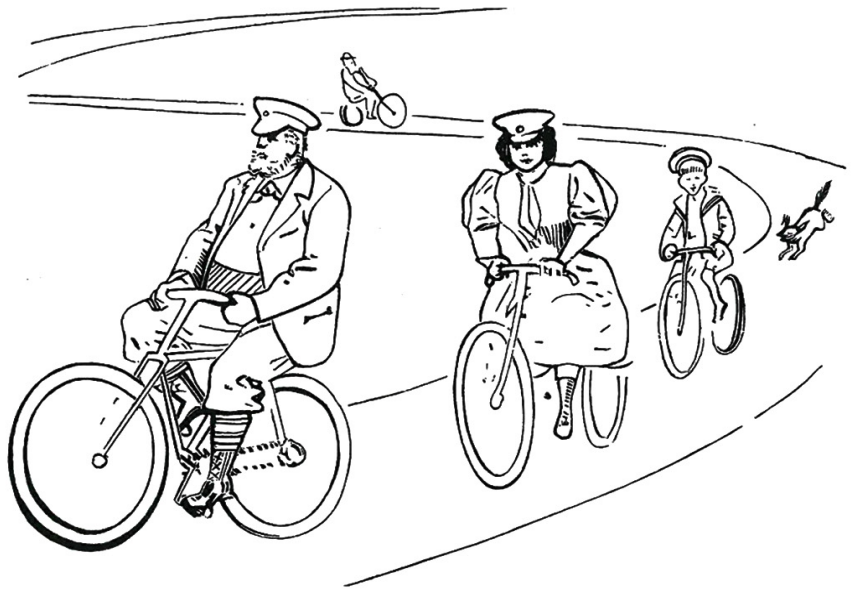
Literary Journalism Studies
Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 2013

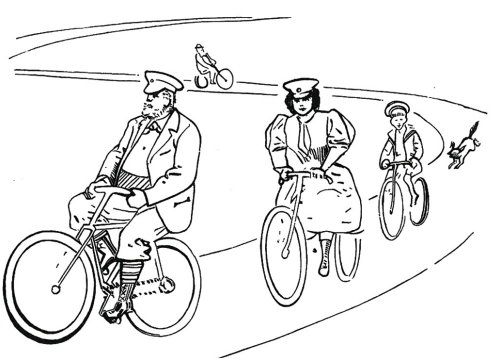


Special Issue

Norwegian Literary Reportage

The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

Our cover



Christian Krohg was a famous Norwegian artist at the end of the nineteenth century. He also wrote early literary reportage, which he illustrated, as in this example of a bicycle tour he took with friends in Normandy. Here, he portrays Frits Thaulow, another famous Norwegian painter, Thaulow's wife Alexandra, their son Harald, and their dog. In the background, around the bend, Krohg appears cameo. Krohg's art very much influenced his literary reportage. The illustration was published with his account of the tour in the Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang* on 17 May 1898. An article on the origins of Norwegian literary reportage begins on page 11.

Literary Journalism Studies

The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 2013

Contents

Website: 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.

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

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 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>. All submissions will be blind reviewed. Send submissions to the editor at <literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com>.

BOOK 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 Nancy L. Roberts at <nroberts@albany.edu>

Note from the Editor…

From my perspective, the collection of articles on Norwegian literary reportage in this issue accomplishes two things. First, and obviously, it provides a clear demonstration of that country's tradition in this genre. Perhaps the tradition has not been as brash, boisterous, and swaggering as the American New Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Nonetheless, it is there.

Second, the Norwegian experience provides evidence supporting a supposition that has been very much a part of this journal's mission since the first issue in 2009: that literary journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, the New Journalism, and whatever other variations, cultural and linguistic, have been practiced but not adequately recognized in countries small and large.

The Norwegian tradition, like the American, precedes the New Journalism. To some extent the New Journalism of some forty to fifty years ago helped to awaken or reawaken interest in a supra-genre (given again the host of cultural and linguistic versions and variants) that had long existed in some form. Nonetheless, there is a tradition in Norway extending back into the nineteenth century, much like the American and Russian, among others.[1] I use it as a prod to ask what other traditions are out there that deserve study? Part of the issue we confront is the continuing need to look beyond the disciplinary blinders we impose on ourselves—for example, that literature is composed of the trinity of three genres, fiction, poetry, and drama. Or, consider traditional journalism studies which long ago associated itself with the social sciences, and that it must be "objective." In its referentiality, literary journalism/reportage, et al., does not make a claim to scientific objectivity, given the heightened subjectivity in the discourse reflected in the "shaping consciousness" of the journalist, as Ronald Weber so concisely expressed it.[2] Because it did not make such a claim, the genre(s) where literature and journalism meet could only be relegated further to the disciplinary margins.

To be sure, we cannot equate one-on-one Norwegian literary reportage and its variants with other traditions such as the American. What readers will discover is that there are similarities but also very much differences in content and critical perspectives. It comes back to culture and language, and the exchange between the two. Those differences and perspectives are important to recognize because their examination helps scholars in the field see just how fragile can be our certitudes. But examining the frailties—and differences of view point—can only make the field of inquiry more robust as we learn to appreciate more thoroughly its nuances.

I would make a further observation. I have watched over the years the growing perception that before a modern narrative literary journalism emerged or began

emerging in the (especially late) nineteenth century, its forerunners included in no small measure, and perhaps in very large measure, travelogue and travel writing—as long as the dominant modalities were narrative and descriptive. We see this again as Jo Bech-Karlsen in the first article draws an approximate boundary between the modern Norwegian phenomenon and earlier narra-descriptive travelogue and travel writing. Charles A. Laughlin dedicated an entire chapter in his *Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience* to the subject of travelogue/travel writing's role as a progenitor of Chinese reportage literature.[3] Isabel Soares intimated this in her "*South:* Where Travel Meets Literary Journalism," in the first issue of this journal in 2009 when discussing the work of a Portuguese author.[4] Katrina J. Quinn did so similarly in her article in vol. 3, no. 1 when discussing an example of epistolary journalism from nineteenth-century America that was also travelogue or travel writing.[5] We detect it indirectly in a compromise made in Keven Kerrane and Ken Yagoda's rich anthology *The Art of Fact*, when travelogue is consciously excluded but nonetheless exceptions are made.[6] Exceptions, of course, reveal the tenuousness of the discrete generic boundaries we attempt to create. The first time, if I recall correctly, I detected this relationship between narrative literary journalism and travelogue/travel writing in English was in examining accounts of exploration and discovery from the sixteenth century, as well as accounts that came later.[7]

Thus scholars in different times and places mutually detect evidence of a fundamental relationship between travelogue/travel writing and narrative literary journalism. Does this mean that they are one and same? No, I think that would be overreaching. Certainly, they can have in common what I have liked to characterize as "the common sense-appeal of the shared common senses,"[8] even if the shared sense-appeals may elicit slightly varying responses, and sometimes not so slightly varying.

But somehow it would be unjust and even morally suspect to characterize *Hiroshima* as travelogue or travel writing given the sheer terrifying magnitude of the event and its (literally) existential dimensions. Nor, of course, need all travelogue be narra-descriptive in its modalities by invoking the common sense-appeal of the shared common senses. One can have narrative summary—a rote recitation of landmarks along the way on the journey without the lush reconstruction of evocative rhetorical appeal to the senses.

What then do we have? I have long believed that when one comes to genre classification it is a mistake to too earnestly emphasize discrete categories: Here you have fiction, here you have poetry, here you have drama, here you have journalism, here you have history, etc. This is because the Linnaean classification of the material world does not work so well when imposed on the fluidity of language. It is not that classification is not useful, but that such classification is approximate at best and runs the risk of ignoring nuance. Perhaps we would do better to view genres as having different functions. As I have long suggested, "Travel narratives, on their face, belong to a topical genre. The kind of literary journalism under discussion here, on the other hand, is fundamentally a modal genre, that of narrative," to which today I would add with strong emphasis the descriptive. "It depends upon if they are approached as topical or modal genres."[8] The same can be said of the topical genre of crime writing,

as well as other topical genres. All of which means, of course, that they can overlap with a modal genre. It depends on whether one approaches such works topically or modally.

There were undoubtedly practical reasons not to open up the Kerrane and Yagoda anthology to an extensive collection of narra-descriptive travelogue and travel writing (and I recognize that travelogue and travel writing can mean different things in other languages and cultures; I only present them as I know them as a native speaker of Amglish). The sheer volume of narra-descriptive travelogue would likely overwhelm and overshadow those compelling examples that make no such topical claim (for example, *Hiroshima*). And as we know a narrative literary journalism has long had to live in the at-times overwhelming shadows of other genres perceived (erroneously, I think) as more culturally central to discourse. The danger would be if we viewed travelogue and travel writing, a topical genre, as one and the same as a narrative literary journalism. The compelling *Hiroshimas* of the world would be overwhelmed.

There is, however, another reason why travelogue and a narrative literary journalism cannot be so discretely separated. When we keep a narrative account we keep a journal or journalism. When we travel, in all the meanings such a term can evoke, we journey. And the common Latin root for these in English is the diurnal, or the passage or journey of the day. After all, the Latin for journalist is *diurnarius*. Thus John Hersey's *Hiroshima* is a journal or journalism of a journey (consisting in that instance of a number of days) in all its existential meaning. We see it in Gunnar Larsen's Norwegian murder account discussed in this issue. We see it in the controversial *Bookseller of Kabul* by Norwegian Åsne Seierstad.

It would stretch the imagination to characterize all such works as travelogue and travel writing, especially given the versions of travelogue and travel writing that are frivolous and designed for the professional tourist who has no desire to mix their subjectivities with the cultural Other, a prerequisite for a compelling narrative literary journalism in my view. Look at some of the travel slicks, or feature stories in travel sections of newspapers, which invariably present the formula of living the illusion of escape sensationalized with some modest danger posing as an existential danger ("As I cast my fly for the elusive mountain trout, I slipped on a slippery stream stone and plunged into the icy alpine waters much to my embarrassment and peals of laughter of my wife." When a St. Bernard shows up with a flagon of brandy, our hero has the happy ending of an epiphany that, as edelweiss waves to the summer alpine breeze and goat bells tinkle to the tune of "The Sound of Music," encourages you to plunk down $2,000 for a ticket to the Swiss Alps). *Hiroshima* was not frivolous and designed for tourists. Nor were Larsen's and Seirstad's accounts. But we can say that they are all (including the frivolous) about taking journeys, real or imagined. It is just that some are more compelling, even profound, such as the existential journey of atom bomb victims seeking to survive. Or the existential journey of murderers to the gallows. Camus (*The Stranger*) and Capote would have something to say about that. As would Norwegian Gunar Larsen reporting the suicide of one of the killers (the other would go to prison, which presumably poses its own unique existential quandary). After all,

in the face of death, as William Barrett observed, life has an ultimate value.[9]

Undoubtedly there is a close association between literary journalism that is narra-descriptive, and travelogue/travel writing that is narra-descriptive. And as efforts continue to explore the origins of modern literary reportage or journalism (in all their variations), the accounts of journeys will likely continue to be one major progenitor as well as, at times, example.

But then that is what our excerpts by Knut Hamsun are about. Hamsun is probably better known outside Norway as the author of the existential, and indeed nihilistic, novel *Hunger* (1890), and is considered one of the founders of literary modernism. But he was also a practitioner of a narra-descriptive journalism that is at the same time a narra-descriptive travelogue, in this case his 1904 *In Wonderland*. While it reflects its era, replete with the kind of value judgments one finds in turn-of-the-twentieth-century European Orientalism, at the least it is also an early proto-literary reportage. It includes a fascinating trip to the Baku oil fields where the Nobel brothers, including the eponymous Alfred, made their fortunes. Such is where narrative meets the descriptive, or a journalism of the journey through time and space.

John C. Hartsock

Notes

1. John C. Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: The 'Other' Literary Journalism," in Literary Journalism Across the Globe, ed. John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 23–46.

2. Ronald Weber, "Some Sort of Artistic Excitment," in The Reporter as Artist, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 20.

3. Charles A Laughlin, Chinese Reportage: The Aesthetics of Historical Experience (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), chapter 1.

4. Isabel Soares, "South: Where Travel Meets Literary Journalism," Literary Journalism Studies 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 17–30.

5. Katrina J. Quinn, "Exploring an Early Version of Literary Journalism: Nineteenth-century Epistolary Journalism," Literary Journalism Studies 3, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 33–51.

6. Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds., The Art of Fact (New York: Scribner's, 1997), 14.

7. John C. Hartsock, A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Mondern Narrative Form (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 102, 120–21, 128–31.

8. Ibid., 71.

9. William Barrett, Irrational Man (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958), 124.

Introduction: Norwegian literary reportage . . .

In exploring Norwegian literary reportage we are exploring an evolution and a cultural perspective. Jo Bech-Karlsen examines the modern Norwegian origins of the genre to be found in the journalistic works of A.O. Vinje, Christian Krohg, and Knut Hamsun. The examination is followed by excerpts from *In Wonderland*, Hamsun's 1904 account of an earlier journey he took in Southern Russia, including the Caucasus. Bech-Karlsen then explores a rough Norwegian equivalent to *In Cold Blood,* one that appeared more than three decades before the latter. Steen Steensen examines the controversy surrounding *The Bookseller of Kabul* and its influence on contemporary Norwegian literary reportage. Finally, Kristiane Larssen and Harald Hornmoen probe the ethical dilemmas contemporary Norwegian practitioners confront.

What readers will find is that our scholars are often working journalists, as well. Larrsen and Hornmoen, for example, interview Steensen who is the author of *Beboerne (The Residents)*. And Larrsen is herself a full-time practicing journalist. It reminds us that critical scholarship can inform practice, and practice can inform critical scholarship. Indeed the relationship is reciprocal. And without that reciprocity, each would be the poorer.

On the next page, we provide our contributors' biographies.

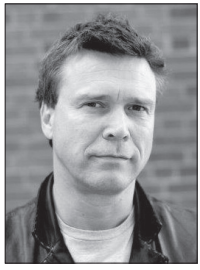
The Editors

Our Contributors

Jo Bech-Karlsen is associate professor in journalism at the Department of Communication, Culture and Language, BI Norwegian Business School in Oslo. He has been a reporter, editor and coach in a great variety of media since 1970. He has published more than twenty books, among them monographs and textbooks on literary reportage and narrative journalism.

Steen Steensen is associate professor at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway. He teaches feature writing, investigative reporting and multimedia journalism. He has a background as a feature writer and literary journalist. He is also the author of the textbook Stedets sjanger: Om moderne reportasjejournalistikk *(Modern reportage journalism) published in 2009.*

Kristiane Larssen is a journalist with D2 *magazine, published by Dagens Naeringsliv. She holds an M.A. in literary journalism from Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Science.*



Harald Hornmoen is associate professor at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. He has written several articles and books on the relationship between science, journalism, and society.

Between Journalism and Fiction: Three Founders of Modern Norwegian Literary Reportage

Jo Bech-Karlsen
BI Norwegian Business School, Norway

The modern origins of literary reportage in Norway can be traced back to the second half of the nineteenth century and a time of uncertain generic boundaries.

In the ongoing effort to excavate the different traditions of literary reportage globally, Norway has its own history. To understand it I will examine three influential Norwegian reporters with origins in the nineteenth century: A. O. Vinje (1818-1870), Christian Krohg (1852-1925), and Knut Hamsun (1859-1952).[1] I have chosen them because they were innovative in their time and worked as reporters for decades. They have "survived"; they are still present in discussions of journalism in Norway, written about in textbooks and biographies, and admired as models. Indeed, we can consider them to be the founders of the modern Norwegian tradition of literary reportage, a term I use in deference to Norwegian and indeed Continental usage, as opposed to the American usage of literary journalism.

Vinje, Krohg, and Hamsun were not only journalists, however. They were also recognized *litterateurs,* writing fiction and poetry. Krohg was, furthermore, a famous painter. Thus, central to any discussion of their literary reportage is the influence of their literary—and artistic—sensibilities on their reportage.

Also central to any such discussion is what I call the "reality contract."[2] Shaped through a slow, dynamic process, the contract is a fundamental agree-

ment between the journalists and their audience; everything they write should be true to what happened in that tangible, material world of phenomenon, or what we conventionally call reality.

The concept of a reality contract was neither clear nor defined towards the end of the nineteenth century, when modern Norwegian journalism began to emerge. Norman Sims writes of the American variety that literary journalists are still "engaged in a struggle to describe reality that has been carried on for more than a century."[3] The reporters a century ago were not yet considered "professional" in Scandinavia. For instance it has been documented that the author and Nobel Prize winner Knut Hamsun mixed reporting and fiction in 1885, in what literary researcher Monika Zagar labeled as a mixed genre, in which Hamsun combines journalistic reporting with a freely invented core [meaning "main" or "central"] story.[4]

This study will be explorative, and will build on existing research. It also accepts as a point of departure Zagar's position that the Norwegian literary reportage is a genre mix of journalism and fiction during this period. Even if some of the mix seems to have been spontaneous and may be unconscious, there are signs of a more conscious use of genre mix, like in Hamsun's travel book from the Caucasus (1903), *In Wonderland,* originally with the provocative subtitle *Experienced and Dreamed in the Caucasus*.[5] Vinje also mixed poetry and reporting in his most famous travel book *Travel Memories from the Summer of 1860*.[6] Krohg's journalism was obviously influenced by his art—and it went the other way: his novels and art were influenced by his journalism. I will investigate the reportage of these author-journalists to see whether they tried to fulfill, or were even conscious of, the "reality contract" with their readers.

Literary reportage, which sometimes is simply called "reportage," is often described as a modern genre. According to the Swedish literary scholar Per Rydén, the history of reportage is "short and special" but built on a "long and more common tradition."[7] He dates the first Swedish literary reportage to the 1880s. The German reportage researcher Michael Haller puts vital importance on what he considers to be the two classic main functions of reportage: the description of a journey and the eyewitness report.[8]

Bearing this in mind, Vinje, Krohg, and Hamsun wrote travel literature; it was on their journeys that they started to experiment with literary reportage, inspired by what they saw and sensed while travelling, and of course by new literary impulses like literary realism and naturalism. The history of modern literary reportage can be traced back at least to Honoré de Balzac and Émile Zola, who became models for more than these three Norwegians, for instance for the Swedish reporters August Strindberg and Ivar Lo-Johansson.[9]

They all were influenced by the literary movements in realism and later naturalism, and their writing was subjective, reflecting the strong personal essay tradition these writers were familiar with. These models had great impact on the development of the Norwegian and the Swedish reportage genre.[10] The strongest impulse was a new interest in the accuracy of the reality portrayed, as opposed, for instance, to the usual romantic idealization of poverty.[11] Content was crucial for these reporters, but they also struggled to develop a new literary style to express this content. As Steen Steensen points out in his article in this volume, they moved in the direction of a modernist approach; the reportage became a "personal narrative."

Vinje, Krohg, and Hamsun travelled extensively, and not only into the far reaches of their own country, Norway. They also travelled to other countries: Vinje reported from England, Krohg from Berlin, Paris, and Normandy, and Hamsun from America, Russia, and France.

This kind of travel literature (what is called in Norwegian "*reiseskildringer*") belongs to the "long and more common tradition" that eventually led to Norwegian literary reportage in the modern sense. Many of these travel texts were partly fiction in the sense of freely invented material. Although we want to distinguish fictional from nonfictional literature, such distinctions have proved difficult to make in practice because the genre was based on a "double contract" with readers. The word is taken from a book published in 2006, *The Double Contract*, written by the Danish literary scholar Poul Behrendt. Basically, it means that the contract with readers is not clear because the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction are not clear.[12] Traditionally, he writes, the contract with readers was formed in one of two ways. One said that everything on these pages is true, it deals with something that really happened, and if necessary it may be confirmed empirically. That is the nonfiction contract: "That was the contract the documentary writers of the 1960s and 1970s made with their readers."[13] The other contract said that everything in this book is made up. That is the fiction contract. These two contracts "are to an increasing degree engaged in to fool the readers," Behrendt states.[14] What if the newspaper reportage appears to be fiction, with invented characters and places? The double contract makes, then, the established frames between fiction and nonfiction break down. Behrendt emphasizes that the double contract is not a genre ; it is "an invasion and may in principle invade any genre."[15]

Hamsun's mix of fact and fantasy from 1885 was probably quite common during the long tradition, going back to the famous instance of the travel writings of Marco Polo. Evidence suggests it is doubtful whether Marco Polo had ever been in China.[16] Thus, we should avoid talking about reportage

in this long tradition, and reserve the genre for the "short and special" cases, let us say from around 1880. It seems somewhat naive when John Carey presents all kinds of travel literature from Thucydides onwards, including Marco Polo's stories from China, as reportage in his *The Faber Book of Reportage* from 1987. In the introduction to the book he insists that reportage must be true: it "must not be inward and fanciful, but pinned verifiably to the clockface of world time."[17] He also insists that "reportage must be written by an eyewitness" (even if he admits that not all the selected texts have been). Many of the "reportage" pieces in the book are a kind of travel literature with *more* or *less* fictional content. This mix of fact and fiction seems to have been commonly accepted during many periods in the history of travel literature. It is likely that this hybrid literary tradition influenced writers and journalists in the late nineteenth century, when they experimented with the new reportage genre. They did not know of anything else.

This starting point is important because we must assume there are elements of fiction in the early examples of literary reportage. I first realized how naive some text studies of reportage have been, including some of my own, when I read Monica Zagar's exposure of Knut Hamsun's journalism ten years ago.[18] In 1885 he published "From an Indian Camp" based on travels in the United States that appeared in two parts in the daily newspaper *Aftenposten*. In Norwegian genre history, journalism researchers call these texts "observation-based reportage," simply because Hamsun apparently used observation as his main method.[19] However, Zagar has convincingly documented that these reports were partly fiction. Hamsun did not meet the Indians he is describing and "interviewing"; it is even doubtful that some of them had existed, and if they had, they died many years before Hamsun visited the actual area in Wisconsin for the first time in 1883. This, I wrote in 2003, should lead to other, additional methods in journalism genre research.[20] Textual analysis alone is not sufficient, because information given in the text may be false. We need more context and empirical evidence; at least we have to show something was *likely* to have happened in the way it is described. It is possible to make spot tests to verify fundamental facts. It is not enough to claim authenticity based exclusively on information given by the reporter in the text.

It is revealing that all three reporters have been compared with the American New Journalism movement by different Norwegian scholars. The New Journalism in the United States in the 1960s has undoubtedly been the most publicized example of literary journalism. And while American scholarship in the last twenty years has amply demonstrated that it was hardly new, nonetheless that period has often provided a point of reference from which much

Scandinavian scholarship drew for comparison. But as a point of reference we can now see that it is false given the more recent historical findings. That applies not only to the United States, but to Norway as well, as this article reveals, and most likely to other countries where literary reportage was largely ignored by the academy and *belle lettres*. Of course one salient difference from the American New Journalism is that in Norway in the late nineteenth century journalism and fiction still freely mixed.

Fortunately, researchers have followed in the footsteps of two of the reporters in this article: Jon Severud in Vinje's steps 150 years later, and Bjørn Rudborg and Ole Petter Førland in Hamsun's steps 100 years later. Through this retracing we can get closer to the reporters' conception of the truth of the reality they portray. There is also some evidence of Christian Krohgs' conception of reality, especially in Arvid Bryne's book *Christian Krohg: The Journalist.*[21]

A.O. Vinje

In 2010 it was 150 years since Aasmund Olavsson Vinje made his long journey from Kristiania (re-named Oslo in 1925) to Trondheim mainly on foot. It resulted in his most famous book, *Travel Memories from the Summer of 1860*.[22] In the anniversary edition, the publishing house presented the volume as a "pioneer work in Norwegian journalism."[23] This view is based on the findings of several researchers who have described Vinje as "one of the founders of modern Norwegian journalism."[24] The scholar of rhetoric Jon Severud writes that Vinjes' journalism "is pointing forward to modern feature journalism."[25] The journalism professor Thore Roksvold states that Vinje "uses modern techniques in complex observation-based reportage at least with the same perfection as the writers in the 1960s New Journalism tradition."[26] In the recently published *Norsk Presses Historie* (Norwegian press history), the book is described as "The first modern travel reportage in Norwegian journalism."[27] It is also defined as "an early example of literary journalism, with a distinct first-person narrator, humor, observation and narrative." [28] The literary researcher Jon Haarberg has shown *how* Vinje's journalism was literary in his book on the author[29]: Factual events are given a literary structure and fictitious events are added. "How much of the reportage that is 'true' is an open question," Aina Nøding writes.[30]

Haarberg relates the book to "subjective, humorous travel literature ("reiseskildring")" and "sociological reportage."[31] Even while he still lived, Vinje was accused of "factual inaccuracies."[32] For instance he tells how the glimpse of a beloved girl in a harbor prevents him from entering a ship: "And that was fortunate, because a storm in the fjord made the ship go under. I think they

all died. . . . The girl saved my life."[33] The intent is humorous, and according to Haarberg it is freely invented fiction, inspired by the fact that there had been bad weather lately, and one man had died in the fjord. It is representative of the kind of humorous hyperbole Vinje engaged in. Another example is a story from a farm, where the pig disliked that the traveler borrowed its food dish. Haarberg shows that the same story had been told by another author earlier.[34] In some stories, he writes, "Vinje has simplified and adapted to the factual basis."[35] But at the same time he states that these features of fiction in themselves do not create a breach with the factual basis from which they derived.

The purpose of Vinje's journey was to witness the crowning of the new king, Karl XV, in Trondheim. There is no doubt that he was present at the crowning in Trondheim; he was at the time a famous man, and was observed and later even described in newspapers and books. Severud also confirms that Vinje had been to most of the places he writes about, and that he had even met most of the people he claims to have met. In many places there are still traces from his visits: pictures, guest books, and other textual material. In addition, Severud has met people who have heard stories passed through generations about Vinje's visits. But he also indicates that Vinje describes places he did not visit, probably for various practical reasons, even if his plan had been to do so. These scenes were created, based on information from other sources.

Some of Vinje's travel book is in the form of lyrical poetry, based on the reporter's observations and emotions. It is done in such a way that the journalist in the text, as first-person narrator, bursts into song and lyrics that express his state of mind and heart. Moreover, Vinje uses poetic license to express himself. For instance, he describes a forest that bows down and kisses "this black river."[36] But the river is brown, and the local people insist it has always been. But in this poetic manner, where Vinje personifies the forest and the river, black suits the picture better than brown. Vinje sometimes takes to this kind of poetic freedom.

At times, Vinje even uses some license in the circumstances of how the story is put together. In one chapter from Trondheim he compares two different craftsmen—the shoemaker and the baker.[37] He makes it clear that he did meet the shoemaker in Trondheim, and Jon Severud has even identified him.[38] However, it is more vague when and where he met the baker. It seems likely it is someone he had met earlier somewhere else, but he places him in this story from Trondheim because he needs him as a literary foil to make the comparison between the crafts. It is difficult to find concrete evidence for the existence of this craftsman, Severud concludes.

Vinje also makes his characters better and worse than they probably were for optimum dramatic effect. For instance he describes a former famous politician, now a rich farmer, as an anti-modern, reactionary, and evil man, and this contrasts with an endearing, self-sacrificing priest. "Literary Vinje needs this one-dimensional farmer figure as an antithesis to both his heroes of modernization and the poverty he observes," Severud writes.[39]

A.O. Vinje is famous for his so-called *tvisyn*, which in English would be something like ambiguity or ambivalence. Directly translated, to be *tvisynt* is to have a double sight. Vinje himself describes it this way: "to see at a glance what is right and wrong in the web of life, in a way that can make us cry with one eye and laugh with the other."[40] It refers to a duality both regarding the object (right and wrong) and the observing subject (the ability to see two perspectives, to see the ambiguity). Vinje's *tvisyn* becomes a method and a distinct literary tool in his journalism; it creates tension and uncertainty for the reader.

Vinjes' ambiguity was reflected when he reached the goal of his journey, Trondheim. During the crowning ceremony, he met the rich and poor, the upper and lower classes, and he could not decide for himself which was more fascinating. He placed himself in the interval *between* the popular and the elite. His reportage from the ceremony reflects a unique perspective—his sight is not fixed on the crowning itself, but on everything that happens *around it*. It is not a news report but, rather, a literary reportage focused on human interest.

Christian Krohg

In 1895 Christian Krohg interviewed the Norwegian lyric poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder.[41] In his book *Christian Krohg: The Journalist*, Arvid Bryne writes that the interview "has most of the characteristics of the phenomenon [American] new journalism. . . . New journalism gives a fictional impression and uses literary techniques, just like Krohg demonstrates."[42] The poet was extremely embarrassed with the picture Krohg made of him; he claimed he was described as "a strange, unrealistic dreamer." Both the text and Krohg's drawing of him, Bryne writes, contributed "to giving the lasting impression of Obstfelder as a queer dreamer lost on the wrong planet."[43] In his bitterness the poet worked five years on a text in which he murders Krohg in revenge, but it had still not been published when he died in 1900. Also, Krohg's interview has something in common with Gonzo: it is brutally direct and can easily be read as disrespectful.

His main work of journalism is found in *The Fight for Existence*, published in four volumes from 1920 to 1921, and containing works from 1885

to 1918.[44] There are obvious connections between the artist and the journalist. First, he developed his famous literary portraits as an illustrator; while drawing people, he started to write down dialogue and characteristic details, and eventually he created what would become a strong and durable Norwegian genre: the portrait interview.[45]

Second, he made impressionism his main journalistic method, both in reportage and portraits. We see it, for example, in 1898 when Krohg went to Normandy in France to write reportage while on a bicycle tour:

> Onwards! Onwards!
>
> The bicycle and I, we whizz through, we whizz past, we ring bells, we scorch around corners, we hurry, we whistle along, we speed downwards.
>
> We enter a city. But we do not stop. Clusters of children in the middle of the street. We split them. We are attacked by a dog, we lose a pedal, we find it again.
>
> Onwards, onwards![46]

The passage reflects an observation made by Georg Johannesen, professor of rhetoric, who wrote that "the God in Krohg's journalism is the moment, a glint in his eye"[47] because of the rapidity of the fleeting movement *of the moment*. This is detected in the unrelenting motion of the active voice in the verbs "whizz," "ring," "scorch," "hurry," "whistle," "speed." Similarly, Holger Kofoed notes, "He grabs the living moment, the condensed universal and human in the situation, and in this way the text becomes alive."[48] The description of bicycling illustrates Bryne's observation that it is hard to see "where Krohg stops to be a painter and becomes a writer—or the other way around."[49] Such is Krohg's impressionism of the moment.

As a painter Krohg was originally a naturalist, eventually becoming a pioneer for impressionism. He made impressionism his main journalistic method, both in reportage and portraits.

What are the consequences of his impressionistic method for his concept of truth and authenticity to reality? When Krohg turned seventy years old, in 1922, the professional journal *Journalisten*'s interviewer characterized him as follows:

> As a journalist Krohg is a sovereign, and thus he feels a sovereign contempt for facts. To be more precise—he has quite a special judgment of facts. Concerning important things, those which really matter, he is safe as a rock. Untruth is far from his character. In his characteristics of a person he is sharp as a knife, as a clean, well-disinfected knife. The features he gives his victims are those they have from his point of view. . . . But he does not give a damn

> about all the small things. He has got a definite sense of what is important and is able to separate it from what is not.[50]

The interviewer is focused on how true is Krohg's reliability. He characterizes his impressionism as selective and highly subjective, while praising Krohg's ability to differentiate between the important and the unimportant.

The bicycle tour of Normandy typifies the active kinds of journeys he took, reported on, and illustrated. It also reflects his willingness to push at more than just the boundaries of genres: The bicycle was such a novelty at the time that he had to engage a teacher (*le professeur de bicyclette*) to learn how to ride it. Then he started out on the French rural trails, most of them in better condition than the main street in Kristiania (again, today's Oslo). The result was eight bicycle reportages in *Verdens Gang* during the spring, the very first of their kind.[51] That he was inspired to be literary is reflected in the fact that one of the reportage texts starts with a quote from Émile Zola—in French:

> L`orange gronde, la vieille societé va
> Disparaître, une seule chose peut nous
> Sauver: la bicyclette gratuite et obligatoire.[52]

Later the quote is translated into Norwegian. In English it means, "The storm is approaching, the old society will go under; only one thing can save us: free and mandatory bicycle riding." Clearly, Krohg had an eye for ironic humor in his observations of the human condition.

I have found no indications that his story is not authentic. On the contrary, he traveled with famous Norwegian friends, who are characters in texts and illustrations, and they would probably have left indications if Krohg had invented characters and events. It is his subjectivity and determined selection that impressionistically colors *his* truth.

While the impressionistic artist influenced Krohg as reporter, the opposite was the case with his novels. They are clearly influenced not only by the painter, but also by the socially engaged journalist.[53] As I read him today, Krohg was an early social reporter, and wrote intentionally provocative texts about ordinary people he felt had been exposed to injustice. Often he only used one single source, and based on this source he accused people in high places of misusing power. Ethically and legally this method would likely not be acceptable today. But the way he was writing these texts brings to mind some of the stories about ordinary people in modern narrative journalism. This is reflected in his most famous novel, *Albertine*,[54] which deals with a controversial subject at the time—prostitution. The book is an attack on public prostitution, and an even stronger attack on corrupt policemen involved in the business. It was confiscated by the police the day after it was published,

but it still caused a heated public debate. "There is no doubt that the novel and the paintings [by Krohg] of Albertine played a crucial role for the abolition of public control and approval of prostitution,"[55] Bryne concludes.

The literary impulse in Krohg's journalism manifested itself in still other ways. For instance, he wrote a play called "Pepper in the Eyes" that was published on the front page of *Verdens Gang*.[56] It was an attack on radical feminism, presented as a tragedy in three acts, and paraphrased Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

Knut Hamsun

As noted, Thore Roksvold states that A.O. Vinje's travel book from 1860 was "Norwegian new journalism one hundred years before Tom Wolfe."[57] He adds that Knut Hamsun is "another example of a Norwegian new journalist from earlier times," based on his Indian camp texts from 1885. Of course, Roksvold reveals here that his point of reference is the American New Journalism. Even more interesting is Hamsun's travel book *In Wonderland* from 1903, based on a journey to Russia and the Caucasus in 1899. The intriguing original subtitle—*Experienced and Dreamed in the Caucasus*—invites further investigation: Is this reportage? What is fact and what might be fiction?

Bjørn Rudborg and Ole Petter Førland travelled in Hamsun's footsteps in 1999 some100 years after him. They conclude that the book "is based on an actual journey with a lot of references to named places, descriptions of nature, and an authentic gallery of persons."[58] But they say the book is "fictional and poetic" as well. They show how fantasy is inserted in travel descriptions. Hamsun explained these parts as feverish fantasies from illness on the last part of the journey. He mentions the fever twenty times in the book.[59] "May the fever be 'the wonderland?'" Rudborg and Førland ask, and continue: "Is he in a state that weakens his consciousness, that gives him visions and hallucinations? Is the wonderland as much feverish dreams as factual experience?"[60]

His translator Sverre Lyngstad adds, "Hamsun himself invites the readers' skepticism in regard to the truth value of his book."[61] Lyngstad refers to an unusual scene between Hamsun and his first wife Bergljot who accompanied him on the journey. He finds her reading his travel diary. She tells him she believes neither in the reality of a certain police officer nor in her husband's ride into the mountains, where he visits a herdsman and has a romance with the latter's favorite wife. Rudborg and Førland also point at this ride on a stolen horse into the mountains as a potential dream and fantasy. Elisabeth Oxfeldt writes that Hamsun makes "us readers unsure about the status of the herdsman episode."[62] On the one hand the storyteller indicates it is something experienced, on the other he reports his wife reading his diary and

refusing to believe his story. Oxfeldt stresses that the "story is authentic but not true. The authenticity is reflected in the fact that the narrator apparently has his dreams and experiences on the very journey instead of inventing them after returning home."[63] Thus the fantastical dreams did, in fact, take place while he was in the Caucasus. This reminds us of "logical fantasy," going back to the Czech-German reporter Egon Erwin Kisch, which means to imagine something that happened at the location of a scene without benefit of firsthand observation.[64] But one important difference is that the fantasy is logical, in Kisch's view, because it could be reconstructed according to how it happened.[65] Many modern reporters use that technique in the form of reconstruction after interviewing participants. In Hamsun's case such a fantasy of events took place because he dreamed them.

"Hamsun clearly emphasizes and plays on the uncertainty of the genre," Oxfeldt writes, with reference both to the main title and the subtitle of the book.[66] In that way she indicates that Hamsun deliberately entered into a double contract with his readers; he wanted to keep them uncertain. In this way Hamsun was pushing the boundaries of modernism, indeed.

However, dreams and fantasy do not dominate the book. On the contrary, Rudborg and Førland accept its overall validity, even if Hamsun exaggerates here and there and sometimes they cannot find named places he refers to in the text. Hamsun worked on the book for years. This was at a time when he experimented with new forms, and one may imagine that he tried to build bridges between journalism and fiction by creating a new literary genre.[67] This genre is close to what we think of today as literary reportage. In the text Hamsun clearly shows how he is working with the facts. In many parts he describes his writing in the notebook, obviously to emphasize that everything is correct. He also goes into detail about his research work. Apparently he is well aware of the reporter's role. The book was published eighteen years later than the text about the Indian camp, and one can speculate that his notion of the reportage genre is clearer than before.

Hamsun's mix of genres also applies to his novels. Several scholars have emphasized the autobiographical and factual aspects in some of his novels. Petter Aaslestad claims that "the I narrator in Hamsun's novels sometimes is closer to the factual Hamsun than we usually have supposed."[68] The prominent Hamsun researcher, Lars Frode Larsen, argues strongly that *Hunger* should be read as an autobiography, not as a novel.[69] This implies that Hamsun had a broad notion of the literary concept that included both fiction and journalism.

His concept of literature was probably determined by the view in his own times in Norway. The word *sakprosa* (factual prose) is a Nordic invention

and was introduced in 1938.[70] The division between fact and fiction is older, but a *distinct* division was still not known in the years around the turn of the century—neither by authors nor readers.[71] The works of literary history at the time when Hamsun started to write included both fiction and *sakprosa* (factual prose); it was all one literature. [72]

Conclusion

Thus, these texts of Vinje, Krohg, and Hamsun are examples of an *early* literary reportage in Norway, even if they have fictional elements. It could not be avoided, since their models wrote in the long tradition of mixed travel genres that not infrequently included fictional elements. Yet we can see a new dedication to being more accurate and trustworthy with the facts, thus reflecting new ideals of an emerging modern journalism. It also illustrates how the concept of a reality contract with readers was being shaped through a slow, dynamic process. These three reporters were among those who started this process. It would be unrealistic to assume these early examples to be purely factual in this respect; they are attempts to do something modern, connected to a new interest in the reality of the material world around us, paralleling naturalism and realism in fictional literature. Krohg seems to be closest to the standards of modern literary reportage; he does not invent or fix stories like the two others sometimes do, but his impressionistic method simplifies and purifies his eye, sometimes to an extreme extent; he feels sovereign to pick details and characteristics he finds useful, even if others in society might be offended.

Most definitions of reportage agree on two demands: 1. A reporter should use first-hand observation, and 2. the reporter should be present.[73] As far as the investigations tell us, all three reporters primarily satisfy these demands. These three reporters also satisfy my own definition of reportage: "The reportage is a personally told story based on the reporter's own experiences in reality."[74]

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the author.

1. Many others are forgotten. I could have added one name, Camilla Collett (1813–1895). She was a "pioneer in Norwegian reportage journalism, not at least among women", according to Norsk Pressehistorie 1660-2010, volume 1, page 335. But her career as a reporter was rather short: She published "sketches" from Berlin and Paris in the 1860s, but after 1868 she only published essays. Today she is remembered as an author of *belletristic* discourse rather than as reporter.

2. Jo Bech-Karlsen, "Literary journalism: Contracts and Double Contracts with Readers," *Literary Journalism*, Vol 4, No 3 (2010), 6.

3. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007), Preface xviii.

4. Monika Zagar, "Imagining the Red-Skinned Other. Hamsun's Article 'Fra en Indianerleir,'" *Edda* No 4 (2001), 392.

5. Translated to English by Sverre Lyngstad in 2004: Knut Hamsun, *In Wonderland* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: IG Publishing, 2004).

6. This is my translation of the title of Vinjes' book *Ferdaminni fraa Sumaren 1860*. Only Hamsun's book *In Wonderland* is translated into English. English titles and extracts from Vinje and Krohg have been translated by me.

7. Per Rydén. *Vår dagliga läsning* (Stockhom: PA Norstedt & Söners Förlag,1981), 192–212. In Scandinavia, "reportage" by itself, without the adjective "literary," mainly means the same as literary reportage. This is reflected in other Central European countries such as Germany, Poland, and the old Czechoslovakia.

8. Michael Haller, *Die Reportage* (München: Ölschläger,1987), 8.

9. Jo Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002), 64–75.

10. For those unfamiliar with the Scandinavian countries, one must in any discussion of Norway during this period refer often to Sweden not only because it was a neighboring country on the Scandinavian peninsula and the languages are similar, but because at the time both were ruled by the same king in what had been a united kingdom since 1814, much as England and Scotland were united in the early seventeenth century. That united kingdom would dissolve in 1905 when Norwegians elected their own king who was a prince from nearby Denmark.

11. Bech-Karlsen 2002: 64–65.

12. Poul Behrendt, *Dobbeltkontrakten*, (København: Gyldendal, 2006), 19–32.

13. Behrendt, *Dobbeltkontrakten*, 19.

14. Ibid.

15. Behrendt, *Dobbeltkontrakten*, 30.

16. Frances Wood, *Did Marco Polo go to China?* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996).

17. John Carey, *The Faber Book of Reportage* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber,1987), xxix.

18. Zagar.

19. Thore Roksvold, ed., *Avissjangrer over tid. Studier i språk og sjanger* (Fredrikstad: Institutt for journalistikk, 1997), 58–60.

20. Jo Bech-Karlsen, "Knut Hamsun som reporter." http://cfje.dk/cfje.VidBase.nsf/ID/VB00547723 - (2003/2004): 18. Accessed 2 August 2007. 18.

21. Arvid Bryne, *Christian Krohg. Journalisten* (Oslo: Unipub, 2009), 7–20, 163–68, 207–17.

22. A. O. Vinje, *Ferdaminni fraa Sumaren 1860* (Christiania: Bergh & Ellefsen, 1861).

23. Aasmund Olavsson Vinje, (*Ferdaminne frå sumaren 1860*. (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 2010), Back cover.

24. Jon Severud, *Ei gjenreise. Ferdaminne etter A.O. Vinje* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 2010), 105.

25. Severud, *Ei gjenreise*, 105–6.

26. Thore Roksvold, *Avissjangrer*, 43.

27. Hans Fredrik Dahl, ed., *Norsk Presses Historie 1–4* (1660–2010), vol. 1 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2010), 336.

28. Dahl, *Norsk Presses Historie*, 336.

29. Jon Haarberg. *Vinje på vrangen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget,1985), Chapter 3.

30. Dahl, *Norsk Presses Historie*, 336.

31. Haarberg, *Vinje på vrangen*, 84–85.

32. Haarberg, *Vinje på vrangen*, 85.

33. Haarberg, *Vinje på vrangen*, 86–87.

34. Haarberg, *Vinje på vrangen*, 87.

35. Haarberg, *Vinje på vrangen*, 86.

36. Severud, *Ei gjenreise*, 251.

37. Vinje, *Ferdaminne*, 162–66.

38. Severud, *Ei gjenreise*, 295. His name was Andreas Lyng (1795–1872).

39. Severud, *Ei gjenreise,* 362.

40. Severud, *Ei gjenreise*, 281–282.

41. *Verdens Gang,* 17 August 1895.

42. Bryne, *Christian Krohg*, 121.

43. Bryne, *Christian Krohg*, 121.

44. Christian Krohg, *Kampen for tilværelsen*, ed. by Anders Krogvig, (København: Gyldendal, 1920–21).

45. Hege Lamark, *Portrettintervju som metode og sjanger*, 2. Edition (Oslo: IJ-forlaget, 2012), 20–21.

46. *Verdens Gang,* 17 May 1898

47. Georg Johannesen. "Christian Krohg—journalistikk og journalisme," *Christian Krohg*, (Oslo: Catalogue The National Gallery, 1987), 4.

48. Christian Krohg, *Kampen for tilværelsen*, ed. Holger Kofoed and Oscar Thue (Oslo: A-Gruppen/Gyldendal, 1989), 12.

49. Bryne, *Christian Krohg*, 61.

50. Bryne, *Christian Krohg*, 17.

51. Bryne, *Christian Krohg*, 209.

52. *Verdens Gang* May 17 1898.

53. Bryne, *Christian Krohg*, 163–68.

54. Christian Krohg, *Albertine* (Kristiania: Huseby, 1886).

55. Bryne, *Christian Krohg*, 73.

56. *Verdens Gang*, 17 January 1895.

57. Roksvold, *Avissjangrer*, 58.

58. Knut Hamsun. *I Æventyrland. Oplevet og drømt i Kaukasien* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2000), 143. From the afterword.

59. Hamsun, *I Æventyrland*, 162.

60. Hamsun, *I Æventyrland*, 162.

61. Hamsun, *In Wonderland,* 14. From the introduction.

62. Elisabeth Oxfeldt, "Orientalske reiseskildringer" in *Den litterære Hamsun*, ed. Ståle Dingstad (Bergen: Fagbokforlaget, 2005), 105.

63. Oxfeldt, "Orientalske reiseskildringer," 115.

64. Jo Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002), 231–40.

65. Klaus Haupt, "Nichts als die Wahrheit" in *Menschen Machen Medien* (MMM) March 2008. In an interview in this article Kisch defines "der logischen Phantasie." www.egon-erwin-kisch.de/texte_2.htm

66. Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen,* 105.

67. Bech-Karlsen, "Knut Hamsun som reporter," 3.

68. Petter Aaslestad, *Narratologi* (Oslo: LNU Cappelen, 1999), 97.

69. Lars Frode Larsen, *Radikaleren. Hamsun ved gjennombruddet 1888–1891*. (Oslo: Schibsted, 2001), 281–303.

70. Ottar Grepstad, *Det litterære skattkammer. Sakprosaens teori og retorikk*. (Oslo: Samlaget, 1997), 47.

71. Grepstad, *Det litterære skattkammer*, 53–56.

72. Grepstad, *Det litterære skattkammer*, 53.

73. Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen*, 22.

74. Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen*, 147.

Excerpts: *In Wonderland*

By Knut Hamsun
Translated by Sverre Lyngstad

Knut Hamsun's *In Wonderland* (1903) is an account of his traveling through Southern Russia and up into the Caucasus Mountains in 1899. It ends in Tiflis after he visits the oil fields of Baku. Of course, Hamsun, a Nobel laureate, is best known for his novel *Hunger* (1890). But fiction is not his only genre. *In Wonderland* is, on the one hand, a travelogue. On the other, it is very much a narra-descriptive account in the tradition of literary journalism, with the emphasis on narrative and descriptive modalities. It is not without its flaws from our contemporary perspective. Hamsun often reveals the kinds of bias we associate with European travelers of the late nineteenth century as they explored their perceptions of what constituted the "primitive" and ultimately the objectfied Other—the Mohammedan, the Tatar, the Dervish—perceptions that resulted in European-inspired "Orientalism." Moreover, he reveals how tenuous the boundary between invented fiction and nonfiction could be at the time. As Jo Bech-Karlsen notes in the previous article, there is evidence Hamsun invented scenes. In one of the excerpts that follow, his "companion," his first wife Bergljot, read his account of the journey—this, while he suffers from a fever and sleeps. When he awakes, she accuses him of lying. As Bech-Karlsen notes, the original subtitle of *In Wonderland* was *Experienced and Dreamed in the Caucasus*. Was an account (not printed here) of a police officer and a journey by horse into the mountains a "dream" he had while he suffered from a continuing fever on the journey? Is this the "secret" in his "heart" to which he refers in the excerpt? Perhaps also fascinating to some is the American presence in the Russian oil fields in 1899.

The Editors

Excerpts from the first English edition are gratefully reprinted by permission of Ig Publishing and translator Sverre Lyngstad.[1]

§

1899: Traveling in Southern Russia

The door to our compartment opens onto the corridor. Here an Armenian has settled down. He has prepared a bed out of pillows. Under him he has an embroidered yellow silk mattress, and on top of him a red-and-brown silk coverlet. He lies full-length in these costly fineries, in a cloud of dust beneath a lowered window. He has pulled off his boots; his cotton stockings are full of holes, making his toes stick out. His head rests on two pillows, the cases of which are very dirty but made of pierced work; through the openings one can see the actual pillows, which are of silk with gold thread.

New people arrive and settle down in the corridor by the Armenian. They are Caucasian Tatars. Their women are veiled, dressed in solid-colored red cotton fabrics, and sit still and dumb on their pillows. The men are tall, dark-complexioned people with a gray cloak over their burnous and with a multicolored silk sash around their waist. In the sash they carry a sheathed dagger. They have long silver chains on their pocket watches.

Our locomotive is now stoked with crude oil from Baku, and the smell of this fuel is much more unpleasant than the reek of coal in the great heat.

We suddenly stop at a tiny little station out on the steppe. We are to meet the train from Vladikavkaz. While waiting, we get out and stretch. The sun is hot and it's calm, and a large crowd of passengers buzz around one another, chatting and singing. And there, once again, is the national guardsman. He's no longer grieving, those solitary hours in his closed compartment have set him up again; perhaps he has had a fortifying sleep during these hours, God knows. He's now walking with a cigarette-smoking young lady. Hatless, she lets the blazing sun shine on her rich hair. They are speaking French, and neither is ever at a loss for an answer. They go into peals of laughter. But the prince's daughter, the lady with the diamond rings, may right now be standing at the altar with someone else.

A man jumps off the train with a bundle in his hand. His face is yellowish brown, and he has glistening inky-black hair and beard. He's a Persian. Finding a little spot for himself, he unties his bundle and spreads two pieces of cloth on the ground. Then he takes off his shoes. My first thought tells me he is someone preparing to do tricks with knives and balls, but in that I'm

mistaken; the Persian is about to do his devotions. He takes some pebbles out of the breast of his caftan and places them on top of the cloths, then turns toward the sun and begins his ceremony. First, he stands bolt upright. From now on he doesn't see a single individual in the whole crowd of bystanders, keeping his eyes upon the two pebbles and being absent in prayer. Then he throws himself on his knees and bends the upper part of his body to the ground several times; at the same time he makes the pebbles change places on the cloth, moving the one which was farthest away closer and to the left. Standing up, he holds out his palms before him and moves his lips. At this moment the train from Vladikavkaz roars past and our own locomotive signals, but the Persian doesn't let himself be disturbed. The train won't depart until he's finished, and if it does, that too was Allah's will. He again throws himself on the ground and makes the pebbles change places; indeed, he mixes them up so recklessly that I can no longer keep track of them. Now he's alone out there, all the passengers have boarded the train. Hurry up, man! I think to myself. But the Persian still takes the time to do some bows and to stretch his arms well out before him. The train starts moving, the Persian stands for a final moment bolt upright facing the sun—then he gathers his cloths, pebbles and shoes and boards the train. And there wasn't a trace of haste in his movements. Some of the spectators on the platform murmur a kind of bravo to him, but the imperturbable Mohammedan doesn't take notice of a single word spoken by those "infidel dogs" and stalks to his seat in the train.

At a station where we stop to take in water, I finally catch sight of the conductor who was supposed to remove the wax from my jacket. He's standing on the ground a few cars down. I say hello to him and smile so as not to frighten him away, because I intend to catch him, and when I've reached him I smile a little more broadly and act amiable. He nods and smiles in return, and when he sees the wax like a white trail down my jacket, he spreads both hands and says something, whereupon he rushes into his cabinet in the train. There he runs to pick up the fluids and the warm flatiron, I think to myself. I didn't understand what he said, but it probably was that he would be back in a moment, milord! And I waited. The locomotive drank, whistled and started to move—then I couldn't wait any longer.

I have several times met the officer from yesterday, our future traveling companion over the mountains. He doesn't know me at all anymore, I've offended him. Thank God. At a station where we had supper he sat right beside me. He put his thick wallet well into the light. It was hardly because he wanted to tempt me to steal the wallet, but to show me that it had a coronet in silver on it. But God only knows whether the coronet was of silver and whether he is entitled to have a coronet. When I paid he didn't say a word and

didn't interfere, but a gentleman on my other side pointed out to me that I'd received too little change. He corrects the waiter's mistake and I receive my money immediately. I get up and bow gratefully to the gentleman.

We have decided not to have the officer for our traveling companion and to avoid him in Vladikavkaz. . . .

A beautiful clear morning in the steppe; the tall grass, roasted brown, whistles softly in the wind. There is an immensely wide expanse wherever you look.[2]

§

Ascending the Caucasus Mountains

Again we observe women mowing grain in a field. The older ones stoop shyly toward the ground and go on with their work, but a young girl stands straight up, looks at us and laughs. She's dressed in a blue sarafan and has tied a red kerchief around her hair; she has sparkling white teeth and dark eyes. When she no longer feels like watching us, she stops laughing, tosses her head nonchalantly and turns away. A brief exclamation escapes us travelers: that toss of the head was matchless.

Village after village. The road zigzags because of the rise, and Kornei, who wants to spare his horses, drives them gently and often waters them. At one watering hole we are overtaken by a foreign carriage that Kornei quietly lets slip past, causing the dust to become unbearable for us who are behind. We order him to stop a while, to allow time for the dust to drift away; on the whole, we do not appreciate his somnolent way of driving. Kornei, on the other hand, seems to think it's going very well now; he's humming.

Evening is upon us. It's getting dusky, and it's noticeably colder. We throw the blankets around our shoulders. I notice that the spot of wax on my jacket is congealing again and turning white, it's like a thermometer up here on the heights; we are at an altitude of 2,000 meters. We are still winding our way between the mountains. Kornei waters the horses yet once more, though it is so cold. All fields cease; we have nearly reached the timberline.

Then we rumble across another iron bridge and arrive at the Kobi station, where we will spend the night. Shortly before we get there, Kornei suddenly jumps down from the box and starts pulling on the tail of one of his horses. At the outset we didn't understand this odd behavior, but in a little while we noticed that the horse's belly was very bloated and that the animal could barely walk . . .

A good place; interesting, too.

We ask for lodging, but all separate rooms are occupied. However, that

doesn't mean we'll be without a roof over our heads; my traveling companion is shown into a large common room for women and I into one for men. There are leather-covered benches along the walls, and I am to sleep on one of them. That's fine. We request some food and are served, without any waiting, an excellent filet, shchi and fruit. My fever has worsened again, so I'm exhorted to abstain from certain foods and drinks; but my satisfaction at having found this place in the mountains and its being so pleasant make me forget about the fever, and I order the following wrong diet: filet, shchi, fruit, beer, and afterward, coffee.

While we are eating, Kornei comes into the hallway and insists on talking with us. We can hear him very well out there; besides, we can see him every time someone walks through the door. But the waiter is on our side and won't have us summoned, to avoid disturbing us during our meal. Then Kornei sees his chance and slips into the dining room to us.

What does he want?

Kornei explains that we are leaving from here at six in the morning. Why? It goes against our agreement—we've already agreed on five o'clock in order to reach Ananuri tomorrow evening.

He then gives an extremely complicated answer, but we understand that he's asking us to come outside with him.

We follow him.

We put on neither hats nor outdoor things, thinking we're just going outside, but Kornei takes us far up the road. The moon is only slightly more than half, but it shines brightly, and besides, a multitude of stars have come out. At the edge of the road we see a dark point; Kornei leads the way to that dark point. A dead horse! It's one of Kornei's horses that has died. He has watered it to death. It lies there with a belly so swollen, it looks like a balloon. "It's a hundred rubles!" Kornei says. He is inconsolable; walking us back to the interrupted meal, he constantly repeats it's a hundred rubles.

Well, those hundred rubles have been lost; no one will give them back to Kornei, so there's no need to go on talking about it. And in order to dismiss him, I say something like this to Kornei: "Good night! We'll be off tomorrow morning at five."

"No, at six," Kornei replies.

We cannot reach an agreement. Kornei tries to say something, from which we understand that a hundred rubles have been lost and tomorrow he'll have only three horses.

The logic of this isn't clear to us. With only three horses, there is even more reason to begin our journey at five if we are to reach Ananuri. And after much negotiation, with straws and watches and loudly spoken Russian times

of day, Kornei finally nods and complies. Good night. . . .

The moon and the stars are out. The horse is still lying there, swollen and pagan and gross, with two dogs guarding it. Then a man comes with a farrier's pincers in his hand. A young man, he rolls the balloon around, makes jokes about the dead body, and says whoa to it to make it lie still. He might not have done that with a Christian body. He salvages the shoes of the fallen horse; shortly afterward Kornei comes, and they also prepare for saving the skin. Why not?

The two men slit the skin along the belly and the legs and begin flaying. Kornei is quiet and doesn't say a word, but the young man complains he cannot see very well, glancing up at the sky and grumbling, as if to say: he has forgotten to clean his lamp tonight, all right! Then he goes to get a lantern and returns, bringing several people with him, young and old; it's as though the smell they have picked up of a slaughtered animal has made them eager to follow him.

We are all looking on.

Suddenly more men unsheathe their knives and begin to skin. They seem to act out of sheer desire; feeling the naked flesh with their hands, they warm themselves on it and laugh with subdued excitement. Is their inner pagan awakening in them?

The skin is stripped off the animal in a trice, and another horse comes with a cart to pull the cadaver away. At that moment a lusty young man sticks the point of his knife into the animal's belly and opens it. They all let out a muffled exclamation as a modest expression of how good it makes them feel, and soon many of them run their hands around the intestines, speaking extremely loud, as if they were trying to outshout one another. Kornei himself doesn't take part in this—he's too good a Christian for that; he has even tossed the pagan skin on the ground, wanting no truck with it. But he does watch the butchering, and a low fire seems to be kindled in his eyes as well.

A man comes up from the station. We cannot believe our own eyes: it's the innkeeper. Does he want to be part of it, too? He stops the mutilation of the dead body and seeks Kornei's permission to take portions of the carcass, some limbs. Kornei turns away, refusing him. The innkeeper slips some money into his hand, and Kornei also turns away when he accepts the money. Then the innkeeper points out the parts he wants, and several men take pleasure in dismembering the carcass. With the help of two men, the innkeeper takes the tenderloin and the legs away. Filet, I think to myself, filet and shchi for future travelers! If the innkeeper and his household are of the right sort, they may also taste the meat themselves tonight. For it's horseflesh.

Kornei is busy getting the remainder of the horse taken away in the cart,

but the butchers are still having fun with the leftovers; there are still some tasty pieces left and everyone takes his portion and carries it off, the shoulders, the liver, the lungs. And Kornei turns away and permits it. The part that was left and at long last hauled away in the cart was still big enough—namely, the bloated intestines.

I couldn't help recalling Hakon I during the sacrificial feast at Lade. The king struggled to avoid the horseflesh, but the people insisted he eat it. However, the king had been given a Christian education in England and refused to taste horseflesh. Then the yeomen requested that he drink the soup, but he refused to do that as well, turning away. Finally, they demanded only that he eat the fat, but no, the king stuck to his conviction. Then the yeomen threatened to go against him, and Earl Sigurd had to come forth and arbitrate. "Simply take the pot handle in your mouth," he told the king. But the handle was greasy with the steam from the pot, and the king placed a linen cloth over the pot handle before taking it in his mouth. Then he went ahead and closed his mouth over it. However, neither side was satisfied, the saga reports.[3]

§

Hamsun's wife discovers he is inventing part of his account.

The heat was just too much last night, and my sleep was broken. I woke up any number of times, wiped myself, breathed and snorted, and slept again.

One time when I woke up, my traveling companion was reading a book by the lamp. I was too sleepy and wretched with fever to try to find out what that sort of extravagance was good for. Besides, had books been brought along on the sly, while I languished all the while over an old issue of *The New Press?. . .*

After a restless semi-slumber I wake again and look about me. It's fairly light, five o'clock. I jump up and get into my clothes. Then I tum to the room, direct a word to the other wall, and suggest it's impossible to sleep any longer.

At that point my travel companion asks, "Who is this police officer you ran into on our way?"

"Police officer?" So that was it! My diary had provided the night's reading! I had disclosed nothing about the police officer; indeed, I had spared everyone else and kept the secret in my heart. Didn't that deserve some appreciation?

"How can anybody lie so blatantly?" the voice from the wall goes on. "And I don't believe in your ride into the mountains from Kobi either."

I had kept mum about the ride, too. I had undertaken that ride in behalf of science, had gladly sacrificed a night's sleep to promote the work of the

Geographical Society, enduring all the hardships with a silent heart—that's how a true explorer comports himself.

"And besides," says my traveling companion, "and besides, I think you're writing down too many trifles."

That was the last straw. My good companion had used a quiet hour of the night when, through illness and fever, I was prevented from defending myself and my belongings, to poke her nose into my traveling archive. All right! But my good traveling companion also tried to make me feel uncertain of my ability to keep an excellent diary. That was the last straw.

"I'm going out," I said, leaving the room in an unforgiving mood. . . .

The hotel was still asleep, but when I came down into the vestibule, a doorman emerged, rubbing his eyes. He was one of those adventurers in the hotels of the Orient who know the fastest French you ever came across. I remain speechless because I cannot answer one word to a thousand; I merely wave the door open. When I'd gotten out into the street, I put together what the man had said: he had in one swoop wished me bonjour, remarked on the weather, inquired how I had slept, and offered his services as a city guide. That is only what I understood, but I missed out on a great deal. Oh yes, now I remember that he also wanted to shine my shoes.

However early in the morning it is, people sit in front of their doors chatting or wander about the streets; the Caucasians do not sleep. The sun hadn't risen, but it was a warm, clear morning. Directly opposite the hotel lies a large park; I enter, walk straight through it and come out on the other side. Most of the people I see wear Caucasian attire, with weapons; some wear European jackets and stiff felt hats. The officers sport Circassian uniforms. I see practically no women outdoors.

I had intended to study the city from one end to the other before breakfast, but I soon realized that this would be impossible. Feeling hungry, I got myself a bagful of grapes to fortify myself with, but as a Scandinavian, I needed, of course, to have meat and some slices of bread to be satisfied. I walked around the park and came back to the hotel.

Nobody had yet gotten up. In the vestibule the doorman began again to parleyvoo, so I pushed a door open to escape and found myself in the hotel's reading room. Here, on a table, I found a Baedeker of Russia and Caucasia; I looked up Tiflis and started reading. . . . [4]

§

At the Baku oil fields on the Caspian Sea. Among its developers were the three Swedish Nobel brothers, including Alfred, founder of the Nobel Prizes.

A steamship from Nobel's fleet is placed at our disposal for an excursion to the oil wells in Balakhany. It was not the first and only time that the ships of the great firm carried visitors out there; it is undertaken with alacrity year in and year out and is nothing special. A good many of the Scandinavians were kind enough to come along and explain everything to us.

It was a quiet, moonlit evening. After half an hour's ride outside Baku, the water is seen to boil in black swirls. The swirls change, move, and merge with other swirls; the incessant movement makes you think of the northern lights. A handful of cotton waste is kindled and tossed down into the swirls, and at once the sea in that spot is ablaze. The sea bums. The black swirls are natural gas. Then we have to ride back and forth in the flames, letting the propeller wipe the fire out.

We arrive and step ashore. The ground is damp and fatty with oil, the sand feels like soap when you walk on it, and there is a sharp smell of petroleum and kerosene that gives us foreigners a headache. The petroleum area is divided into basins, lakes, surrounded by sand banks. But it's not much use trying to block out the oil, which seeps into the banks, making them fatty and damp along with the rest.

Crude oil was known by the ancient Jews and Greeks, and out here, on the Apsheron peninsula, it has been used by the population for fuel and lighting for a very long time. But only during the last thirty years have they been making kerosene from it. Not to mention the "13 varieties in vials," which are still more recent products. Now a city of derricks extends as far as the eye can see, the world's most unpleasant and incredible city of black, greasy, crudely built derricks. Inside, there is a roar of machinery day and night; the workers shout to one another to drown out the noise, and the derricks shake from the huge drills that are sunk into the ground. The workers are Persians and Tatars.

We go inside one of the derricks. My hat bumps against a beam and looks ruined for life, it's that greasy and black; but they assure me that in the Baku factories it won't take a minute to get the oil out again by chemical means. The noise is terrible. Swarthy Tatars and yellow Persians stand each at their machines, minding their work. Here the crude oil is drawn up; a contrivance goes down into the ground and returns after fifty seconds with 1,200 pounds of oil, then goes down again, is away for fifty seconds and returns with another 1,200 pounds of oil—around the clock, all the time. But the hole has cost money; it's five hundred meters deep. They used a year to drill it and it cost 60,000 rubles.

We go to another derrick, where they are drilling. The hole is still dry, the drill is working night and day in sand and stone, in rock. This hole is a

capricious hole, it's known for its viciousness throughout the city of derricks. The place was discovered last year, when it showed clear signs of oil like all places around here, and drilling was started. Fifty meters down, almost no distance at all, that is, the oil suddenly shoots up in a mighty fountain, killing people as it gushes forth and shattering the derrick. The fountain is without order and moderation, it's wild, forcing up oil in such excessive amounts that it creates lakes around itself and floods the earth. They make dams and throw up banks, but the dams are too narrow and fresh banks have to be thrown up outside the initial ones—the fountain spewed oil to the tune of one and a half million rubles in twenty-four hours. For two days and nights. Then it stopped. And no earthly power has managed to make it yield another liter of oil since. It corked the hole. It has probably found a rock in the earth's entrails down there and hurled it before the opening. Since then they have drilled and drilled without interruption, but to no avail; they have now got down as far as 650 meters, all in vain. And they are still drilling; some day, I suppose, they will get through the rock. The yellow Persians and the swarthy Tatars stand there with their hearts in their mouths; if this madcap begins to lash out like the last time, Allah will squeeze them all through the derrick's roof and tear them to pieces in a second. But then Allah would have ordained it that way. La illaha il Allah.

The noise of machinery wasn't originally part of this place; America has desecrated it and brought its roar into the sanctuary. For here is the seat of the "eternal fire" of antiquity. There is no place hereabouts where one can escape America: the drilling method, the lamps, even the distillate gasoline—it's all America. The Maccabees burned "the thick water" only for the purification of the temple. And when we have become tired of the noise and half blinded by the natural gas and prepare to leave the place, we go back in a Robert Fulton kind of boat.

Tomorrow we shall visit Surakhany. Thank goodness, it's said to have a Parsee temple.[5]

§

Hamsun encounters a "Persian dervish."

Now and then there appeared at the door of the hotel a Persian dervish, a monk and student of theology. He was wrapped in a motley rag rug, walked barefoot and bareheaded, and had long hair and a full beard. Occasionally he would gaze fixedly at a stranger and begin to say something. In the hotel he passed for a lunatic; Allah had touched him and therefore he was thrice holy. Unless his lunacy was just an act. He seemed to have acquired a

taste for displaying himself, for popping up, strange and holy, to be observed and remembered with alms. Moreover, his portrait was for sale at the photographer's, which shows what a remarkable person he was. It was as though he had become accustomed to the veneration he inspired everywhere, and he felt good about its continuing to come his way. He was a handsome man with exceptionally fair skin, ash-blond hair and smoldering eyes. Even the servants at the hotel, who were Tatars, left everything to look at him, and they treated him with veneration when he carne. What was he talking about?

"Get him to say something," I said, "and then tell me what it was."

The doorman asked what he could do for him. The dervish replies, "You all walk with your heads down, and I walk with my head up. I see everything, all the depths."

"How long has it been since he began to see all the depths?"

"It's been very long."

"How did it happen?"

"I saw another world, that's how it happened. I see the only one."

"Who is the only one?"

"I don't know. He tires me. I'm often on the mountain."

"Which mountain?"

"The birds fly toward me."

"On the mountain?"

''No, here on earth.... "

I, of course, had to be clever and know all about it, and since I felt suspicious of him I snorted rather scornfully at his simulated lunacy and went off without giving him anything. But when I saw that he didn't, for that reason, send me a dissatisfied glance, which I had expected, I grew less confident, turned around and gave him something. If this man was playacting, he did so brilliantly. But there was, of course, this matter of the portrait, in which he seemed to pose for effect. And those staring hypnotic eyes of his, which I thought were somewhat affected. And this matter of the attention he seemed to expect because he was mad. This was the man I would have liked to observe as he climbed the stairs in his shed and lay down in solitude. . . .

The fever is draining my strength. The watchmaker's medicine, which I've acquired more of, doesn't help me anymore. I shall probably have to leave this place before I've seen everything, and before I've been in the forest and inspected a Kurd's house. Last night, when the fever was at its worst and I didn't want to awaken anyone in the hotel, I dragged myself across the street to a shop where I saw some bottles in the window. A man was standing behind a small counter, and some swarthy men sat on the floor drinking from tin cups.

I walk up to the counter and ask for cognac. The man at the counter understands and plunks down a bottle. It has a label I'm not familiar with, and it says Odessa on it. *"Pfui!"* I say, doesn't he have something else? He doesn't understand. I reach up into the shelf myself and pick out another bottle of cognac. It proves to be the same Odessa label but has five stars. I look at it, scrutinize it, and find it to be common. Doesn't he have something better? He doesn't understand. I count the stars for him, five of them, and add a couple more with a pencil myself. That he understands. He actually brings an Odessa bottle with six stars. "How much does it cost?"—"Four and a half rubles."—"And the previous one?" "Three and a half." So one star was a ruble. Well, I took the one with five stars, and it turned out to be a smashingly strong cognac that enabled me to sleep.

And today, in defiance of the sage counsels of all wise women and all tourists, my fever is better, although I drank cognac last night. . . .

It's late afternoon. I sit at the open window watching some naked men water their horses in the Black Sea. Their bodies show dark against the blue sea. And the sun still shines upon the ruins of Tamara's castle, which rise above the shaggy woods.[6]

Notes

1. Knut Hamsun, *In Wonderland*, trans. Sverre Lyngstad (Brooklyn: Ig Publishing, 2003).
2. Ibid., 40–43
3. Ibid., 74–79
4. Ibid., 132–33
5. Ibid., 161–163.
6. Ibid., 183–84.

The 1933 Norwegian Nonfiction Novel *Two Suspicious Characters*: Thirty-three Years before *In Cold Blood*

Jo Bech-Karlsen
BI Norwegian Business School, Norway

The drama inherent to murder stories is a natural subject for literary reportage. This is no less so in Norway. Long before Capote, there was Gunnar Larsen.

In 1926 one of the most reported cases in the history of Norwegian crime took place. "The Country Policemen Murders" it was called in the news. Two policemen were killed after a robbery. The young journalist Gunnar Larsen in the daily newspaper *Dagbladet* covered the two months' intense chase for the two murderers. Seven years later, in 1933, he published a book based on the case—*Two Suspicious Characters*.[1] The book has been described as Norway's very first "documentary novel"—thirty years before this genre term came into use in Scandinavia,[2] and thirty-three years before Truman Capote published *In Cold Blood*, claiming that he invented the "nonfiction novel," [3] a claim numerous scholars have long demonstrated has little real basis.[4] Larsen's *Two Suspicious Characters* provides further evidence not only that the claim was spurious, but that the genre was practiced well beyond the shores of the United States. The similarities between the two books are striking. Among the more salient, Capote and Larsen both use reconstruction as their main method. Both depict two murderers' attempt to escape from the police after having committed brutal murders. Some of the similarities might be coincidental or driven by the fact that both books may be viewed as "true crime," a nonfiction genre in which the author examines an actual crime. This genre

was popular in the 1930s not only in the United States but also in Norway when Larsen wrote his book.

However, one important cultural and discursive difference should be emphasized from the outset: Reconstruction historically has not been acceptable in Norwegian literary reportage. But it is acceptable in the Norwegian conception of the "nonfiction novel" transplanted from the United States after Capote invented the term.

The purpose of this essay is twofold. First, it is partly a comparison of *Two Suspicious Characters* with *In Cold Blood*. I am not the first to do this. Norwegian scholars have already compared the two books, and as journalism scholar Martin Eide notes, "the comparison usually comes out in favor of the Norwegian journalist."[5] My focus in the comparison is on how true the two books are to the facts. Second, I want to highlight Gunnar Larsen's place in the history of literary journalism and to show to an international audience of scholars his valuable contribution to the nonfiction novel genre in Norway. In my opinion, if Larsen had published his book in English, he would be considered to be in the same league as Capote and Norman Mailer. In fact, they all wrote "true crime."

Ultimately, *Two Suspicious Characters* is the better of the two, I would suggest. But then, of course, I bring to it a Norwegian perspective.

Background

Gunnar Larsen, who lived from 1900 to 1958, came to the daily newspaper *Dagbladet* in 1923 educated as a lawyer. He became news editor in 1930 and editor-in-chief in 1954. Four years later, at age fifty-eight, he died. As a reporter and newspaper columnist he was famous for his modern and elegant style. According to Randi Bård Størmer, his biographer, "Many of his texts are among the best ever written in [the] Norwegian press."[6] Similar to some of the New Journalists from the 1970s, Larsen had serious alcohol and drug problems that became worse when he left his wife and two children and started a new life with a divorcée. It was a notable scandal at the time. Larsen was often found sleeping in his office in the morning with manuscripts and bottles around him. To break through the alcohol intoxication so that he could write, he used amphetamines. His drug abuse apparently caused his early death. At the time of his death, in addition to his prodigious work as a newspaperman, he had published five novels and was working on his sixth, according to Størmer.

Two Suspicious Characters is Larsen's second "novel," although it can make, of course, a claim to being journalism or nonfiction, but a claim not readily acknowledged in Norway where what constitutes "journalism" and

"nonfiction" is different from how it is viewed in other countries such as the United States. Told in the third person, the book charts the dramatic story of the two murderers sought by the police, based on the true event of "The Country Policemen Murders" reported initially in the newspaper press. After a robbery the two policemen in pursuit of the perpetrators were killed. One died immediately; the other lived long enough to identify the murderers. This is the starting point for an extensive police pursuit of the criminals in a large area of eastern Norway. In Larsen's "novel" the chase is mainly perceived through the young and sensitive boy Gustav. The reader only comes close to the older and tougher man, Ekstrøm, in the last part of the book. In the work Larsen has changed the names of the originals, probably for ethical and legal reasons. Gustav's real name was Henning Sigurd Madsen, and Ekstrøm's was Anton Emanuel Oskar Svensson.

The style has been said to resemble that of Ernest Hemingway, particularly through the tone, its impression of reportage, of being there, and the lean descriptive style reflecting dramatic suspense. As his publishing house puts it, the novel "depicts the chase with nerve and intensity."[7] After two months the murderers are surrounded by the police, and Ekstrøm kills himself with a revolver, ending the book.

Disqualified as Nonfiction?

Journalism scholar Thore Roksvold calls *Two Suspicious Characters* a "dramatized fiction" based on the newspaper account of the chase for the murderers. He states that this dramatization "disqualifies the text as nonfiction," even if the novel is based on a real event, and even if "Larsen himself had driven and walked the route [the murderers] fled to make the account as authentic as possible."[8] That Larsen uses the third-person point of view apparently does not trouble Roksvold. Rather, to him "What makes the text fiction and not journalism is first of all that he quotes the thoughts of . . . one of the two criminals that died," someone "Larsen could not possibly have talked to."[9] Roksvold's observation suggests he could have accepted the book as nonfiction if Larsen had met and interviewed both murderers, as Capote did. But Larsen only met the murderer who survived the chase, which in Roksvold's view weakened the documentary basis for reconstruction. I will return to this at the end of this essay. But at this point I have three criticisms to Roksvold's argument. First, the part dealing with Ekstrøm covers only fourteen pages out of 155, less than 10 percent of the text. It is only in this part that Larsen "quotes the thoughts" of the criminal who died before Larsen could have interviewed him. Second, this is the last part of the book, where the author changes third point of view from the young man Gustav ("The boy") to the

elder man Ekstrøm ("The man"), who kills himself at the end of the chase. Gustav survives and is sentenced to prison for life. Larsen said he met and interviewed Gustav in prison, though not by any means as comprehensively as Capote interviewed the murderers for his book. Third, my reading of the two books clearly shows that Capote used reconstruction that was not based on interview or observation much as Larsen did regarding Ekstrøm. Even if he met both his murderers in prison, he never met the members of the murdered Clutter family, who are described extensively and in detail in the first part of the book. But he writes as if he had, using third-person point of view and even interior voice. He based this reconstruction on "hundreds of hours with the killers" and a long correspondence with them.[10]

Confusion about the Genre

The reception of *Two Suspicious Characters* has always been divided. The Norwegian literary scholar Ellen Rees writes that the text's hybridity—the fluid border between fact and fiction in the narrative—"has resulted in the lack of scholarly consensus regarding the genre status of the text."[11] But she disagrees with scholars who say the text should be interpreted as a fictional novel, which would privilege the purely literary and aesthetic quality of the text. She argues that the book's "factual basis (the newspaper reporting done by Larsen in 1926) is both unavoidable and theoretically compelling," adding, "The text's documentary sources are in my view crucial elements of the plot and structure."[12] Rees calls Larsen's book a "documentary novel," but realizes that this genre most often is associated with the 1960s and 1970s and so suggests considering less period-specific terms: "One might, for example, define the text as an outstanding early example of creative nonfiction with elements of the sub-genre known as true crime."[13]

But as noted earlier, some influential scholars have insisted, and still insist, that *Two Suspicious Characters* should be interpreted as a fictional novel. In addition to Roksvold, Geir Gulliksen argues that its factual elements are subordinate to the fictional, and that "the act of rewriting a story previously written about as a journalist effectively transform[s] the events into fiction."[14]

Such a conclusion, however, has not been the most common in the reception of the book. Sigurd Hoel, a major Norwegian author and publisher, wrote in 1955 that Larsen "has collected everything possible of facts," that "everything in the book is based on concrete observation," and that Larsen "very clearly has followed this principle: give such a precise and correct depiction as possible of all tangible factuality, then the not tangible—thoughts, feelings, moods—will appear by itself."[15] Another well known scholar from the next generation, Philip Houm, wrote in 1981 that the book "is as close to the factual event" as it is possible to get.[16]

There is another point to emphasize that both Hoel and Houm agree on: Larsen was influenced by Ernest Hemingway's style. No wonder, perhaps, since Larsen was Hemingway's first translator in Norway (*The Sun Also Rises/Solen går sin gang*). Furthermore, Hemingway had the same double relation to fact and fiction as Larsen, being both reporter and fictional novelist. Hoel writes that *Two Suspicious Characters* "is the most successful work in the Hemingway style I know."[17] In fact, at the end of his essay Hoel goes even further to compliment Larsen: "I am tempted to say that Gunnar Larsen has fulfilled the demands on style even tougher than the Master himself."[18] Not everyone agrees, however, with the comparison. Norway's internationally most celebrated author today, Per Petterson, calls it "tiresome."[19] He recommends reading Larsen for himself, independent of the perception of Hemingway's influence.

Close to Literary Journalism

It is *not* my opinion that *Two Suspicious Characters* should be part of the canon of journalism. I have argued that *In Cold Blood* is not journalism, but something *between* journalism and fiction, a mix of the two genres.[20] I would say the same is the case with *Two Suspicious Characters,* even if it can be argued that this book is closer to journalism than *In Cold Blood* because Larsen worked closely on the case as a reporter from the beginning, something Capote did not do. While Gulliksen argues Larsen's prior work as a journalist on the murders ensured that his book about them would necessarily be fiction, I see that background history bringing the book closer to nonfiction. I will return to this argument later.

As a whole the two books are both expressions of a hybrid genre. That means they both contain elements of what we traditionally consider to be fiction. In general my point of view is that we have to "distinguish between reportage and documentary on the one hand and nonfiction novels on the other."[21] In other words, a nonfiction novel is not literary journalism (or reportage). Literary journalism is, in my opinion, not a hybrid genre; it is journalism with literary qualities. Both the books, however, are *close* to literary journalism, and therefore are often described as such. In Scandinavia *In Cold Blood* is sometimes even recognized as "one of the best examples of New Journalism."[22] The confusion about the genre is demonstrated in what a Norwegian publishing house wrote about the book when it was reprinted in 2006: "One of the classics within the documentary genre, a shocking reportage and a masterly novel."[23] In my opinion it cannot be all this at the same time; at least, if it is reportage, it cannot be a novel. But of course the author might enter a "double contract" with his readers, which means that the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction are not clear.[24] In my opinion, fiction writers

may enter such a double contract, while reporters cannot.[25]

The genre "confusion" goes further than the Norwegian discourse. It is hard to find any universally accepted definitions of literary journalism. Norman Sims has argued that "Written definitions of literary journalism are, at best, abstractions."[26] He writes that he always wants to see an example: "Without some examples, I feel like a dinner guest with an empty plate."[27] The two examples in this essay are on that plate. Do they taste like literary journalism? Even if Larsen's and Capote's books are not reportage or literary journalism according to Norwegian genre categories, they are relevant for literary journalism history and discourse, since they clearly demonstrate and challenge the borders between fact and fiction.

In an interview in the newspaper *Tidens Tegn*,[28] Gunnar Larsen declared that the book was based on solid facts. He was asked if anything in the book was invented by the author.

> No, the author answers.
> —In the whole book there is not a spruce-fir or a fence that the two men didn't pass.
> —But the talks they had with the few persons they met?
> —I have visited these witnesses and stenographically recorded their statements . . . .
> —And the conversation between the two themselves?
> —They didn't talk much. And most of it is retorts that Madsen ("The Boy") recounted during the examination.
> —Did you talk to Madsen?
> —I was allowed to as long as Madsen, who is now in prison at Akershus, accepted, and was informed what it was for. . . .
>
> I don't think it is possible to point out any factual errors in my book. Of course I could have invented a story inspired by the events, but it is the same for me as it is for many journalists, I cannot do it really well if I don't know that what I'm saying is really true. . . . The need to find the truth is the very trigger in a real journalist's business."[29]

The *Tidens Tegn* interview deals with what is fact and what is not. Gunnar Larsen was very much aware of a distinction between journalism and fiction. He does not say that the book is journalism or reportage. He must have known it was some kind of "novel," and that is how it was presented by the publishing house. But in the interview he insists on being a journalist and having used journalistic research methods in his work with the book.

The Norwegian scholar Steen Steensen writes that "*Two Suspicious Characters* was written at a time when the distinction between fiction and journalism was not well established."[30] But even if the concept of journalism became clearer in the decades after *Two Suspicious Characters* was published, historical

evidence suggests that legitimate debates about professional journalism were taking place in Norway already in the 1920s.[31]

In the interview in *Tidens Tegn* Larsen stresses, "The need to find the truth is the very trigger in a real journalist's business." By truth he seems to mean factual accuracy, that the factual basis must be solid, that the sources are sufficient. The idea that the use of specific literary techniques could harm the factual basis probably did not occur to him. It was a premature issue. This is mainly a debate that turned up in Norway in the 1960s and 1970s, connected to the new hybrid genre called documentary novel.[32] It is a paradox, though, that some American scholars today probably would accept *Two Suspicious Characters* as literary journalism, like they do *In Cold Blood.*

The Newspaper as Teacher

One year before *Two Suspicious Characters* was published, Larsen published his first novel, called *This Summer*. Størmer, his biographer, writes that this is mainly a "roman á clef."[33] Larsen uses quite a lot of material from his newspaper articles, "much more than in later novels."[34] One of the main characters is the journalist Anton, "who is the author's spokesman in the book."[35] We recognize that what Anton says in the novel coincides with what Larsen himself said in the interview above: "The difficulty is that I can never get myself to write anything other than what I have seen and experienced."[36]

This attitude appears to be deeply rooted in Larsen's critical consciousness at this time in his career. His biographer notes of his first two books:

> The reportage . . . pretends to describe the factual basis of a case; it pretends to be "true." In Gunnar Larsen's case, the borders seem to be somewhat vague, particularly in the personally-colored reportages, where the journalist stands up as the participant he in fact is. When he uses reportage material in his books, he brings in his person in ways that are not easy to interpret.[37]

Størmer states further that for the author, "his years in *Dagbladet* were his most important teacher."[38] Truman Capote never had this kind of tough journalism teacher. He never worked at a daily paper; rather, his journalism experience was gained through writing for *The New Yorker*. This magazine was known for its fact checking and accuracy, but some confusion about accuracy seems to have arisen in the case of Capote. *The New Yorker*'s fact checker called Capote "the most accurate writer whom he had ever worked with."[39] But Clifford Hope, the executor for the murdered Clutter family, took a different view: "'There were inaccuracies, sure,' said Hope."[40]

Larsen learned research and respect for facts at the newspaper. Before he wrote *Two Suspicious Characters*, he read all the statements from the experts, all the papers from the court, and statements from witnesses in police inter-

rogations. So did Capote in his case, but he felt free to change the facts of reality, and even admitted to have "giv[en] way to a few small inventions."[41] One famous and major example is that he invented the last scene in the novel. "Since events had not provided him with a happy scene, he was forced to make one up," Gerald Clarke writes in his book *Capote: A Biography*.[42] Few have accused Larsen of inventing, and he never admitted to giving way to "small inventions." On the contrary, he rejected the idea of inventing a story, and insisted that the book was based on solid, tangible facts and that there were no factual errors.[43] As a reporter he followed the actual events as closely as he could. What scholars have discussed are mainly his literary techniques, not his research.

It all started in the newspaper

As noted, Gunnar Larsen covered "The Country Policemen Murders" as a newspaper reporter in 1926 in what has been described as "a brand new and unusual form of reportage."[44] He did not write using the singular first person, *I,* but rather *we*, in a descriptively impressionist style. Here is an example of the newspaper reportage:

> Into this wasteland . . . we drove Saturday evening just as dusk was falling. The air was cool, a breath of autumn. A pair of cranes flew low over the treetops, with out-stretched gangly necks into the last of the day's shimmering rays. The evening dew spread itself in solemn procession over the moors and gave a picturesque expression of fairytales, and Kittelsen-bog whortleberries stood blood-red and the cotton grass bowed low. [45] Soon it became pitch black under an overcast sky; the car headlights, which flickered over the grey-bearded spruce boughs, laid a mysticism and dread over the forest. It sent shivers down our spine; we tried to push aside our observations of nature as we at once remembered why we were driving through this dismal forest landscape: supposing suddenly that the murderers stood out there in the groves!
>
> We were, after all, hunting down murderers.[46]

The reportage changes from depictions of nature and the environment to a reminder of why they are there. Larsen, in the form of the first person plural, places himself in the middle of the action, a way of writing that later would be common in Norwegian feature writing, one that brings the reader in as participants: they are part of the "we."

Despite obvious similarities between his newspaper coverage and the book—he was writing about the same events—his way of writing, or his writing strategy, is different. In the book, he largely uses the third person the way one might find it in a realistic novel. In the first 90 percent of the text the third person point of view is that of Gustav's, and Larsen even uses interior voice; the reader is taken into Gustav's head and also shares his feelings,

suggesting the technique of free indirect discourse as it would be called in Norwegian, or the paraphrase of indirect quotation reflecting interior third-person monologue in English:

> The boy suddenly understood:
>
> It is now he (Gustav) shall die. That is why Ekstrøm took that detour into the densest forest. To do it in peace and quiet.
>
> Gustav feels himself become prickly red; he squints shyly to the side. He can't move, can't say a word. He can't even summon up enough courage to be afraid. The silence pounds in his ears like heavy stomping. He smiles.[47]

In parts of the book, mostly when he depicts nature and describes the two men's movements in the landscape, Larsen is an omniscient narrator. This is different from the point of view in the original newspaper reportage such as in the following:

> They have arrived at the more open pine forest and look down towards the track. There is a warehouse there; between the tree trunks they see glimpses of white, children at play.
>
> They make a turn to the left, coming further down where the narrow path curls itself between rows of light birch. There is wilted fireweed everywhere, grey tufts on red stalks.
>
> They step over the sand hill down towards the forest, which already has evening darkness under its foliage.
>
> They go down a path, slippery from evergreen needles and pine cones. It gets dark, brown mushrooms clustering along the sides, and the trees have hazy contours.[48]

Of course, the description of nature is prominent both in the reportage and the book. But recall that in the reportage expresses the "we" of the reporter's first person plural impressions: "a pair of cranes flew low over the treetops, with out-stretched gangly necks into the last of the day's shimmering rays."[49] "We" were observing it. In the book, however, there is a subtle but significant difference: "And the dawn breaks, and they've never had a more beautiful morning. A pair of cranes awakens; they fly with out-stretched gangly necks towards the east."[50] Note the invocation of the third-person plural, "they." Thus, our view of nature shifts to one closer to that seen through the eyes of the murderers by means of the omniscient narrator, not through the eyes of the reporting "we."

In the interview with *Tidens Tegn*, Larsen is confronted with the fact that he makes his characters almost lyrical. The interviewer asks:

> —At least *something* is wrong in your book. If the two of them had sensed nature the way the reader does through your depictions, they would hardly have become murderers.

Larsen answers:

> —No one knows how these two beings of nature felt about nature. They would not have known how to express it themselves. [51]

Larsen's answer might seem strange, since he insists on authenticity and actuality. He states that nobody knows how the two men felt about nature, and they would not have known how to express these feelings (if you asked them). One could as well ask why the interviewer puts up that question. Does he think that murderers cannot have feelings, including feelings about nature?

In the newspaper reportage, Larsen witnessed the beauty of the morning. But in the book he attributes the perception of such beauty to the killers. And the cranes he witnessed as the "we" he now attributes to the killers as seeing.

This relates to Capote's attitude; to defend his intimate portraits of the murderers, he insisted he knew them as well as he knew himself.[52] The opposite is the case with Larsen: he says nobody could know these killers' feelings about nature. But in using their imaginations, both authors appear to take a bit of license with the facts. Whether Larsen made up the two characters' strong impressions of nature, or he had some support in the interview with Gustav, remains an unanswered research question. But we cannot rule out that most of these depictions express the author's own impressions and imagination from following in the murderers' footsteps. There is no doubt that he attempted to get the details as correctly as he could. According to Larsen's biographer, the author "was hunting for his reconstruction in the forests and landscapes of Vinger and Eidskog and east towards Sweden. His ambition was not only to follow the same route as the murderers did seven years ago, but also even at the same points of time. The farmers stopped and glanced at the tall city guy that bustled about on roads and paths, even walking in circles, picking up small things from the ground in the forest. He was even observed walking backwards while taking notes."[53] What the biographer does not note is that Larsen could not get the details absolutely correctly from the time of the murders because he was returning to the scene much later.

Differences and Similarities

There are many similarities between *Two Suspicious Characters* and *In Cold Blood*, due to the facts of each story. I have already mentioned that the main characters in both books are two males on the run after they have committed murders. In Larsen's book their escape attempt is the main story, while it is only one part of Capote's more complex story (taking up about forty-four pages, until they are caught on page 208). In both books these characters are vagrants with a criminal record. In *Two Suspicious Characters* the murderers

are caught by the police after two months, as is the case in *In Cold Blood*. Another similarity is that both books were published seven years after the murders were committed. The authors spent a lot of time on their research and finding the literary form.

I find it more interesting that both books have one weak and one dominant character. In Larsen's book Gustav ("The Boy") is young, often afraid, and quite dependent on the older and more dangerous man, Ekstrøm ("The Man"). In Capote's book Perry is a daydreamer who writes poetry, while Dick is a more violent, aggressive character. In both books this relationship is central to the dramatic structure. This is important because both authors have the ambition to do more than merely tell the story; they want to understand their characters on a psychological level, which is more revealing when a weaker, more sensitive character is juxtaposed against a stronger more aggressive character. It is also evident that both authors sympathize with the weaker character. Part of Larsen's reason for writing the book was that he suspected that the younger boy Gustav was used as a tool by the older Ekstrøm. In the foreword to the Swedish translation Larsen writes that even if the boy had shot his gun, it was likely, according to the forensic investigations, that it was Ekstrøm who had fired the fatal shots.[54] Similarly, Capote also shows affection for the more sensitive Perry,[55] with whom we may assume he can identify more readily than with the tougher and less sensitive Dick.

But Larsen's biographer emphasizes that redeeming Gustav as an innocent was not Larsen's only purpose for writing the book: "The author had a literary program."[56] Størmer does not specify what this program was about. One could speculate that he tried to experiment with a new literary form, like Capote claimed to do thirty-three years later.

Both authors use numerous quotations from newspapers that covered the murder cases, which, as a literary technique, helps to emphasize the documentary basis for the stories. Capote and Larsen create tension by having the murderers read about themselves; in what they read they are reminded—much as readers of the accounts are as if they were in the murderer's shoes—of how desperate their plight is: They are wanted for murder. In Larsen's book, even the title is taken from the news coverage: "The chase for *two suspicious characters* observed at Krøderen train station, was without result. . . ."[57]

There are also explicit differences between the books. *Two Suspicious Characters* has a rather simple composition. It tells the story of the two murderers seeking escape. The criminal acts and the murders are reproduced in flashbacks through the mind and memory of the young man Gustav. There are really only two characters in the book, Gustav and Ekstrøm. Other characters only play subordinate roles. *In Cold Blood* has a much more complex

composition and more characters. Perry and Dick are the main characters, but there are others, too: the members of the Clutter family; the police investigator, Alvin Dewey; and several others. Capote tells the whole story of the planning of the murders, the murders, the escape, the murderers' capture, the investigation, the stay in jail, the court process, and, finally, the hanging. He also provides parts of the characters' socio-cultural backgrounds to explain their actions. Larsen combines psychological portraits of his characters in an intensely action-driven story, but has modest ambitions in providing a broader sociological explanation..

Both books were made into feature films, but ultimately had different futures. *In Cold Blood* was released in 1967. While *Two Suspicious Characters* was filmed in 1950, the surviving convicted murderer, still in jail, turned to court to stop it, and the Norwegian Supreme Court ruled it could not be shown in public. It would not be fully released until 2007, when it was shown for the first time on Norwegian Public Service TV (NRK). The Norwegian response demonstrates how extremely sensitive the identification of a murderer was, and this was probably why Larsen chose not to use the murderers' real names in his book. It also demonstrates that the Norwegian Supreme Court considered the book, upon which the film was based, to be more fact than fiction.

Reconstruction of the Flight from Justice

The murderers' flight follows quite similar dramatic patterns in the two books. In *Two Suspicious Characters*, Ekstrøm and Gustav are, in the beginning, confident that they will not be recognized and caught, but eventually, after reading newspapers, they understand that the police know who they are and are pursuing them. The young Gustav is the first to get nervous and suspicious:

> Scared stiff, searching, the boy pulls the newspaper nearer; he finds it:
>
> "The Chief of the Identifications Bureau drove yesterday morning up to the cabin which belongs to the brother of one of the murdered policemen. It is established that the murderers have been in the cabin. There are numerous fingerprints which will be investigated further. Some of them are very clear. . . ."
>
> Fingerprints . . . Now Gustav understands. That dark wave envelopes him once again. That's why Ekstrøm has been moping. Those old fingerprints that they have of him . . . .
>
> Maybe they even know who Ekstrøm is! [58]

In *In Cold Blood* Dick and Perry do not know that the police suspect them, but the more sensitive of the two, Perry, is suspicious from time to time, such as just before they are caught, when Dick is still talking about robbing and stealing big money:

> But Perry chewed his gum and shivered and sulked. Dick said, "What is it, honey? That other deal? Why the hell can't you forget it? They never made any connection. They never will."
>
> Perry said, "You could be wrong. And if you are, it means The Corner." Neither one had ever before referred to the ultimate penalty in the State of Kansas—the gallows, or death in The Corner.[59]

Both couples share the same destiny—they get increasingly more miserable as time—weeks and months—pass. They are hungry and cold. Gustav and Ekstrøm are often starving:[60]

> They walk over a shaded mound, find three eggs under a pair of sloping roofing tiles behind a barn. One of them is warm, Gustav picks them up through the nettle.
>
> Gustav crushes his egg with his fingers. With trembling hands he slurps it down.
>
> Afterwards he feels even hungrier, famished. He craves more food.
>
> He stumbles along, unsteadily, takes small steps, listens dully. [61]

There is a similar scene in *In Cold Blood* when Dick and Perry hide from the rain in a barn in Iowa[62]:

> Perry, drenched and shaking, dropped beside him. "I'm so cold," he said, burrowing in the hay, "I'm so cold I wouldn't give a damn if this caught fire and burned me alive." He was hungry, too. Starved. Last night they had dined on bowls of Salvation Army soup, and today the only nourishment they'd had was some chocolate bars and chewing-gum that Dick had stolen from a drugstore candy counter. "Any more Hershey?" Perry asked.
>
> No, but there was still a pack of chewing-gum. They divided it, then settled down to chewing it. . . .[63]

In both books the killings are described indirectly. Whether this solution is a matter of ethics, research method, or dramatic suspense is unclear—it may be a combination. I find it likely, though, that dramatic suspense provides at least one important explanation for the authors' choices. Part of the suspense in Larsen's story is the uncertainty of Gustav's guilt, which is reflected in several flashbacks where Gustav recalls the fatal event in different ways. If Larsen had depicted the killings directly in the beginning of the novel, one of the most suspenseful parts of the plot would have been lost. Likewise, suspense would have been lost in Capote's work if the author had described the killings immediately for readers; more suspense is created when he presents the result of the brutality through the eyes of some neighbors and the sheriff.

In *Two Suspicious Characters,* Gustav, while in flight, thinks back in flashbacks:

> No! He knew nothing. Not until everything was over, and the last smoke from the gun rose towards the evening sun. There were two lying there. . . .

Unpleasant images which he tried to block out, overwhelmed him. What happened? Why? In the dim haze, through salty sweat, he saw dark shapes swaying violently. Boots that kicked. And police batons. It all went so lightning fast. He just stood there, panic-stricken and fumbled with his revolver so that it would be too late.

He never intended to take anyone's life. They just sat there, eating peacefully. How could he help it if those damned . . .

Ugh, they were dead. Yes, was the big one . . . ?

Images crash together, become just a black interference in his eyes. An upright shape storms towards him at violent speed . . . Throws hands in the air. At once. Falls backwards to the ground . . . Oh silence!
It wasn't him! It wasn't him! He wouldn't shoot!

When they took him, he would swear that it couldn't have been him. They would have to believe him. It wasn't him!

A new image burns, lurking behind, coming forward, not to be denied, relentlessly:

Ekstrøm with his knee over the youngest. Lifts the knife, forcefully, quickly, stabs!

Gustav had said he believed the younger policeman knew him from Hokksund. He had been in the police force there.

It was then that Ekstrøm ran off . . . No, Gustav hadn't meant it. Didn't want anything to do with it . . . Didn't he turn himself away from it all, and then packed his bag?

It *was* Ekstrøm! [64]

In the next flashback, fourteen pages later, Gustav seems to have collected his thoughts:

. . . They were seated and were almost finished eating, when the policemen suddenly appeared. Gustav immediately recognized the youngest one who had been the Sheriff at Hokksund. But he didn't say anything that indicated that he recognized Gustav.

Then the old policeman asked: Are you berry-pickers?

There aren't many berries in the forest, Ekstrøm replied. Gustav remembers every word; it was so seldom they spoke to anyone.

And I see you have a tent, the older officer said, and then he went behind a spruce tree and whistled. It was then that the younger one—the one that Gustav recognized—said that they were police, and asked what kind of guys[Ekstrøm and Gustav] were.

We are what we are, said Ekstrøm.

After that the young policeman, once again, said that they were policemen, and that they had gotten their questions answered.

Then Ekstrøm said: And you come here, into the forest, to ask your questions?

Yes, said the young one.

> It was as if Ekstrøm grew wings. He sprang up: No way, you, he screamed, and in a second he was behind the spruce. At the same moment, gunfire, two-three shots, and Ekstrøm screamed to Gustav: Shoot, shoot, God dammit!
>
> At this point he can think no longer.[65]

The uncertainty of who the killer was continues throughout the book. Gustav is unsure and changes his opinion: Did he kill? Or did he not? Ekstrøm exploits Gustav's uncertainty to convince him that he is the killer. This was a main concern for Larsen, who deliberately wished to create the uncertainty of Gustav's guilt.[66] In this way the book has a touch of investigative journalism.

Like Larsen, Capote does not reconstruct the murders by describing them. He leaves Dick and Perry when they enter the house of the Clutter family. We see the killings through the eyes of witnesses who come to the murder scene—first some neighbors, and then the sheriff. Finally, Perry fills in the details in his confession.

Reconstruction without Observation or Interviews

I have already mentioned that it appears Capote uses reconstruction without observation and interviews to a larger extent than Larsen. In *Two Suspicious Characters* this technique is mainly used in the last fourteen pages of the book.[67] At that point Larsen changes the point of view from Gustav to Ekstrøm (who fatally shoots himself when he is eventually surrounded by the police). But Larsen does not only write in the third person; he is also an omniscient narrator, and more so in this last controversial part than in the main part written from Gustav's point of view. It is as if Larsen knew he was on thin ice, since he had never met Ekstrøm. Most of this part is action-driven and told by the omniscient narrator.

Larsen had in fact been on the spot of the suicide just after it happened in 1926. He observed Anton Emanuel Oskar Svensson (Ekstrøm) being carried on a ladder just after the shot. Larsen had come to the place where the two murderers were surrounded just before Svensson, wounded by a series of shots, managed to escape into the forest. Larsen then followed the chase by police, dogs, and farmers until Svensson committed suicide. On October 23 the headline on the front page of *Dagbladet* reported, "The murderer Svensson shot himself today [at] 11:15 a.m." The subhead read "An eyewitness report." Larsen had interviewed police sources and walked around in the actual terrain with the man who discovered the two murderers.[68] Later he read the police documents that reconstructed the chase of Svensson. In this way, he had both his own observations and documents to base his story on. But, of course, he never had the chance to talk to Svensson. And it is particularly in the last lines of the novel that Larsen uses the interior voice of Svensson/Ekstrøm:

> People stomp in through the grove from all directions.
>
> An excrutiating, unbearable pain cuts through the Swede's (Ekstrøm's) arm. Then paralysis, with flowing ease.
>
> It's useless.
>
> He knew it.—But he didn't care.
>
> He'll fool them! For one last time.
>
> Slowly, he turned the revolver towards his own forehead. Uses his left hand for support.
>
> As the gun fires, he knows that this time it will not fail.
>
> He blows up the world.[69]

In the thirty-five pages about the Clutter family before the killings Capote used reconstruction without observation or interviews with members of the Clutter family. He never met them. His own editor at *The New Yorker*, William Shawn, regretted that he had allowed Capote to use this technique after the story appeared in the magazine.[70] As Weingarten notes, how could Capote know what the four family members said and thought? Weingarten emphasizes the difficulty in "writing about events that [Capote] hadn't witnessed, dialogue that he received secondhand, interior monologues that required a fair amount of creative license on his part."[71]

There is a decisive difference between Larsen's and Capote's research. Larsen worked as a reporter during the two months the book depicts. He was close to the police and other sources when it all happened, and he was even on the spot when the two murderers were caught. I do not agree with Geir Gulliksen that this is a disadvantage when it comes to the book's credibility and status as a nonfiction novel. In fact, Larsen's detailed research as a journalist guarantees a high degree of accuracy. Without it, the story would have been fiction. Gulliksen does not argue convincingly why "the act of rewriting" the story in book form necessarily turns it into fiction. It is just an unsupported claim.

Capote did not follow the events as they were taking place. He started his work on the story long after. One of the problems with Capote's sources has been pointed out by Weingarten: Capote "had to piece together a story that had only two living witnesses, as it turned out—the murderers themselves."[72] This also applies to the eighteen pages about Dick and Perry on their way to the home of the Clutter family. Capote does not only describe what they are doing, but he also quotes their direct dialogue in long passages. He writes as if he had been on the spot and overheard their conversation. But he did not. He only had his interviews with them to base it on. Larsen does some of the same, but, in my view, not to the same extent. There is not much dialogue in *Two Suspicious Characters*. It is likely he felt he had to be careful since he was not on the spot. As a trained journalist he had respect for the difference

between what you could tell from observation, interviews, and documents—and what you could not tell. One more difference is striking. Whereas Larsen "stenographically recorded" the witnesses' statements and took detailed notes of everything he observed, Capote trusted his memory; he never took notes during interviews.[73] He wrote down from memory shortly after what he had heard, and used the notes of his secretary.[74]

Different Traditions

Thore Roksvold chose the wrong argument in excluding *Two Suspicious Characters* from being nonfiction and journalism. Even if Larsen had interviewed both murderers, his book, in my opinion, when judged today, would still not be journalism. This is simply because the use of interior voice and monologue is not consistent with the methodological and ethical demands of professional journalism as practiced in Norway. I am not aware of any journalistic method that gives access to a person's thoughts and inner feelings in the past. In my view literary reconstruction of such thoughts and feelings based solely on interviews crosses the border into fiction.[75] So far this has been the most common opinion among Norwegian reporters and literary reportage scholars, even if many American scholars of literary journalism may think that it is an acceptable practice. The reason for this might be our two different traditions; in Norway literary journalism and literary reportage are not the same thing. The reportage tradition goes back to the 1860s, and professional standards were established in the early twentieth century. Scandinavian reportage theory and practice is strict when it comes to the demands of actuality, firsthand observation, and participant experience.[76] There is no room for literary reconstruction of events in the past, solely based on interviews, like in American literary journalism and nonfiction. In this respect our traditions seem to be quite different.

There are signs, however, that these boundaries are being pushed against even in the Scandinavian countries. It started in Denmark in the early 2000s. Inspired by Mark Kramer and what has come to be called the Narrative Journalism movement in the United States, Danish reporters turned to literary reconstruction built on interviews when writing series for the daily press. Three textbooks, two Danish and one Norwegian, presented this kind of journalism to Scandinavian journalists.[77] But so far Norwegian reporters tend to stick to the old ideals, in my view, even if a few younger reporters experiment with reconstruction in a very modest way and within the frame of full openness with their readers about the use of such literary techniques.

Another indication of change is that the most recent Norwegian textbook on reportage, written by the scholar and literary reporter Steen Steens-

en, leaves an opening for use of reconstruction based on interviews. "But it obviously is connected with several challenges," he writes, and particularly mentions source criticism, inner monologue, intimacy, and false impression of the reporter's presence.[78]

I have been asked by American scholars if *Two Suspicious Characters* is as good as *In Cold Blood*. To me it is better. But I know this may be highly subjective since I can read it in Norwegian. It might also be a cultural phenomenon. To me the story is less clear cut and more uncertain because there is doubt about Gustav's guilt. As the only survivor at the conclusion we are haunted by not knowing the answer. For that reason I find it more exciting and thrilling than *In Cold Blood*. But it might well be that many American readers would judge it differently.

My modest contribution in this essay is to introduce Gunnar Larsen to an international audience of scholars, and in particular to showcase his early and original "documentary novel." I find that Larsen is largely forgotten today in Norway, while Capote is still of current interest. Norwegian journalism teachers and students know Capote, but few know Larsen.[79] *Two Suspicious Characters* was last published in 2000 and is long out of print. *In Cold Blood* was last published in Norwegian in 2006 and is still available. I find this unfair. I hope I have shown that *Two Suspicious Characters* is a better example of the nonfiction novel than *In Cold Blood*, and it was written thirty-three years earlier. That is why I would suggest that *Two Suspicious Characters* should be translated into other languages so it can be accessible to a growing family of scholars with an interest in this field. Only then can it obtain the prominent position it deserves in international discussions of literary journalism.

Notes

1. This is my translation of the title of Larsen's book *To mistenkelige personer*. Gunnar Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer* (Oslo: Den Norske Bokklubben, 1983).

2. Thore Roksvold, ed., *Avissjangrer over tid* (Fredrikstad: IJ-forlaget, 1997), 79.

3. Clarke, Gerald, *Capote: A Biograph*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 357.

4. Ralph L. Voss, *Truman Capote and the Legacy of* In Cold Blood (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 16.

5. Martin Eide, *Hva er journalistikk?* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2011), 69.

6. Randi Bård Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2001), 10. All translations from this book are mine.

7. From the presentation of the book on the Internet: http://www.gyldendal.no/layout/set/print/Skjoennlitteratur/Romaner-og.noveller/To-mistenkelige-personer.

8. Roksvold, *Avissjangrer,* 80. My translation.

9. Roksvold, *Avissjangrer*, 80.

10. Weingarten*, The Gang*, 32.

11. Ellen Rees, "Border Crossings in Gunnar Larsens To mistenkelige personer," *Edda* Nr. 03 (2007), 263.

12. Rees,"Border Crossings," 263.

13. Rees, "Border Crossings," 263.

14. Geir Gulliksen, *Virkelighet og andre essays* (Oslo: Oktober, Oslo), 72. Ellen Rees's translation.

15. Sigurd Hoel, *Tanker om norsk diktning* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1955), 265.

16. Philip Houm, *Helter og hjertesaker* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1981), 159.

17. Hoel*, Tanker om norsk diktning*, 265.

18. Hoel, *Tanker om norsk diktning*, 268.

19. Per Petterson, *Månen over porten* (Oslo: Oktober, 2004), 74.

20. Jo Bech-Karlsen, *Åpen eller skjult. Råd og uråd i fortellende journalistikk* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2007), 197–201.

21. Jo Bech-Karlsen, "Rapportbøker og dokumentarisk reportasje." In Egil Børre Johnsen og Trond Berg Eriksen (red.) *Norsk litteraturhistorie. Sakprosa fra 1750 til 1995*, vol. II (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1998), 238–251.

22. Capote, Truman, *Med kaldt blod* (Oslo: Arneberg Forlag, 2006), 10, from the foreword by Rune Larsstuvold.

23. Capote, *Med kaldt blod*, from the cover text.

24. Poul Behrendt, *Dobbeltkontrakten* (København: Gyldendal, 2006), 19-32.

25. Jo Bech-Karlsen. "Når reportere flytter trær," *Samtiden* No 4 (2010), 50–62.

26. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 24.

27. Sims, *True Stories*, 24.

28. *Tidens Tegn,* 18 November 1933.

29. My translation.

30. Steen Steensen. *Stedets sjanger. Om moderne reportasjejournalistikk*. (Kristiansand: IJ-forlaget, 2009), 130.

31. Some useful history: The professional journal *Journalisten* was established in 1917. By the 1920s, there were a lot of local journalist associations, and in 1931 Norwegian journalists were organized nationally. During this time and through these processes journalism was debated heavily, and as news editor in a large newspaper, Larsen knew the content of these debates well. Rune Ottosen, *Fra fjærpenn til Internett. Journalister I organisasjon og samfunn* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1996), 45–109.

32. Jo Bech-Karlsen, "Rapportbøker og dokumentarisk reportasje." In Egil Børre Johnsen and Trond Berg Eriksen, ed., *Norsk litteraturhistorie: Sakprosa fra 1750 til 1995,* vol. II (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1998), 238–251.

33. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 208.

34. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 208.

35. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 209.
36. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 209.
37. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 208.
38. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 215.
39. Marc Weingarten, *The Gang that Wouldn't Write Straight* (New York: Crown Publishers. New York, 2006), 33.
40. Weingarten, *The Gang*, 34.
41. Clarke, *Capote*, 358.
42. Clarke, *Capote*, 358–59.
43. *Tidens Tegn*, 18 November 1933
44. Reidar Anthonsen: chronicle in *Dagbladet,* 16 September 1983. My translation.
45. Theodor Kittelsen (1857–1914) was Norway's most celebrated painter and illustrator in national folklore, famous for his trolls and other mystical creatures of nature lurking in deep, dark forests.
46. Bech-Karlsen, *Åpen eller skjult*, 68. Translated by scholar Derek Matthews, BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo.
47. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 15. All translations from Larsen's book have been done by scholar Derek Matthews.
48. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 18.
49. Bech-Karlsen, *Åpen eller skjult*, 68.
50. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 222.
51. *Tidens Tegn,* 18 November 1933.
52. Weingarten*, The gang*, 32.
53. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 224.
54. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 224.
55. Voss, *Truman Capote*, 17.
56. Størmer*, Gunnar Larsen*, 22.
57. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 64. My translation.
58. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 56.
59. Truman Capote, *In Cold Blood* (London: Penguin Classics, 200), 182.
60. Scenes like this seem to build on police documents and Madsen's (Gustav's) responses recounted during the examination in court. Interviewing Madsen might also have been helpful.
61. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 60.
62. This scene is probably based on interviews with Dick and Perry.
63. Capote, *In Cold Blood*, 181.
64. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 11–12.
65. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 25–26.
66. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 223.
67. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 141–55.
68. Størmer, *Gunnar Larsen*, 131–33.
69. Larsen, *To mistenkelige personer*, 155
70. Weingarten, *The gang*, 33–34.

71. Weingarten, *The gang*, 33.
72. Weingarten, *The gang*, 30.
73. Weingarten, *The gang*, 31.
74. Weingarten, *The gang*, 31.
75. Bech-Karlsen, "Når reportere flytter træer," 50–62.
76. The most authoritative and influential reportage definition in Scandinavia, made by the respected Swedish scholar Gunnar Elveson, is quite strict: "A representation that reveals a contemporary actuality and is *based upon the observer's own direct experiences* registered within relatively short time *in the form of self-experience* and with the precise time and place stated." Gunnar Elveson. *Reportaget som genre*. (Uppsala: Avdelningen för litteratursociologi, Litteraturvetenskaplige institutionen, Universitetet i Uppsala, 1979).
77. Ole Sønnichsen and Mark Kramer. *Virkelighetens fortællere. Ny amerikansk journalistikk*. (Århus: Ajour 2002). Mikkel Hvid. *Fascinerende fortælling*. (Århus: CFJE, 2004). Linda Dalviken, *Fortellende journalistikk i Norden*. (Fredrikstad: IJ-forlaget, 2005). Even published in Danish.
78. Steen Steensen, *Stedets sjanger. Om moderne reportasjejournalistikk* (Kristiansand: IJ-forlaget, 2009), 132–133.
79. An exception is Steen Steensen's textbook *Stedets sjanger: Om moderne reportasjejournalistikk* from 2009, where he briefly mentions Larsen and *Two Suspicious Characters* in comparison with *In Cold Blood*. Beyond that Larsen is mainly of interest to scholars, not to practitioners.

The Return of the "Humble I": *The Bookseller of Kabul* and Contemporary Norwegian Literary Journalism

Steen Steensen
Oslo and Akerhus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway

Åsne Seierstad's The Bookseller of Kabul *prompted controversy in Norway, a controversy that influences the practice of literary journalism in that country to this day.*

In September 2002 a few copies of a new nonfiction book nobody seemed to have any hope for was modestly placed on the shelves of Norwegian bookstores. The book, which portrayed the life of a relatively ordinary Afghan family, had a limited print run of approximately 2,000 copies, and the publisher did not bother to market it properly. The author, the then relatively unknown—even to a Norwegian audience—journalist Åsne Seierstad, did not seem to hope for much either. "Why would anyone want to read about an Afghan family?" she much later was quoted as asking herself.[1] The first review seemed to agree and called the book "dreary."[2] But then something happened. Within a few months, the book—*The Bookseller of Kabul*[3]—became a national best seller, selling 250,000 copies, which is a record for nonfiction literature in Norway. Within a few years, it was translated into forty-one languages and had topped the *New York Times* best-seller list for forty-one consecutive weeks.

Something, however, was lost in translation. While both reviewers and readers around the world praised *The Bookseller of Kabul*, the bookseller himself, Shah Mohammad Rais (who is given the pseudonym Sultan Khan in the book) raised his voice in the Norwegian public sphere. Rais claimed that

Seierstad had betrayed his trust in her exposure of him and his family. Commentators started debating: Did the book *really* tell a true story? Was it not fiction? Had the author behaved unacceptably and unethically in the way she portrayed, in intimate detail, the everyday life of the bookseller and his family? The criticism was a familiar one. It was the kind of epistemological critique concerning levels of truth and ideals of objectivity commonly raised toward what Eason labels "realist" literary journalism.[4] And it was an ethical critique concerning the consequences of immersion in cultures unfamiliar with public exposure of everyday life.

In this essay I will argue that both the success and the criticism of *The Bookseller of Kabul* had a profound effect on Norwegian literary journalism in the years to come. Since 2002, book-length literary journalism has grown in popularity with Norwegian readers, publishers, reviewers, and journalists alike. This wave of literary journalism seems to be inspired by the success of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, while at the same time incorporating, at least partially, some of the criticism made of Seierstad's book. The essay first presents the domestic debate about the book and analyzes it within a framework of the different epistemological and ethical traditions in literary journalism and literary reportage. In the last sections, I will discuss three contemporary award-winning Norwegian literary journalism books—Kjetil Østli's *Politi og røver* [*Cop and Criminal*], Simen Sætre's *Hugo* and Bjørn Westlie's *Fars krig* [*My Fathers War*]—to see what possible consequences the debate following *The Bookseller of Kabul* have had on this kind of journalism in Norway. Based on this discussion, I will argue that an ideal of compassionate subjectivity in line with Eason's (1990) notion of "modernist" literary journalism and European literary reportage dominates these works and that, as a consequence, the "humble I" has returned to become the ideal narrator in contemporary Norwegian literary journalism. The "humble I" narrator is characterized by open subjectivity, self-reflection, a sensitivity towards how the presence of the narrator affects characters and milieus, and a constant questioning of the narrator's ability to provide a truthful account of described events, people, and milieus.

II

The form, or discipline, of literary journalism inevitably evokes discussions on the distinctions between fact and fiction, journalism and literature, and different notions of truth. David Eason argues that the New Journalism, one of the origins of contemporary literary journalism, falls into two camps—the "realist" and the "modernist"—which differ in their epistemological approach.[5] In spite of their new approaches to journalism, the

realists, like Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, and Truman Capote, were, according to Eason, conventional journalists in the sense that their journalism did not effectively challenge the hegemonic ideal of objectivity. Eason argues that these realist New Journalists "organize the topic of the report as an object of display, and the reporter and reader, whose values are assumed and not explored, are joined in an act of observing that assures conventional ways of understanding still apply."[6] Their approach thus implies that an undisputed reality can be discovered by the journalists and expressed in their texts; that observation as a journalistic method involves almost no ethical problems; and that traditional, cultural models of storytelling are perfectly capable of unmasking the real.

It is, by contrast, with the "modernist" New Journalists that we find those who challenge the conventional notions of journalistic epistemology. According to Eason, the modernist New Journalists, such as Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, and Hunter S. Thompson, deny the ideal of objectivity and instead "describe what it feels like to live in a world where there is no consensus about a frame of reference to explain 'what it all means.'"[7] They insist on subjectivity and do not put their trust in the ability of narrative structure to portray an objective account of real life. They are part of their own narratives and make transparent their awareness of the limits to their observations. The modernists' approach to literary journalism therefore to some extent corresponds to the epistemological position taken by many structuralist and post-structuralist literature theorists, like Roland Barthes, who argues that literature is based on the "plurality of meanings."[8] But there is a vital difference. The premise of Barthes' argument is that there is no referential reality beyond language, and that, as a consequence, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction is difficult, if not impossible, to draw. Even the modernist literary journalists insist on the difference between fiction and nonfiction. Even though they deny the idea of objectivity, they aim at portraying an intersubjective truth that relates to a world outside the text.

The modernist approach to literary journalism has by no means overthrown objectivity's hegemonic position in the ideology of journalism. Journalism in general and literary journalism in particular are still dominated by a realist approach. The works of popular, contemporary U.S. literary journalists—for instance the ones labeled by Robert S. Boynton as the "New New Journalists"[9]—seem to take for granted an uncomplicated relationship between text and reality, fact and fiction, subject and object. Many of these contemporary U.S. literary journalists—such as Adrian Nicole LeBlanc and Tom French—differ from the earlier realist approach to literary journalism only in what their objects of inquiry are. They are to a much greater extent than Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, John McPhee, and similar writers preoccupied

with portraying the lives of ordinary people. They immerse themselves in the everyday privacy of subjects unaccustomed to the attention of journalists, but they treat them more like objects of study than subjects with whom the journalist engages in compassionate, intersubjective relationships.

As we shall see shortly, the approach taken by Seierstad in *The Bookseller of Kabul* fits well with this contemporary realist literary journalism. But this approach does not conduce equally well to the Norwegian and European tradition of (literary) reportage. Most definitions of reportage emphasize the reporter's eyewitness accounts of the events described as a prerequisite of the genre.[10] By such a definition, it follows that the reportage is often considered as personal account, and much European reportage has therefore not only been marked by the reporter's subjectivity, but also by a combination of opinion and observation. A German definition of reportage emphasizes, according to John Hartsock, "eyewitness account, running commentary."[11] In many European countries, especially in Eastern Europe, reportage journalism has had a political, often polemic, side to it, such as in the works of the Czech journalist Egon Erwin Kisch and Swedish journalist Ivar Lo-Johansson in the 1920s. As pointed out by Hartsock, this polemic type of reportage is not the only kind of reportage journalism found in Europe. Hartsock distinguishes among three types of literary reportage: 1) polemic literary reportage; 2) narra-descriptive literary reportage providing a close-ended response to the topic reported on; and 3) narra-descriptive literary reportage that "embraces the inconclusive present of a fluid phenomenal world that grants free interpretive possibilities to the author and reader."[12] I interpret Hartsock's two forms of narra-descriptive literary reportage as equivalent to Eason's distinction between realist and modernist literary journalism.

In Norway, all three of these forms of (literary) reportage have co-existed. But when the New Journalism arose in the 1960s in the U.S., a polemical and politically radical form of book-length reportage thrived in Scandinavia.[13] This tradition of polemical reportage, coupled with the ideal of subjectivity and first person narration found in twentieth-century reportage in Scandinavia,[14] has greatly influenced the way reportage is perceived in contemporary Norwegian nonfiction literature. Torunn Borge, for instance, emphasizes the importance of the journalist's "open subjectivity" when writing reportage,[15] and Jo Bech-Karlsen defines reportage as "a personal narrative" that derives from the reporter's own experiences in the real world.[16] Bech-Karlsen further emphasizes that the journalist's presence as eyewitness must be apparent in order for a journalistic text to be classified as reportage.

Such definitions alienate the detached omniscient narrator as a journalistic ideal of narration and instead promote compassionate subjectivity and

what might be interpreted as a "humble I" as a preferred narrator. Such a narrator is personal and thereby vulnerable, because the "I" is part of the events described, and thereby affected by these events. The "humble I" narrator does not think any higher of himself then of the characters he encounters; he acknowledges that he has much to learn from the people and milieus he seeks out; and he thereby modestly accepts that his view of the world might not be right. As a consequence, realist literary journalism might be perceived as an unfamiliar form of journalism within a Norwegian reportage tradition. However, it must be noted that in the Scandinavian newspaper's feature sections, the detached omniscient narrator has grown to be quite common during the last twenty years or so.

III

When Seierstad traveled to Afghanistan in 2001 to cover the recently started war, it was as a freelance war reporter. She had previously worked as a foreign correspondent in China and Russia for Norwegian newspapers before she became a freelance reporter for the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK in 1998. At the time, she was essentially an unknown journalist, but within the community of Norwegian journalists she was considered to be a fearless, hardworking, and independent member of the profession. These sides of her professional self became apparent when she, after being embedded with the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan for six weeks, traveled to the city of Kabul, recently surrendered by the Taliban, in order to investigate the lives of ordinary people in the Afghan capital. Upon her arrival to Kabul in November 2001, she made an acquaintance with a bookseller, who invited her to stay at his house with his family. She ended up immersing herself in the life of this family—the bookseller, his two wives, their five children, and several other relatives—from January to May 2002. They knew she was a journalist, and they knew she wanted to write a book about their lives. And so she did.

The Bookseller of Kabul was published in Norway in September 2002 with the subtitle *Et familiedrama* [*A Family Drama*].[17] This was not Seierstad's first book. Two years earlier, in 2000, she published a series of profile interviews from Serbia following her coverage of the Balkan war.[18] The differences between the Serbia book and *The Bookseller of Kabul* are interesting. First, the Serbia book is written as a first-person narrative from Seierstad's point of view, in tune with the dominant Norwegian reportage tradition, while *The Bookseller of Kabul* is written as a third-person narrative from the character's point of view, including inner monologue—in other words more like realist literary journalism. Second, in contrast to the Serbia book, the characters of

Bookseller are not portrayed with their real names. Third, the level of immersion is much more developed in *Bookseller* since Seierstad lived in the same house as those she wrote about, which she did not in the Serbia book. Consequently, *Bookseller* offers far more access to, in Ervin Goffman's phrase, the "backstage" of the characters' lives.[19]

Fourth, *The Bookseller of Kabul* was published with a more ambiguous genre affiliation than the Serbia book. The subtitle of the Serbia book—*–Portretter fra Serbia [Portraits from Serbia]*—to some extent relates the book to genres of nonfiction,[20] while the subtitle of *The Bookseller of Kabul—A Family Drama*—alludes to Henrik Ibsen's dramas, at least in a Norwegian context, and thereby to genres of fiction. Bookstores and libraries in Norway therefore could not quite figure out whether to classify the book as fiction or nonfiction, reflective of Poul Behrendt's "double contract."[21] Bech-Karlsen argues that such double contracts are common in narrative journalism—a realist kind of literary journalism based on a reconstruction of events more than eyewitness reporting—but that they are uncommon in the Nordic reportage tradition.[22]

The Bookseller of Kabul starts off with a description of how the bookseller, who is given the name Sultan Khan, goes about to get himself a second, younger wife, after being married to the same woman for sixteen years. This story and the triangle relationship between the bookseller and his old and new wives are the primary narrative focus of the book. The bookseller is portrayed as a rather tyrannical man, who controls his family and especially the women with a harsh hand. Seierstad sides with the women and with what she interprets as their struggle for independence, freedom from oppression, and other basic human rights. More than just a visitor, Seierstad becomes part of the family; she travels and eats every meal with them, goes to the bazaar with the female members, and shares a bedroom with the bookseller's nineteen-year-old sister, who is ordered to take care of her. But unlike the other women in the family, Seierstad is free to move out of gender-specific circles, which gives her the opportunity to see both male and female perspectives.

The Bookseller of Kabul has been called "the most intimate description of an Afghan household ever produced by a Western journalist"[23] and "a beefed up, bedroom version" of Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations."[24] Unlike the first reviewer in *Dagbladet*, most critics were positive towards the book. By November 2002, the book was on top of the nonfiction bestseller list in Norway. Seierstad won the National Booksellers Award, was nominated for the prestigious Brage award, and the National Freelancer's Association appointed her as freelancer of the year.

But then, with the help of a Norwegian magazine journalist, the book reached Kabul. In June 2003, Tuva Raanes, a journalist with the women's magazine *Kvinner og Klær* [*Women and Clothing*], travelled to Kabul to interview the bookseller, Shah Mohammad Rais, about his take on the then internationally acclaimed book. During the spring of 2003 the *The Bookseller of Kabul* had been translated into French, German, Italian, and Swedish, and deals had been made to publish the book in thirteen additional countries. It had been praised by international reviewers, and Seierstad was traveling across Europe to promote the book. But no one had heard from the bookseller himself, even though his name had been made public by the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*, which interviewed him when the book was published in September 2002.[25] When Raanes met with Rais she was amazed to find out that he had not read the book. She managed to provide him with an English translation and was present when he read it. According to Raanes, he became furious.

The magazine story did not run until September 2003, but the story about the magazine journalist's efforts to make the bookseller read the book broke a month earlier, on 28 August, in the newspaper *VG,* which simultaneously published its own interview with Rais. Consequently, this interview was the first public account of Rais's reactions to the book, and he did not mince words. "I hate Åsne very much right now," he proclaimed, according to *VG.*[26] He was deeply humiliated and shocked by some of the stories in the book, especially those where his female relatives revealed intimate details about their sex lives. If these stories became publicly known in Kabul, they would cast long shadows of shame and dishonor over the family, according to the interview with Rais. "The consequences of all this . . . will be divorce or death!" he said to *VG,* before proclaiming that he was going to sue Seierstad. Seierstad, who was confronted with the bookseller's reactions, regretted that she did not have the manuscript translated for Rais to read before it was published.[27]

This interview sparked what was to become an intense debate on the truthfulness of the book and the ethics of Seierstad as a journalist. The day after the interview with Rais was published, the well-known Swedish journalist and author Jan Guillou was quoted by *VG,* claiming that the book was a "fabrication from cover to cover," "a novel disguised as journalism," and that "now the family has to take responsibility for a western woman's novelistic imagination, and that's a gross ethical misconduct."[28] Seierstad, in the same newspaper story, simply replied that "everything in the book is true." In another newspaper the same day the Norwegian-Iranian author Walid al-Kubaisi was quoted to have said that Seierstad should withdraw the book. Al-

Kubaisi had written an essay in a small Norwegian newspaper in April 2003, where he argued that *The Bookseller of Kabul* was a deeply problematic book in moral and ethical terms. This essay had, however, passed unnoticed, but it was now brought back to the public's attention. "Åsne has created a disaster for the family," al-Kubaisi said to *Dagbladet*,[29] before asking a rhetorical question: What would have happened if an Afghan journalist with no knowledge of the Norwegian language were allowed to stay with a well-known family from the posh parts of Oslo in order to write a book, in which he disclosed the husband's affairs with prostitutes; the wife taking a lover; the son's drug abuse; and the daughter trying to commit suicide? If such a book was published in Afghanistan, it would have found its way back to Oslo, and it would not have been considered a truthful or ethically sound account of events, argued al-Kubaisi, according to *Dagbladet*.

The criticism was in other words twofold. First, there was the epistemological consideration related to the book's truthfulness—how can we know what is true and what is fabricated in a book with such close resemblance to genres of fiction? Second, there was the ethical consideration related to the revealing of intimate, private, and potentially compromising details from the lives of this Afghan family. Both these dimensions continued to dominate the public debate during the fall of 2003 in a range of newspaper interviews, essays, and commentaries from authors, journalists, editors, publishers, intellectuals, and academics. Some, like al-Kubaisi, sided with the bookseller and argued that the book should be pulled off the market, while others sided with Seierstad, arguing that the book, in spite of its ethical and epistemological problems, served a greater good, namely to give voice to the voiceless—the women of Afghanistan. Wrote *Aftenposten* commentator Kathrine Aspaas: "It is our duty to report on encroachments in the name of culture. This fact justifies Seierstad's betrayal."[30]

The *Bookseller* controversy reached a high point when Rais himself turned up in Oslo September 16, 2003, with his youngest wife and their newborn son. They stayed a week; Rais gave an impressive amount of interviews for newspapers, radio programs, and television talk shows. He made it clear that he wanted the book to be withdrawn in the seventeen countries where it had been published, or was about to be published. Rais and the Norwegian lawyer he had hired met with Seierstad, her Norwegian publisher, and their lawyer to discuss the matter. But nobody agreed on what actually happened at this meeting. The lawyers quarreled, Seierstad was angry with the press, her publisher was angry with everyone who suddenly criticized the book after praising it a year earlier, and it became clear that there would never be any agreement. Rais declared he would write an autobiography containing a

"whole chapter devoted to Seierstad."[31] It was truly a media circus.

The bookseller's wife, Suraya Rais, who did not speak English, was also interviewed by several newspapers (without the presence of her husband), amongst them *Dagbladet*, which had the translator read out loud to her the opening pages of the book (which she claimed she did not know the content of). In these opening pages the process by which Suraya Rais became the bookseller's new wife is described. According to Seierstad's descriptions, Suraya was sold to Shah Mohammad Rais against her will. When learning about this, Suraya reacted, according to the *Dagbladet* interview, with disbelief and anger. "I did not at all mind marrying him. I trusted my parents to make the right decision . . . . I was neither sold nor bought," said Suraya, according to the interview, before adding: "I thought she was a nice person, a journalist who would help people understand Afghanistan. Now I don't like her. She has taken advantage of our hospitality and spread lies about our family."[32]

When Rais left Norway, two things happened: First, sales of the book increased, not only in Norway, but also internationally. The conflict between Rais and Seierstad had been picked up by international press, including in the U.S., where the book was about to be published. The conflict therefore drew attention to the book in the States, and sales there increased dramatically. Second, high profile Norwegian academics became interested in the debate. In hindsight, one of the most cited essays related to the debate was written by a professor of social anthropology, Unni Wikan. Wikan, a specialist in Arabic culture, criticized Seierstad's methods. Her main concern was that the "genre" Seierstad had chosen made it difficult to assess her methods. "She exposes her informants, but disguises herself," wrote Wikan.[33] She found it difficult to assess how Seierstad had solved the language problem; if any of her informants spoke English, or if she had used a translator, and if so, what kind of relationship the translator had with the informants, and how she could have quoted her informants as excessively as she did without using a recorder.

The Bookseller of Kabul does not provide any answers to these questions, as Wikan pointed out. Some notes on method were added in the English version, namely who Seierstad used as translators: the bookseller himself, his sister, and one of his sons. To translate from Dari via English into Norwegian (and then into other languages) is extremely difficult, Wikan argued. She found it problematic that excessive quotes, dialogue and inner monologue were represented in the book when all of it was filtered through the minds of these three translators—especially since the role of these translators and of Seierstad as a participant observer is omitted from the book.

Wikan's evaluation was both epistemological and ethical. She found that

the ethical problems of exposing private details were directly linked to Seierstad narrative style and her position as narrator and to the way she represented "reality." In an essay in the magazine *Samtiden* a year later, a professor of global history, political science, and development studies, Terje Tvedt, made similar arguments, but he went even further in arguing the impossibility of claiming that *The Bookseller of Kabul* represented truth. Tvedt argued that the book was "intellectually immature," and he questioned whether it should have been published.[34] He pointed out the postcolonial theory of "othering" of non-Westerners in Western media representations and he argued that *Bookseller* was marked by such a discourse. Furthermore, he claimed that the arrival of bookseller Rais in the Norwegian public sphere was a historic, first account of a "native striking back" to oppose the way he was represented.

Another social anthropologist, Knut Christian Myhre, extended Tvedt's postcolonial interpretation by arguing that "Seierstad's inability to talk directly and freely to the people she writes about serves to establish the primacy of 'vision' over 'narrative', which Said (1978) describes as characteristic of Orientalizing discourses."[35] Myhre found it surprising that so much attention had been paid to the ethical concerns of *The Bookseller of Kabul* instead of closely investigating the "metaphors and literary images employed by Seierstad."[36]

The above account of the debate that *The Bookseller of Kabul* caused in Norway—a debate caused mostly by Rais's public declarations—makes it clear that what most critics found troubling about the book was related to the author's narrative insistence that *Bookseller* represents an objective truth. The Norwegian (and European) tradition of (literary) reportage clearly favors reportages in which the journalist's position as narrator is detectable and where the journalist imprints her reportages with a personal perspective, and thus a subjective truth. Consequently, the realist type of book-length literary journalism represents a form and an epistemological position that becomes problematic as a journalistic genre in a Norwegian context. That being said, this explanation does not account for the many adverse responses to the book, and it fails to explain Rais's role in increasing such responses.

I will therefore argue that there is something deeply problematic with realist literary journalism when it is applied as a narrative form to describe events and people that belong to cultures other than those the journalist and her domestic audience are familiar with. There are so many cultural, socio-political, and personal obstacles and differences between Seierstad and her readers on the one side, and Shah Mohammad Rais, his family, and the people of Afghanistan on the other, that it is impossible for her to completely understand beyond doubt the Afghan way of living, thinking, and reasoning.

These vast differences are greatly amplified by the language issue.

The realist form Seierstad writes within takes its energy, in Eason's sense, "from an image-world that obscures the subjective realities of diverse subcultures."[37] This image-world is constructed by Seierstad's—and her Western world readers'—predefined ideas not only about the Oriental world, but about ethics and morality, and what is considered good and bad. It is a normative and thereby subjective position, within which a traditional, Western way of thinking prevails over the subjective realities of the Rais family in particular and Afghans in general. Realist literary journalism provides a predefined frame within which events, places, and people are interpreted. The problem is that this frame, and the normative and subjective position it promotes, is disguised as objective, unbiased truth, thus making it difficult, if not impossible, to apply a journalistic "reflexivity," which, according to Elisabeth Eide, is necessary when trying to represent "the other."[38]

The ethical problems raised by Rais and the critics return us to the dilemma of realist literary journalism: Had Seierstad written *The Bookseller of Kabul* in line with the ideals of modernist literary journalism and personal reportage, the ethical problems would have been much easier to solve. Seierstad's methods would then have been made transparent, as would her influence as a participating observer. She would have been forced to question openly her perspective, values and norms, and what she believed to be true. And she would have avoided the "absoluteness" of positivist realism and could instead have opened her participatory observations up for multiple interpretations. Such "open subjectivity" has, according to Borge, "the clear advantage that it can be located, both as the reporter's distinct voice and as the interplay between her and the people, places, and events she describes and analyzes."[39]

IV

In May 2004 it became clear that Rais would not follow through with his legal threats because of the costs involved in a potential lawsuit. But four years later, in 2008, the bookseller's youngest wife, who traveled with him to Norway in 2003, and again in 2006, summoned Seierstad and her publisher for violation of her privacy. She won her case in the Norwegian District Court, and Seierstad was sentenced to pay Suraya Rais a compensation of 125,000 NOK (U.S. $15,000). However, the case was brought to the Court of Appeals, which reversed the verdict. And finally, in March 2012—ten years after the book was published—the Norwegian Supreme Court voted it would not hear a second appeal. There were, in other words, no legal reasons why literary journalism in Norway should not profit from the commercially successful formula of *The Bookseller of Kabul.* Yet, it did not.

However, several things happened to literary journalism in Norway in

the wake of the *Bookseller* controversy. First, book-length literary journalism increased in popularity with journalists, readers, and publishers. The Norwegian book market had for years been dominated by fiction. Journalistic nonfiction with literary inflections was rarely published. *The Bookseller of Kabul* changed that. Literary journalism and literary reportage became popular genres with publishers, who became aware of the commercial potential of these genres. But there were also other incentives for publishing houses to offer nonfiction in general and literary journalism/reportage in particular. In 2005 the Norwegian Arts Council extended the publicly financed purchasing system to include nonfiction titles. This system secures a minimum of sales to public libraries of books published by Norwegian publishers. Publishers also saw that the struggling newspaper industry increasingly had a hard time fulfilling its promise of bringing in-depth analyses of modern society, and book-length journalism hence became a commercial priority. Publishers at Gyldendal, one of the two biggest publishing houses in Norway, argued, "The newspapers have cut back on the difficult, research-demanding part of their practice, and thereby handed over parts of their job to the publishing business."[40]

Second, book-length literary journalism has increasingly been acknowledged as quality literature in Norway. *The Bookseller of Kabul* was the first piece of literary journalism to be nominated for the prestigious Brage award for best nonfiction book in 2002. In 2006, Simon Sætre's *Hugo*—a literary journalism book portraying the life of a homeless drug addict—was nominated for the same award, and in 2008, Bjørn Westlie became the first literary journalist to win the award with his book *Fars krig [My Father's War].* The following year another literary journalist, Kjetil S. Østli, won the award for his book *Politi og røver [Cop and Criminal]*.

In contrast to *The Bookseller of Kabul,* these award winning literary journalism books adhere to the epistemology of modernist literary journalism, thus indicating that this form of literary journalism has come into prominence in Norway. In the last sections of this essay, I will take a closer look at the implications of this epistemological change and give examples of how it is manifested in the three Brage-nominated books mentioned above—and also, surprisingly, to some extent, in the later works of Seierstad.

V

Modernist literary journalism, and much of the Nordic reportage tradition, is marked by subjectivity, uncertainty, and an awareness of the journalist's limits in describing the "real" world. It is marked by methodological transparency and sensitivity towards informants and milieus, and its practitioners treat their sources as subjects they engage with, not as objects they

can observe without interference.[41] This epistemological position fits well with Sætre's *Hugo*, and the other award-winning books, Westli's *Fars krig* and Østli's *Politi og røver*.

In *Hugo,*[42] Simen Sætre, a feature writer with *Morgebladet,* follows a homeless drug addict in Oslo for a year, trying to get to know him, his past, why and how he became what he is, and how someone might end up homeless in Norway, the richest country in the world, where each and every city and municipality is obliged by law to provide shelter for everyone who needs it. The book is deeply humanistic. Sætre treats Hugo with respect, as a fellow human being, even though he at times finds it hard to understand him. In his efforts to do so, he tries, at least to some extent, to live like Hugo. He goes undercover in the underworld where Hugo lives, pretends to be his brother, and tries out begging and sleeping on the streets. Sætre searches for answers and explanations, but discovers how difficult it is to find any. He reflects, asks questions, thinks out loud, and extensively investigates Hugo's past, but the more he finds out about him, the more questions he asks. It's an open-ended and never-ending story. Furthermore, Sætre constantly doubts what he discovers and he shares his uncertainty with the readers. What is real and what is not is constantly under scrutiny in the book. A good example of this constant questioning of what Sætre believes to be true is found in the book's very first chapter, where Sætre discloses how he met Hugo. Sætre had posted flyers around the city of Oslo hoping to get in contact with a guy like Hugo in order to write the book he wanted. Hugo made contact, and they met at a café. But could he really be sure that Hugo was who he said he was? This is how Sætre describes parts of their first meeting:

> While we are talking I can feel a pang, a feeling of doubt. I have felt it before. It's the feeling you get of someone hinting at something, like when I once came home to a girl I liked and she played Nick Cave's "Are you the one that I've been waiting for?" Was something going on here? Was it a hint, or just coincidence? It was the same feeling. I started doubting if this man really was homeless.
>
> He was introvert and quite dull, actually.
>
> Afterwards, I noticed that I in my notebook had described him as "ordinary," a characterization, which by no means describes a beggar, a homeless and a drug addict (and which by the way is a ridiculous description of any person). I couldn't picture him on the streets. His hair could fit, and the plastic bag, and the way he talked. But the rest was not right. Afterwards it struck me that I never saw his arms.[43]

Sætre uses his own point of view and his uncertainty quite consciously,

almost as a dramatic effect. The questioning of truth claims becomes a narrative driving force. He positions himself as a rather naïve and quite blunt narrator, and the book thereby becomes as much about Sætre—who he is, his prejudices, and values—as about Hugo. And since the "I" is the point of identification for the reader, the book implicitly becomes as much about the reader's prejudice and values as about Sætre's.

As with *Hugo*, the 2008 Brage award winner for best nonfiction book of the year, Bjørn Westlie's *Fars krig*,[44] is a deeply humanistic and personal book. The two journalists embark on similar projects in the sense that both books deal with trying to understand someone who is an outcast, someone with a totally different way of living and thinking about the world, which contravene standard social norms and conventions. But while Sætre tries to figure out a contemporary stranger, Westlie, a feature writer with *Dagens næringsliv,* tries to figure out his own father—why he became a Nazi soldier during the Second World War. Westlie's father welcomed the German invasion of Norway in 1940, enrolled as a SS soldier, and fought for the Third Rich on the Eastern front. Needless to say, having a father who was a "quisling" is both traumatic and tabooed, especially in Norway, a country that prides itself on its resistance during the war.

Westlie's father was convicted for treason after the war, and their relationship was thereafter almost nonexistent, the son being filled with anger and embarrassment about his father's actions. Over the years, Westlie's father tried to reach out to his son by sending him tapes he had recorded. Westlie stored the tapes in a box in his attic, never listening to them. But one day he changed his mind. He started listening to the tapes and found that they contained his father's recollection of the events of his life and his attempts to explain himself. These tapes are the starting point of *Fars krig.* Westlie uses the tapes, and letters his father wrote, to reconstruct his experiences during the war and the events that turned his father into a Nazi. But he does not treat the tapes as reliable sources. He constantly doubts his father's recollection, even when it comes to his father's feelings and descriptions of the impact different events had on him. An example is when Westlie writes about his father's first experiences at the Eastern front in Ukraine following his training in Germany:

> The reality that he was met with in Ukraine was dramatically different and far more brutal. What he experienced there was, according to him, "ten times worse" than during training. But what did he mean by that, and what was it that made him react in such a way? Was it the way the soldiers were treated, or was it the way they approached the Jews? Or was it something he much later arrived at?[45]

Throughout the book Westlie tries to verify the events his father describes

by doing extensive research, and he tries to figure out what his father had left out in his tape-recorded memoirs and why he had done so. The events at the Eastern Front in Ukraine are of particular importance, because it became crucial for Westlie to find out to what degree his father participated in the pursuit, deportation, and assassination of Jews. The tapes and letters did not provide any answers to that question, and Westlie decided he needed to travel to Ukraine and seek out the places where his father was stationed, the people living there now, and what they had to tell. As best he could, he followed in his father's footsteps. Westlie found the remains of mass graves nearby where he believed his father had been positioned, but—as with Simen Sætre in *Hugo*—the more he found out, the more questions he was left with. The truth kept slipping away; all the different sources provided nothing but bits and pieces that never made a complete picture. In the end, Westlie confronted his father, who was still alive, albeit in poor health. It became a meeting filled with ambiguity, leaving Westlie with no final answers.

Questioning claims of truth is also at the heart of Kjetil S. Østli's *Politi og røver,*[46] the book that won the Brage nonfiction award in 2009. In *Politi og røver,* Østli, a feature writer with *Aftenposten*, portrays an undercover agent who for twenty years worked to bring down a gang of criminals involved in several armed robberies, including the infamous 2004 robberies of the Munch painting *The Scream* and the Nokas Cash Handling, from where the gang managed to get away with 57.4 million NOK (approximately U.S. $10 million). Østli also portrays one of the gang members, a man who started his "career" the same year as the agent. Østli followed both of these men for three years and discovered many similarities between them. He was surprised to find that the main line of difference was not drawn between the cop and the criminal, but between the cop and the criminal on the one side, and him, the well-educated family man, on the other. The cop and the criminal represented an ideal of masculinity quite different from the one Østli adhered to. They were both risk takers and adventure seekers; they loved guns and action, body building, and fast cars; they would never take paternity leave; they did not read books; they shared the same favorite movie (*Heat*) and the same views on women's rights; and it seemed to Østli that there were only minor coincidences that had made one of them a cop and the other a criminal. It might as well have been the other way around. If the law did not divide them, they would have been great friends.

After a while, Østli found out not only that they knew each other much better than he originally thought, but that they—the cop and the criminal—were conspiring behind his back in order to change his views on masculinity. They nicknamed him spitefully "the academic" and considered him a wimp

and a sissy. They started, Østli afterwards learned, "Project Man."

Part of this Project Man involved teaching Østli how to drive like a man, which, according to the cop and the criminal, implied driving fast and recklessly. One cold winter day Østli therefore found himself in a car with the criminal behind the steering wheel in search of a deserted, icy road where some "real" driving could be done. The criminal found the perfect road, and the events that then unfolded were so shocking to the journalist that he totally blacked out. He was so scared he could not remember a thing afterwards. He wrote about the experience based on the recordings he had made on a minidisc recorder he had left on the dashboard:

> "We could drive all night, just drive, drive, drive" I hear Petter say on the recorder. And then I just hear the engine, pushed to its limits, and I visualize the narrow road, the turns, the accident, the death, the funeral. And then, out of nowhere, I hear myself laughing. A loud laugh I don't recognize, high-pitched and strange, and in-between the gasps I can hear myself cursing, swearwords gushing out of me. "HAHAHA FUCKING HELL FUCK FUCKING CUNT HAHAHA."
>
> I was so surprised I had to listen to the minidisc once again. Now I heard that my fear turned into hysteric euphoria. And I heard more. My laughter was not manly. It wasn't The Man we had lured out. It was the boy. Who you really are, says Nietzche, is a big child, who can make life an esthetic game of self-confirmation until eternity. It was the boy inside me I found that night.[47]

The experience made Østli question his own ideas of masculinity, and the book is as much about what it means to be a man in a contemporary Western society as it is about a cop chasing a criminal. Østli is forced to reconsider his preconceived ideas of manhood, of morality, of ethics—and, as with Sætre and Westlie, he is left with more questions than answers.

All three of these books share some striking similarities. Apart from being thoroughly researched and beautifully written pieces of literary journalism, they are all highly subjective and methodologically transparent. None of the three journalists claims to have found the objective truth about the topics they write about; they are more than happy with mapping out different perspectives and different levels of subjective truths. Furthermore, they are deeply involved with the subjects they write about, and this involvement becomes a core part of their narratives. What seems to be a book about a homeless drug addict is as much a book about the journalist's, and the implied reader's, prejudice and preconceived ideas.[48] What seems to be a book about a father who was a SS soldier is as much a book about a son trying to understand the incomprehensible. And what seems to be a book about a cop

and a criminal is as much a book about a modern family man trying to figure out what it really means to be a man.

In contrast to *The Bookseller of Kabul* these three books are rooted in the traditions of modernist literary journalism and Nordic reportage. Sætre, Westlie, and Østli are deeply affected by what they experience, and their emotional reactions constitute much of the books' thematic substance.

VI

To conclude this essay, I will take a look at Seierstad's most recent book, *The Angel of Grozny: Inside Chechnya,*[49] to see if any changes in her epistemological position can be found. The most striking difference between this book and *The Bookseller of Kabul* is that *The Angel of Grozny* is a first-person narrative, thus allowing much more methodological transparency and a more specified and subjective point of view. However, Seierstad does make use of an omniscient narrator in certain parts of the book, and, for example, resorts to a third person narration and a reconstruction of inner monologue in the first chapter, techniques she used in *The Bookseller of Kabul.* But this is the exception rather than the rule in *The Angel of Grozny.* The first part of the book consists mainly of Seierstad's recollection of her first trips to Chechnya as a correspondent for *Arbeiderbladet* in the mid-1990s. This part is written with an awareness of the tricks memory can play on past events, as when Seierstad writes about her trip from the airport to the city center of Grozny: "Did I walk? Did I drive? Did I meet anyone? Did I catch a ride with anyone? I am no longer able to remember how, but in some way or the other I ended up in the city center of Grozny."[50] And a few pages later Seierstad mixes dreams with reality in her description of her first night in Grozny in a way that makes the reader wonder were the one ends and the other begins:

> The cool breeze had been an illusion, now the dark was warm and heavy. The sheets were clammy. There was no air to breathe in. The salvos came closer; there were fights just around the corner. The gate was broken open and the house stormed by soldiers, who slammed the door open, ripped the blanket off me, pulled me out of bed, threw me on the floor. I screamed. And woke up. Then I dozed off again to a restless sleep accompanied by the gunfire, which came closer and became more distant, before slowly dying down.[51]

This kind of humble uncertainty is not to be found in *The Bookseller of Kabul*, and given the first-person narrator that Seierstad employs when she travels back to Chechnya in 2006—a trip that makes up the main part of the book—it becomes clear that Seierstad has changed her narrative style and epistemological approach, making her literary journalism far more openly

subjective, closer to the modernist position and more compatible with the Nordic reportage tradition. She is, to a much greater extent, "an independent moral agent," which, according to James L. Aucoin, represents a quality judgment of literary journalism. Writing about Ryszard Kapuscinski, Aucoin argues that such a quality judgment implies that: "His techniques and biases are laid bare before the readers, allowing each to judge his credibility."[52] Instead of trying to create authenticity in a positivist-realist manner by presenting facts as absolute, Seirstad's own voice—her "humble I"—becomes her "badge of authenticity,"[53] as it did for such a master of European reportage as Ryszard Kapuscinski, and as it did for Simen Sætre, Bjørn Westlie, and Kjetil S. Østli.

It must, however, be noted that the "humble I" by itself does not guarantee such authenticity. As any narrator, the "humble I" is a literary construction. It can never be an actual representation of the author, even though the bond between the author and the narrator in first-person journalism is closer than in fiction. The "humble I" may implicitly position the journalist in the text as a moral agent, but it also positions the journalist as a literary agent. There is a chance that the "humble I" becomes ritualized as a genre convention in literary journalism, as a kind of narrator journalists construct in order to create a sense of authenticity. If that becomes the case, the "humble I" becomes just another container, which, in Eason's words, "can come to seem as incapable of grasping reality as those [it] displaced."[54]

Notes

1. Siss Vik, "Bestselger på tross [Best seller in spite]" *Bokprogrammet,* NRK (Oslo: NRK, 19 October 2010).

2. Espen Søbye, "Traurig fra Kabul [Dreary from Kabul]," *Dagbladet*, 2 September 2002, http://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/2002/09/02/347621.html.

3 Åsne Seierstad, *Bokhandleren i Kabul. Et familiedrama [The Bookseller of Kabul. A Family Drama]* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2002).

4. David Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-world," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 191–205.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid., 192.

7. Ibid.

8. Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, trans. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 68.

9. Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism: Conversations on Craft With America's Best Nonfiction Writers* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

10. See for instance Jo Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen [The Reportage]*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002); Steen Steensen, *Stedets Sjanger. Om Moderne Reportasjejournalistikk [The Genre of Place. On Modern Reportage Journalism]* (Kristiansand: IJ-forlaget, 2009); John Carey, *The Faber Book of Reportage* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987); John C. Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: The 'Other' Literary Journalism," in *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, ed. John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 23–46.

11. Hartsock, "Literary Reportage," 30.

12. Ibid., 41.

13. Jo Bech-Karlsen, "Rapportbøker og dokumentarisk reportasje [Report Books and Documentary Reportage]," in *Norsk Litteraturhistorie. Sakprosa Fra 1750 Til 1995 [Norwegian History of Literarure. Nonfiction from 1750 to 1995]*, ed. Egil B. Johnsen and Lars B. Eriksen, vol. 2 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1998), 238–51.

14. See for instance Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen*; Thore Roksvold, *Avissjangrer over Tid [Newspaper Genres Across Time]* (Fredrikstad: Institutt for journalistikk, 1997). See also Bech-Karlsen's contribution elsewhere in this issue of *Literary Journalism Studies*.

15. Torunn Borge, ed., *Yrke, Reporter: Fra Isabelle Eberhardt til Wera Sæther [Occupation: Reporter. From Isabelle Eberhardt to Wera Sæther]* (Oslo: Oktober 1999).

16. Bech-Karlsen, *Reportasjen*, 216.

17. Seierstad, *Bokhandleren i Kabul*.

18. Åsne Seierstad, *Med ryggen mot verden. Portretter fra Serbia [With the Back Against the World. Profiles from Serbia]* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2000).

19. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971).

20. "Portrett" (Portrait) is a well-established genre of journalism in both print and broadcast in Norway, equivalent to a long profile interview.

21. Poul Behrendt, *Dobbeltkontrakten. En æstetisk nydannelse [The Double Contract. An Aesthetic New Formation]* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2006).

22. Jo Bech-Karlsen, "Literary Journalism: Contracts and Double Contracts with Readers," *Literary Journalism. The Newsletter of the IALJS* 4, no. 3 (2010): 8.

23. Richard McGill Murphy, "The War at Home," *The New York Times*, 21 December 2003, Online edition, http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/21/books/the-war-at-home.html?ref=bookreviews.

24. Tim Judah, "Family at War – with itself," *The Observer*, 31 August 2003, Online edition, http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/aug/31/travel.features.

25. Jan-Erik Smilden, "Åsne er min venn uansett. Men hun tar feil [Åsne is my friend no matter what. But she is wrong]," *Dagbladet*, 11 September 2002.

26. Lena Storvand, Ida Ellisif Knutsen, and Guro Hoftun Gjestad, "– Hater Åsne veldig mye nå [– Hate Åsne very much right now]," *VG*, 28 August 2003.

27. Lena Storvand, "– Angrer på at bokhandleren ikke fikk lese manuset [– Regrets that the bookseller did not read the manuscript]," *VG*, 28 August 2003.

28. Lena Storvand, "– Boken må være oppspinn [– The book has to be a fabrication]," *VG*, 29 August2003.

29. "– Mangler moralsk samvittighet [– Lacks moral consciousness]," *Dagbladet*, 29 August 2003.

30. Kathrine Aspaas, "Overlagt svik [Deliberate betrayal]," *Aftenposten*, 29 August 2003, sec. Kultur.

31. "Bokhandleren vil skrive om Seierstad [The bookseller will write about Seierstad]," *Dagsavisen*, 22 September 2003.

32. Tore Gjerstad, "Bokhandlerens kone: Sint på Åsne [The bookseller's wife: angry with Åsne]," *Dagbladet*,18 September 2003, 50.

33. Unni Wikan, "En svært forsinket debatt om bokhandleren fra Kabul [A very delayed debate on the bookseller of Kabul]," *Aftenposten*, 30 September 2003, sec. Debatt, 8.

34. Terje Tvedt, "The native strikes back. Om budbringere og verdensbeskrivelser [The native strikes back. On messengers and descriptions of the world]," *Samtiden*, no. 4 (2004): 18.

35. Knut Christian Myhre, "The Bookseller of Kabul and the Anthropologists of Norway," *Anthropology Today* 20, no. 3 (2004): 22.

36. Ibid.

37. Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-world," 194.

38. Elisabeth Eide, *Down There and up Here: Orientalism and Othering in Feature Stories* (New York: Hampton Press, 2011), 284.

39. Borge, *Yrke, Reporter*, 12.

40. Sandra Lillebø, "Gjør journalistenes jobb [Does the journalists' job]," *Klassekampen*, 21 September 2010.

41. Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-world."

42. Simen Sætre, *Hugo: En biografi [Hugo. A Biography]* (Oslo: JM Stenersens forlag, 2006); (the name Hugo is a pseudonym).

43. Ibid., 15–16 (my translation).

44. Bjørn Westlie, *Fars krig [My Father's War]* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2008).

45. Ibid., 98 (my translation).

46. Kjetil S. Østli, *Politi og røver [Cop and Criminal]* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2009).

47. Ibid., 164 (my translation).

48. By "implied reader" I refer to the way in which meaning is prestructured by the text and actualized through the reading process. See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

49. Åsne Seierstad, *De krenkede: historier fra Tsjetsjenia* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2007); English version: *The Angel of Grozny: Inside Chechnya* (London: Virago, 2008).

50. Seierstad, *De krenkede*, 21 (my translation).

51. Ibid., 23 (my translation).

52. James L Aucoin, "Epistemic Responsibility and Narrative. Theory The Literary Journalism of Ryszard Kapuscinski," *Journalism* 2, no. 1 (2001): 15.

53. Ibid., 17.

54. Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-world," 203.

The Literary Journalist as Fellow Human Being

Kristiane Larssen
Harald Hornmoen
Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences, Norway

Three contemporary Norwegian literary journalists discuss the responsibilities of the literary journalist, and the problematic ideals of their genre.

"One day, abruptly, the life of a family member will appear as a book. Their sorrows will resurge again. There will be nights when they cannot sleep. They will see sides of a son or brother that they are not familiar with. That will happen, because I, an inquisitive journalist, lift stones, interfere in Hugo's and their lives."

The excerpt is from *Hugo,* a book by the literary journalist Simen Sætre.[1] The book is based on his experience following the homeless drug abuser Hugo over a period of one year. In this book the author has entered a room that conventionally has been reserved for fictional literature. Whereas the news journalist normally relates to press conferences, meeting rooms, and offices—in other words, the public rooms—Sætre has entered a private room or sphere.

Sætre's methods and motivation are similar to those found among American practitioners of what has been labeled the "New New Journalism." In his book *The New New Journalism* Robert S. Boynton[2] attempts to define these writers and their common platform:

> What they do share is a dedication to the craft of reporting, a conviction that by immersing themselves deeply into their subjects' lives, often for prolonged periods of time, they can bridge the gap between their subjective perspective and the reality they are observing, that they can render reality in a way that is both accurate and aesthetically pleasing.[3]

These journalists spend weeks, months, and years in the private sphere of their sources and have consequently opened a crack in the door between the private room and the parlor of the public, or, as Boynton explains: "Wolfe went inside his character's head; the New New Journalists become a part of their lives."[4]

An Unanswered Question of Ethics

Sætre is not the only Norwegian writer who has taken literary ambitions and journalistic methods and entered the lives of ordinary people. The huge success of books such as Åsne Seierstad's *The Bookseller of Kabul* [5] suggests that the trends from American New New Journalism are having an impact in Norway. Moreover, narrative journalism is a hot topic in newsrooms; journalists who are able to write a good story in a compelling way are highly regarded.[6]

Such trends have not always gone smoothly, as demonstrated in the wake of Seierstad's Kabul narrative. After its publication she was criticized for her methods, the truth content of the book, her use of a hidden narrator and interior monologue, the laying bare of intimate details, and the family's privacy protection. (On this dispute, see Steensen's article in this issue.) In the wake of the dispute journal editor Karianne Bjellås Gilje called for ethical guidelines for the literary journalist in an article in the Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen*: "If we get more books where journalists cover milieus either out in the world or at home, we need more discussion about the use of sources in literary journalism. . . . "[7]

The code of ethics of the Norwegian press, Vaer Varsom-plakaten, which is a set of normative guidelines adopted by the Norwegian Press Association, provides a strict privacy protection. In September 1999, the leader of the Norwegian Union of Journalists called for a study of the methods that the press used in its coverage of a child murder case. The authors of the report, the so-called Hedrum-rapporten, noted that the press's professional ethics seemed to cultivate a distanced and detached observation of an event, a professional attitude that left little room for empathy, caring, and compassion. The committee also noted that there is a tendency in the press to limit ethical questions to publishing, keeping the collecting of material and conducting of interviews outside the ethical domain.

In the wake of the report, journalistic conduct and relationships with the sources became its own chapter in the code of ethics of the Norwegian press. It was added that the ethical practice comprises the complete journalistic process. The revision signifies the importance of ethical awareness in the journalist-source relationship, but the wording is still vague.

The uncertainty surrounding ethical and moral issues tied to methods applied in literary journalism persists today. How should the journalist proceed when following individuals for weeks, months, and years in their private sphere? What is morally demanded from a journalist who becomes a part of the source's life? It is precisely such potential conflict zones in the literary journalist's entrance into the private sphere that we address in this article.

We will present three trendsetting Norwegian literary journalists' thoughts on these questions. They are Sætre, who writes for the Norwegian weekly newspaper *Morgenbladet* and has published four nonfiction books since 2004, including *Hugo,* which was nominated for the National Literature Award (Brageprisen); Steen Steensen, an associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences in Norway who spent eight months interacting with the elderly residents of a nursing home for his 2006 book *Beboerne* (*The Residents*); and Seierstad, whose *The Bookseller of Kabul* became the bestselling nonfiction book in Norwegian history and was translated into forty-one languages.

These three literary journalists´ reflections were acquired through a semi-structured interview method. Their reflections are presented by introducing them as they arise in three phases of the journalistic process: 1. preparation, 2. information gathering, and 3. publication and aftermath.

The Preparation Phase:

An Extended Informed Consent

How should a literary journalist best prepare sources, and possibly their relatives, on what it means to partake in stories that are so different from traditional news?

Sætre and Steensen emphasize the importance of giving the source a clear idea of what the end result is likely to be. Sætre gave Hugo the book *Stuart: A Life Backwards* by Alexander Masters[8] in order to create an understanding of his project. Steensen wrote a "test sample text" for the nursing home staff so that they could get an impression of how closely he wanted to portray the life there and how scenic the text would become. According to Steensen the staff was surprised by how he had chosen to write the text and how closely it depicted the sources, even though he had informed them about this in advance.

All the informants believe that the sources must know that they at any time have the possibility to abandon the project or have a kind of "brake pedal." The possibility to stop the project depends on what kind of stories are told and how deeply the stories delve. According to Steensen: "It is essential that such sources have much greater rights than official sources."[9] Sætre fears

that a brake pedal will lead to sources withdrawing right before publication, but points out that when sources have invested so much time in the project, they too will wish to see results from the efforts.

Seierstad, on the other hand, did not make any agreements with sources in *The Bookseller of Kabul* so that they could read the manuscript before publication. She explains:

> That was never a question. I did not even consider doing that. When we discussed it [the main source] said: "This is your book, and you write it the way you want to." It would also have been practically difficult. The family did not have a phone or mail at this time, and to mail them quotations by post would have been laborious.[10]

During her work with *De Krenkede* (*The Offended*),[11] Seierstad let her main sources have their own quotations read out and be informed about the contexts in which they were used. This was not because she feared that the sources were misquoted, but because they lived in Chechnya, a society with grave repression. She did not want the sources quoted on something that could cause problems for them. Seierstad dropped a whole chapter because of the sources' intervention, even though she thought the chapter could have been exciting.

Seierstad makes an important point when stating that if the source achieves too much control over the text, there is also a risk that essential elements of reportage disappear. The journalists do allow their sources to exert considerable control over the project, even though this may negatively affect their "purpose-rational considerations." The fact that these journalists give their sources such influence over the process is interesting for several reasons. The code of ethics for journalists in Norway establishes that changes in quoted statements should be limited to correcting factual mistakes. In the book *The New New Journalism* a general principle is that sources shall not have an opportunity to read the whole manuscript, nor their own quotations, before publishing.[12] Steensen goes as far as stating that vulnerable sources also should have a certain influence over how the text is framed, how images are used and the layout is designed, but he does add that this influence is determined by context: It all depends how deeply the journalist delves into the source's private zone.

Working with *Beboerne*, Steensen prepared a written contract with the staff at the nursing home and the city area Sagene. The contract gives a detailed account of his journalistic motives and what the project demands of both parties. This kind of contract could increase the confidentiality in the source relationship, and secure the rights of both the journalist and the source. But Sætre, Steensen, and Seierstad reject the idea of routinely formalizing a source contract for vulnerable sources.

Incomplete Consent

For *Beboerne* Steensen used sources with dementia, sources who evidently could not know the consequences of being interviewed. He had to trust that their relatives and the staff were capable of judging such consequences on their behalf. He believes that such a procedure is justified when the journalist can account for his choices on the grounds of a social and journalistic responsibilities.

In a similar manner Sætre defends "under cover" as a method used when he worked with *Hugo*. Sætre believes that he would not have gained admittance to key places if he appeared as a journalist, whether in drug circles outdoors in Oslo or in the hostels. Because of this, Hugo used to say that Sætre was his brother.

One of Sætre's greatest ethical challenges was that some members of Hugo's family did not want a book to be written about his life. Both Sætre and his book editor talked to family members who did not support the project. The solution became to anonymize Hugo, despite the fact that he himself wanted to appear with his family name. The family was also given the opportunity to read the manuscript before publication. For Sætre it was important to let Hugo decide if he wanted to contribute or not. He further believes that having incomplete consent from relatives is a problem because the process that the journalist exposes the family to is a process that may " bring up things that are difficult, [since] one digs into the childhood and enters into open wounds. . . ."[13] Now he thinks that the decision to write about Hugo was right: "If the book has positive consequences for many other people and may have negative consequences for the family—how should one compensate for that? There really are no clear answers. But I think it was right. I was not so sure before the book was published. Now I am sure."[14]

When Sætre asks whether the positive consequences for many people legitimizes the harm he possibly inflicts on close relatives, he essentially asks a question concerning the way of thinking in consequentalist ethics: Is it defensible to act on the ground that the decision is likely to have positive consequences for as many people as possible?

Choosing Sources

In literary journalism it is important that the sources have *good* stories, with conflict, a turning point, and an acknowledgment of one's own situation. Steensen is familiar with several cases where journalists have arranged something resembling an audition in order to choose the best story. But he finds this practice ethically problematic: "To have people's private life on audition—that does not sound right."[15] He experienced choosing sources for

Beboerne as somewhat unpleasant, because he had to pick among a rather large amount of people. According to Steensen, the ideal entrance would be to discover the story first, a story that also could tell us something about the society we live in, although this approach cannot be made into a matter of principle.

A Joint Project?

All of the informants consider it important that journalists seek information about the sources' motivation for participating: "Some may have a political agenda; some want to be portrayed for vanity reasons."[16] Sætre points out that a motivation may have many elements, and he is not sure if the journalist should refuse participation because a source has an "invalid motivation." He believes the source ideally should participate for somewhat similar reasons as the journalist. He himself sought a person who was motivated to display what it was like to live on the streets.

If a journalist and a source share the motivation behind the project, is it then natural to conceive of this type of journalism as a kind of "joint project" between source and journalist? Steensen believes this concept *sounds* erroneous, but still agrees: "One should have a common interest and motivation in telling something important."[17]

The Information-gathering Phase: Private Spaces and the Public Stage

The three journalists consider it important to clarify in advance what the sources wish to be quoted as saying, how much the sources wish to recount, and how much of it the journalist can expose. Nevertheless, the informants admit they also have had problems striking a balance between what one may convey and that which should remain private.

Steensen thinks that on a couple of occasions he went too far in documenting the intimacies in the daily life at the nursing home. He took pictures of the residents in intimate, private situations—for instance, during morning care and change of catheter. The pictures were not intended to be published, but rather to be used as documentation during the writing process. He now regrets having taken some of these pictures.

Sætre also ponders the question of where the boundaries for Hugo's private life were to be drawn: "Which sphere shall he have for himself and where shall I not enter?"[18] He thinks he may have gone too far when he brought Hugo home to his mother, whom he had not seen for four years, and put a recorder on the table. They had difficulties talking to each other, and Sætre encouraged them to speak, within the confines of an interview: "I entered into

a relationship between him and his mother and interfered rather strongly in their lives on the grounds of my motivation, which was journalistic."[19] But he did respect an "untouchability zone" for Hugo. There were things he did not ask about because he thought it would be too difficult for Hugo to enter into.

Seierstad does not think *The Bookseller of Kabul* is as intimate as many claim it is. But if she were to work with the book anew, she would be more careful with some of the details, among them a scene where she describes a woman washing herself. She now sees that portraying a naked woman in a society where all women wear a burka was a misjudgment: "For me it was a very beautiful scene. It was foolish. I would not do that again."[20] She further believes that the intimacy in the book lies more in her presence in their daily life than in that the sources confided their inner thoughts to her. She was careful not to get too intimate in interview situations:

They are very modest, those women. I found it very difficult to ask about things related to sexuality, and I hardly did that unless they invited me to ask about it. We had a conversation about it and I did not include it. It was not suitable. It became too intimate, you can say.[21]

Steensen has, on his side, experienced that even if one agrees in advance on a kind of untouchability zone, the source may often exceed it in the interview situation. The solution for him is to remind the source about the interview situation by asking: "Are you sure that this is something I can write about?"

Protecting the Source

According to the code of ethics for Norwegian journalists, one is to: "show consideration for people who cannot be expected to be aware of the effect that their statements may have. Never abuse the emotions and feelings of other people, their ignorance or their lack of judgment. Remember that people in shock or grief are more vulnerable than others."[22]

Even though the sources haves given informed consent to tell their stories, it is, in the end, the *ethical responsibility* of the journalist to judge whether the sources are ready to tell them. One of Sætre's greatest ethical challenges was to decide if it was right to subject a person to the intense experience of having a book written about oneself. Sætre reflected on how his project would influence a person who already had problems. In this case, he thinks that the solution was to find a person who had the motivation to tell his story, and had been given the possibility to retreat at any time. Sætre chose Hugo as a source because he perceived him as resourceful. He believes it is right to give the source time to decide if he is ready to contribute.

Steensen, too, mentions time as an important key, because the journalist

can never be fully confident that the source is really ready for the attention that may follow:

> One cannot as a journalist believe that one possesses such unique abilities to judge characters. One cannot be bombastically certain. One can assess situations to a certain extent. Having time is a key—to not have any time constraints—so that one doesn't intrude into in a grieving process with a plan to publish something the next week. One must be able to come back half a year later and ask: "How does it feel now?"[23]

Seierstad perceives two challenges when one attempts to judge if a source is ready to participate: If the source is ready to talk, and if the source is ready to get the story published. Like Sætre she sees a solution in making sources anonymous. In *De Krenkede*, she chose to anonymize children suffering from war traumas. But she also believes that it does not necessarily have to be a great strain on the source to talk about her traumas. It may be a good thing.

None of the informants had any general advice about how one as a journalist should judge if sources are ready to present their stories. However, all of them could account for how they themselves had assessed this problem in specific situations. We therefore interpret them as building their knowledge about traumatized sources on experience rather than on theory about how such sources—and sources under great psychological pressure—act.

The journalists, then, believe that the work process may contribute to something that is beneficial for the source in the sense that difficult matters are talked about rather than suppressed. But when the source uses the journalistic work process as a form of therapy, or when the journalist indirectly creates a kind of understanding of the source's "emotional chaos," does not the journalist then take on the role of a therapist?

Journalist, Therapist, or Friend?

According to the code of ethics in the Norwegian press, journalistic integrity to a certain extent presupposes distance. But all three informants experience a detached position as a virtually impossible ideal. Sætre found that it was necessary to play with open cards and let Hugo become acquainted with him to achieve the kind of confidentiality that the book project demanded. Steensen thinks that the journalist necessarily has to enter a different role than the traditional role when one delves so deeply into another person's life:

> The question is: Is that a problem? Is it problematic to tell about your own life? I don't worry so much about holding on to the traditional journalist role. I did not have any problems with sharing, telling about my own life and talking about other things than what I was there to write about. . . . One is, above all, a fellow human being; one isn't first and foremost a

> journalist. Particularly this kind of journalism has a clear humanistic side, which makes it ridiculous to pretend that doesn't become a part of it.[24]

Seierstad, on the other hand, says that she has not shared many of her own life experiences in interview situations. She has experienced that most people are not particularly interested in her background, especially not in situations where the sources are in a conflict and both their life situation and their society is so different from her own. When working with *The Bookseller* she did not fear that she would pass on information that the sources gave her confidentially because she did not speak their language.

Sætre believes that the danger related to getting access to feelings that a source shows in intimate situations is that the journalist may exploit it for commercial purposes. If the journalist uses these feelings in order to sell newspapers, he thinks the journalist acts immorally. Sætre further thinks that the meeting between his publisher and Hugo reminded him that there was a professional context around the project that had to be maintained: "It is OK that I became a friend of Hugo, but there was also a publishing house there which I had to relate professionally to."[25]

The Journalist's Appearance

An ethical dilemma that Seierstad explicitly mentions from working with *The Bookseller of Kabul* was the extent to which she was to enter into discussions with the family:

> Should I have explained that "you know, for a Norwegian reader what you are doing now will appear as very unfair"? It was not my role to say that. So I did not enter into many discussions, simply because I did not want to influence the family. . . . I thought that I am not here to reform a family or say "that and that is unjust." Otherwise I could have risked that they had changed their behavior because they knew that I did not like it. . . . I tried to act in such a way that I got the right picture. And then I could not all the time say what I thought.[26]

Seierstad's issue, the extent to which a journalist should interfere with and influence situations, she observes, was also Sætre's when he was working with *Hugo*: "I may have 200 kroner in my pocket and he stands and freezes, begs, and is about to become ill. How do I relate to that? If I lend him money, then the story will be a different one."[27] Sætre found a solution through drawing strict boundaries. He made it clear that he had to follow some rules and that Hugo had to accept them. Sætre could, for example, treat him to food and coffee, but he would not put money in his cup. When Sætre broke the rules and lent Hugo money, it was used as a kind of experiment that he used in his writing, but then he was also open about his choices and dilemmas in

the book. In situations where the journalist does not participate as a character, Sætre believes that the journalist should not interfere unless the circumstances are extreme or dire.

Steensen thinks it is naïve of the journalist to believe one can observe a situation without influencing it through one's presence. That is the problem of the hidden narrator. But as long as one is open about what one does and writes about it in the text, Steensen feels one may be as much of a presence as one likes, and that need not be interpreted as wanting to steer sources in a particular direction to improve the story.

Seierstad has also experienced situations where she wanted to intervene. When working with *The Bookseller of Kabul* she became less concerned about intervening when she felt that she "had the story." Seierstad experienced the dilemma in a situation where the bookseller wanted to report a poor carpenter for a minor theft. She says she then intervened and tried to prevent the bookseller from reporting it. She further says that she intervened because she "had the story" and the carpenter had already been interrogated by the police. She then gave the carpenter money because she felt sorry for him. She considers it absurd to define which situations are appropriate for intervention and which are not, but points out, like Steensen and Sætre, that it is less problematic to intervene in cases where the journalist herself appears as a character in the text.

Sætre witnessed criminal activity. In such situations, he believes it is important to make one's role as observer clear; one should never store substances or interfere in any way, but rather draw back from the situation: "One's presence should be flexible. Generally one should have a role that is laidback and observing."[28]

Publication and Aftermath:

An Uneven Trade-off

The relationship between reporter and source has traditionally been viewed as a trade-off. In literary journalism it is unusual for the source to ask for media attention or seek publicity. The source spends considerable time in interviews, and in such a context the relationship between source and journalist may appear as an uneven trade-off. Is it then really illogical to compensate for the time and efforts of the source?

Steensen sees it as unethical to pay the source if the source needs money and the payment becomes a condition for the project. Furthermore, he believes it is not necessarily less ethical for a newspaper than for a publishing house to pay for the source's contribution, but that the uneven trade-off becomes less visible if a book, which has been created on the basis of a meeting

between journalist and source, sells well. He has experienced how sources immediately ask: "How much do I get for this?" and he always answers: "Nothing." To him it is important to know that the sources participate with the right motives, and not because they think they can make money.

Hugo received a form of compensation for his contribution from the publisher. According to Sætre, a teacher at the Journalism Program in Oslo suggested the compensation:

> I made it clear that [Hugo] would not receive any money for the project. I think the compensation was a decent arrangement; it was an issue between him and the publisher. It was not my money. . . . I would have found it difficult to pay him. That would have been at the expense of what I think about the journalist role.[29]

Sætre adds that it is not always the case that the source thinks he has not "got[ten] something back" from participating in a large journalistic project. He believes that Hugo appreciated the acquaintance in part because he made contact with someone outside the drug circles. He thinks, then, that Hugo had a positive experience through them getting to know each other.

In several cases, Seierstad has helped those she has written about economically, from her own pocket. She has supported the building of a school in Afghanistan and contributed to opening a bakery in Chechnya. As long as everything happens after the project has ended, Seierstad does not see it as a pressing ethical issue, but rather as a gesture from her as a private person.

The informants, then, have different opinions of which contexts and to what extent it is permissible to compensate for the source's time and participation. But if it is, as Seierstad suggests, acceptable to pay after projects have ended, is it then the case that the journalist stops being a journalist the moment the last period is put in the reportage?

To Withdraw From the Private Sphere

When Sætre ended the project with Hugo, he asked himself what further responsibility he had for Hugo: "When one has followed somebody . . . for such a long period, what kind of responsibilities do you then have? I think it has to do with being present—if [sources] need to talk, then one talks with them . . . without trying to save them or solve their problems. It is a kind of passive presence."[30]

Steensen experienced it as strange to end the relationship with one of the close relatives from the book, after following her for so long. He thinks that one may feel cynical when all contact suddenly ends after publication. However, he points out: "I do not think that there is any expectation there on the other side either. It is not only that I know the premises and what this

is about—neither does the source have an expectation about sustaining that contact. That would not be natural for the source either."[31]

He does not think the journalist has an extended responsibility for the source's life situation after publication, except for making sure that the source is comfortable with the attention. He has experienced how sources have contacted him after publication with a kind of expectation that he will write something else or something new, and finds it difficult to reject the requests: "Then one has not succeeded in reaching the common understanding of the boundaries of the project."[32]

Seierstad is of the opinion that when the project has ended, one is free to do what one wishes, such as supporting different initiatives economically. She views her support after she completed her work for *The Bookseller* in this way: "Not really as a penitential exercise, but a little because ethically this is not my story. It is Afghanistan's story. If I could contribute to more people getting education,[so] that more people can tell their stories, then I have done it."[33]Still she believes that boundaries for the relationship with individual persons must be clear from the outset: When the project is completed, then the relationship between the professional journalist and the source is over: "You may carry on having contact, but you are not there as a spiritual adviser."[34]

The Aim of Literary Journalism

We have seen that in many cases the informants justify their choices on the grounds of their perception of the *importance* and *relevance* of their projects. It may be difficult to accommodate a traditional understanding of the journalist role in definitions of the purpose behind literary journalism. One definition, for example, sees the literary journalist not as a watchdog, but as a communicator of "the complexity of humankind."[35] We further emphasize how the journalist's right to interfere with others' private issues is anchored in journalism's societal mission, and if this task is not carried out, the right to interfere with others' private issues disappears. The question then is: How do our informants position their projects within an understanding of a larger societal mission of journalism?

Sætre has difficulties with seeing how all of Nordic literary journalism fulfills a societal task. He sometimes wonders if it is the reading experience itself that is interesting, somewhat like when magazine fiction draws one in by a gripping story, without it having any value beyond itself. Sætre wishes himself to be positioned within an American "New New Journalism" tradition:

> In a way there has to be a cost connected to people who tell about their own lives, but that cost must . . . be motivated by a greater framework, I feel. The reason I think it is justified in the case of Hugo is that there is a lack of

> knowledge about that life situation, or there has been a [perception] that has been wrong. So I think that one can illuminate important matters by [writing about them], and in such a context one may view it in a kind of exposé tradition, in which one illuminates parts of reality to get a proper political understanding.[36]

Sætre thinks it would have been difficult to legitimize the book if Hugo did not have this motivation. Certainly, a human life may be exciting enough in itself, but Sætre believes there must be a greater motivation than just to tell a good story.

Steensen, too, is of the opinion that one has to elevate the story to exhibit general human values or place the story in a context where the source's story may say something about a phenomenon in our time or in our society:

> To move the readers only at an emotional level is not enough. One must try to include a dimension that appeals to the intellect. But then the question is: Will not all stories about human experience have something universal about them? Yes, but there is also a difference between *Dynasty* and *The Wire*.[37]

He further points out that a societal task or mission is a difficult concept and that large parts of all journalism cannot be defined as important or relevant. The journalist role must also include telling stories about ordinary people's everyday lives, but based on a premise that one still "manages to lift it up to a level where the story has a value beyond itself."[38]

Seierstad emphasizes that all reportage activity has to do with seeking out someone, traveling to a place, finding out things, and judging if what is discovered is generally beneficial or important to understanding the world:

> How can we understand the Afghans without seeking them out, asking them about things, or the Chechens, Serbs or Iraqis, or the drug-addicted or different groups, parents of young children or whatever. This is of course the premise for the whole of reportage, the journalist role; to define for oneself what one thinks is important to write about.[39]

Even though there are topics that do not interest her, Seierstad also sees a value in reportages or books that are about "ordinary people's" challenges, narratives that may be of assistance to people facing similar problems.

We interpret the informants' answers in this manner: If the motivation to write reportage solely is to appeal to a "sense of community," the journalist fails in writing a good literary reportage. If the topic concerns many people, manages to appeal to the intellect, and at the same time illuminates important or unknown parts of our society, the journalist succeeds in writing a solid literary reportage within the frames of the societal mission of the press. The

orientation towards individual persons in literary journalism should be considered as a device in order to illuminate important social issues.

Conclusion

Summarizing the contributions of the three informants makes it possible to point out a direction for how the Norwegian literary journalist should proceed when entering the private sphere of vulnerable sources. It is clear that vulnerable sources should have more rights than official sources, but the circumstances of literary journalism are such that hard-and-fast professional norms may not be appropriate. In some cases a judgment call, a sense of what feels right, will determine the appropriate way to proceed in an encounter with another person.

These literary journalists are prepared to allow their sources to intervene directly in the narrative of the literary journalist, even though their intervention may reduce the quality of the reportage. But these writers also recognize their responsibility to educate their sources about how literary journalism works, communicating details with revelatory power, so that the source can be fully informed before making a decision to cooperate.

The process of immersion journalism means that other relationships beyond the immediate source connection need to be considered, including relationships with family members and those that may continue after the story is complete. Boundaries must be carefully negotiated, as when the journalist takes on a therapeutic role of helping a source deal with trauma and then perhaps learns information that would not be in the source's best interest to reveal.

In cases where the literary journalist writes a narrative from private spaces without informed consent, the journalist should base the reasons for doing so on a solid, social responsibility. If one interprets the requirement of informed consent too strictly, some areas of society, such as its drug scene and geriatric care, may not be covered properly. Overall the published story ought to have significance beyond itself. The informants use the importance of their project to legitimize their intrusion into the private sphere of vulnerable sources. The personal stories should not only appeal to the readers' feelings, but illuminate social issues.

The debate about the methods used by literary journalists is often reduced to a question of "for" or "against." But one should not underestimate the power of literary journalism as a genre whose function is to use personal stories to direct the reader's attention towards critical social issues. The value of a place for a private life in the public should not be underestimated. The important thing is that literary journalists continuously reflect on the way they approach and use vulnerable sources, and on the power they possess in their communication with them.

Notes

1. Simen Sætre, *Hugo: En biografi* (Oslo: Stenersens forlag, 2006). Our translation.

2. Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

3. Ibid., 27.

4. Ibid.

5. Åsne Seierstad, *Bokhandleren i Kabul: Et familiedrama (*Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2002). Here referred to as *The Bookseller of Kabul*. The English translation was first published in 2003: Å. Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul*, trans. Ingrid Christophersen (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003).

6. Jo Bech-Karlsen, *Åpen eller skjult: Råd og uråd i fortellende journalistikk* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2007).

7. Katrine Ree Holmøy, «Trenger Vær Varsom-plakat», *Klassekampen*, 3 March 2007.

8 Alexander Masters, *Stuart: A Life Backwards* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005). Alexander Masters's book inspired Sætre's project. Masters's book is about the drug abuser Stuart and includes a biographical element where the main person's past is exposed in some chapters.

9. Steen Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.

10. Åsne Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.

11. Åsne Seierstad, *De krenkede: historier fra Tsjetsjenia* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2008).

12. Jon Krakauer is among those who never lets sources read through their own quotations. There is, in other words, a major difference between our informants' practice and American journalists' established practice. Krakauer says: "I tell the person I'm interviewing that he'll have no control over the process, that I won't show the article to him before publication, that he will give me things he'll regret. . . ." See Robert S. Boynton, 167.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.

16. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.

17. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.

18. Simon Sætre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.

19. Ibid.

20. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.

21. Ibid.

22. Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press, Norsk Journalistlag. http://www.nj.no/no/Journalistikk/Etikk/Var_Varsomplakaten/Code+of+Ethics+of+the+Norwegian+Press.b7C_wZHU0V.ips (accessed 5 April 2013).

23. Steensen, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.

24. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.

25. Sætre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009

26. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.
27. Sætre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.
32. Ibid.
33. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.
34. Ibid.
35. Linda Dalviken, *Fortellende journalistikk i Norden* (Kristiansand: IJ-forlaget, 2005), 38.
36. Sætre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.
37. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.
38. Ibid.
39. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.

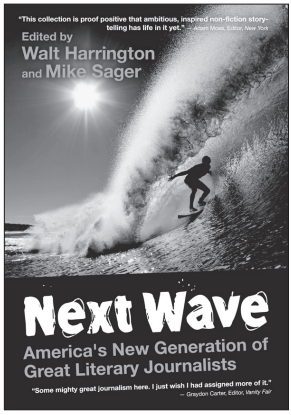
Book reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

The Future Has Arrived

Next Wave: America's New Generation of Great Literary Journalists
Edited by Walt Harrington and Mike Sager. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012. Paperback, 370 pp., $18.95

Reviewed by Holly E. Schreiber, Indiana University, U.S.A.



Walt Harrington and Mike Sager's edited collection, *Next Wave: America's New Generation of Great Literary Journalists,* promises to quell those rumors that the death of literary journalism is nigh. The book's cover, introduction, and advance praise excerpts all invoke the same anxiety surrounding the future of the form, even if only to assert the opposite—that literary journalism is alive and kicking, and is the choice form for some of the most promising talents working in journalism today. The editors write: "We're here to prove that the naysayers who predicted the end of literary journalism—compelling, long-form, nonfiction stories distinguished by in-depth reporting, artful writing and unique authorial point of view—were greatly mistaken" (xi).

And without a doubt, the collection of journalism assembled by Harrington and Sager does just that. With topics ranging from celebrity profiles to crime stories to disaster reconstructions, a reader's interest is easily maintained through the nineteen stories collected. To limit the collection, the editors chose stories written primarily in third person from writers who as of 2011 were under the age of forty. Other than these restrictions, the editors were guided by taste alone, leading to an impressive variety of work from magazines and newspapers across the country, both national and regional.

Stories that embrace ambiguity and complexity are harder to tell, and often fall between the cracks of mainstream journalism. It is the contribution of literary journalism to tell the difficult story—one that involves complicated characters rather than simply heroes and villains, with no easy answers in sight. The strongest of the pieces included in *Next Wave* do just this, showing that more consideration, more research, and more empathy can lead to a completely different story than has previously been told. Indeed, many of the stories in the collection come from what Dan P. Lee refers to as "scorched earth from the mainstream" (193), or material that has already been thoroughly (and at times gleefully) covered through other major news outlets. These reassessments are inherently critical of sensationalist, reductionist, or just plain insensitive journalism, even as they offer models of more responsible storytelling.

A particularly powerful example of this is Pamela Colloff's contribution, "Hannah and Andrew." Hannah Overton's arrest and trial had been covered before Colloff began her research. The case itself was harrowing: Overton was accused of poison-

ing her adopted, troubled child by force-feeding him Zatarain's seasoning. She had already been convicted of capital murder and sentenced to life in prison, in part due to the media and prosecution's portrayal of her as a cold, heartless child abuser. However, Colloff remarks that during the course of her own research, "the picture that emerged of Hannah was so radically at odds with the picture of her that had been presented at trial that I started thinking about that as a theme of the story. She was either an angel or a monster, and nothing in between" (28). The story that results not only forces readers to change their perception of the case, but also to consider the terrifying power of reductive characterizations such as "good" and "evil."

In another example, Wil S. Hylton's "The Unspeakable Choice" covers the astounding number of children abandoned shortly after the passage of Nebraska's safe-haven law. Hylton began his research with trepidation, wondering what responsible story could result from such tragic circumstances. He recalls asking himself, "Beyond the sordid tale of negligence and trauma, did the episode reveal anything larger?" (127). His exhaustive research and reporting did indeed reveal something larger, that the passage of a safe-haven law with no age limit provided an opportunity for desperate parents from across the country to guarantee medical care for their children that they could not provide themselves. Instead of portraying such parents as irresponsible and cruel—as the media, lawmakers, and politicians have done—Hylton puts a human face on the issue through his sympathetic portrait of an exasperated and desperate mother who chooses to give up her child to the state. Ultimately, he reveals a hidden story of how state institutions are failing to cope adequately with mental illness and are unfairly placing the blame on struggling parents.

These are only two examples among many. The collection abounds with stories that critically examine the nature of truth-telling today. Harrington and Sager remark on this key feature of literary journalism: "In a world where it seems everybody has a strong opinion about everything, these stories remind us to be humble about what we think we know. They illustrate how literary journalism can unlock the inner workings of human experience in ways that traditional news, investigative and feature journalism can't" (xv).

Besides being excellent reading for nonfiction enthusiasts, *Next Wave* will undoubtedly serve as a resource for students, teachers, and practitioners of literary journalism. The collection offers several supplements that aid in the reader's appreciation of the process behind each of the stories included. Among these are a list of notable young literary journalists and "Walt Harrington's Selected Readings," a guide for students or teachers who would like to read more broadly among contemporary and historical examples of literary journalism. Perhaps the most enlightening feature of the collection is the inclusion of a short personal essay, entitled Author's Afterword, from each of the contributors. These essays describe the authors' approach to the topic, their own experiences writing the pieces, and other challenges unique to each story. Through this feature, research methods are illuminated that might be obscured in the final products.

As the editors are heartened to hear, most of the personal essays emphasize good old-fashioned journalistic practice: getting to know the sources; spending time im-

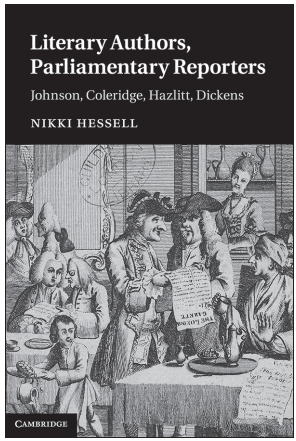
mersed in the field; and devoting hours to perfecting prose and searching for the ideal narrative structure. This goes to show, once again, that the tradition of literary journalism is still strong. This emphasis leads to my one major quibble with the book, however: while the collection vigorously refutes the idea that engaged, stylistically masterful nonfiction storytelling is no longer relevant in today's society, it does not particularly address the ways in which literary journalism *has* changed in the last two decades. Besides being under the age of forty, there is little that explicitly distinguishes these writers from those preceding them. Perhaps too much energy is being expended on making sure the form persists to allow the editors to reflect critically on the capacity for change, growth, and experimentation within the genre. While this collection is valuable in that it offers material that fits squarely into the established genre of literary journalism, this lack of historical awareness of generic change keeps publication of this book from being a field-defining event.

As the editors note in the introduction, this text is available primarily as an eBook with paperback editions printed on demand. In this reviewer's copy there are repeated typographical errors in the introduction and final piece, which unfortunately mar an otherwise excellent collection. Nonetheless, it will prove to be of great interest to fans of good literary journalism, and an invaluable resource to students of the form.

Doing Time in the Gallery: The Parliamentary Reporting Careers of Four Great English Writers

Literary Authors, Parliamentary Reporters: Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Dickens
By Nikki Hessell. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Hardcover, 195 pp., $90.

Reviewed by John Tulloch, University of Lincoln, England, U.K.



The struggle to win the right to report the doings of the secretive and corrupt parliaments of Georgian England is one of the grand narratives of Whig history and crucial in the emancipation of the English press and the construction of the Georgian and early Victorian public sphere.

Secrecy and corruption of course largely *was* the system. It was only in the mid-seventeenth century that the first attempts were made to report parliamentary news. But the publication of anything that was said in parliament was a breach of privilege and remained so for most of the eighteenth century. Despite the growth of a lively and scurrilous London morning press, in the eyes of most Georgian MPs the public had no inherent right to know what they were up to. Rather than representatives, they saw themselves as the entitled placemen and hangers-on of various aristocratic factions, lovingly delineated by that great historian of the system, Sir Lewis Namier.[1] Editors and printers were routinely fined and jailed for publishing unofficial accounts, and newspapers were forced to resort to a variety of methods, such as reporting the proceedings of fictionalized assemblies. As an official account tells us: "One of the most famous was the Report of the Senate of Lilliputia, which appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, edited for some years by Samuel Johnson."[2]

Nikki Hessell's extraordinarily interesting study bridges a period of seventy years from the 1760s to the 1830s during which parliamentary reporting moves from the disguised reporting of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, to the advent of morning newspaper accounts which aspired to a more complete and accurate reflection of what was actually said, in some cases based on shorthand. Her study focuses on four of the most celebrated men of letters and creative writers in English literature: Johnson, Coleridge, Hazlitt and Dickens.

By analyzing that most taken-for-granted form of journalistic work—the recording of the diurnal chatter of an assembly—she both raises the status of the reporter from that of humble hack to creative interpreter of actuality and undertakes a penetrating scrutiny of that most taken-for-granted journalistic value, accuracy.

Johnson was involved with the *Gentleman's Magazine* for six years in the early 1740s, although he apparently only attended one debate. Coleridge reported for the London *Morning Post* in 1800. Hazlitt reported for another London daily, the *Morning Chronicle,* from 1812–1813. Most famously, Dickens began as a shorthand reporter for the *Mirror of Parliament* in 1831 and worked in the gallery until 1836. [3]

Unsurprisingly, Hessell finds that biographies of all four writers tend to dismiss the parliamentary reporting phase of their careers as a mere "interlude" in their path to fame, only interesting for what it reveals of the nascent creative writer struggling to emerge. She is determined to rescue their journalism not only from the condescension of posterity but its ignorance. "It is easy to overlook the degree to which these literary writers operated as *highly successful journalists*, not frustrated novelists, poets and literary essayists, during their time in the gallery." [4]

Taking the journalism seriously involves placing it within its proper context, using as a point of comparison the work of other reporters. It also involves understanding the way in which their authorial voice as a journalist is submerged in the work of a journalistic team, the reverse of romantic concepts of authorial exceptionalism—not the "egotistical sublime" that Keats criticized in Wordsworth's poetry, but what Hessell playfully terms "the collaborative sublime," which is "a state in which a writer needs to both relinquish originality and idiosyncrasy in the interests of a collective authorial voice and bring something distinctive to the collaboration."[5]

Hessell outlines the interaction between fact and fiction in the construction of Johnson's reports—"actual speeches transformed to notes changed to stories taken for the fact by the original speakers and the author who thought he knew they were fictions."[6] This malleability was a characteristic of early eighteenth-century print. But what did the actual readers expect? Hessell suggests "they both desired accuracy *and* were doubtful about its likelihood."[7]

Hessell compares coverage in the *Gentleman's Magazine* with its rival *London Magazine*—notably the celebrated speech by Sir Robert Walpole of 1741 in response to a motion to remove him from office[8]—often cited as Johnson's finest piece of parliamentary reporting.

Although the debate was a passionate one, Johnson's rendering of Walpole at bay is strikingly dignified and restrained, employing a balanced Augustan rhetoric in which the symmetry of the clausal structure stands for a statesmanlike poise:

> Having now heard the charge against me with all the Aggravations which suspicion has been able to form; and Eloquence to inforce; after the most fruitful inventions have combined to multiply Crimes against me, and the most artful Rhetorick has been employed to blacken them, I stand up to offer to the House a plain unstudy'd defence. . . . [9]

Hessell accepts that this account is substantially fictional, and certainly lends Walpole a suave Ciceronian grace that he is unlikely to have possessed. But she argues that it fitted in well with the house style established by the *Gentleman's Magazine*:

> Legal constraints and the absence of effective techniques for capturing parliamentarians' words made it inevitable than parts of the magazines' coverage would be

> invented, no matter who was reporting. Fictionalization, however, or the addition of aesthetic flourishes where none had existed in the original speeches, needs to be understood as a journalistic technique; that is, as a journalistic technique as opposed to a literary technique. . . .[10]

Parliamentary reporting remained controversial throughout the eighteenth century. In December 1798 it was described by no less than the Secretary at War as "evil in its nature . . . inflammatory information . . . [which] kindled . . . heat among the lower classes."[11] Journalists were not allowed to take notes until the 1780s and had no guaranteed access to the Strangers' gallery. Frequently forced to rely on memory, they could be turfed out at the instigation of any MP. [12]

Coleridge joined the parliamentary reporting team of the London *Morning Post* in January 1800. Among other reports, Hessell examines his rendering of William Pitt's celebrated speech of 17 February 1800 on the object of the war with France. She claims Coleridge himself said in a letter: "I reported the whole with notes so scanty, that—Mr Pitt is much obliged to me. For by heaven he never talked half as eloquently in his Life-time. He is a *stupid insipid* Charlatan, that *Pitt.*"[13]

Why did Coleridge want to make Pitt speak so eloquently? The answer, Hessell reckons, is Coleridge's "journalistic vision." His version matched the newspaper's politics and provided a "springboard" for his other writing on Pitt in the paper, including a brilliant sketch which later drew on the speech to illustrate Pitt's mental limitations: "Press him to specify an individual face of advantage to be derived from a war—and he answerd, SECURITY! Call upon him to particularise a crime, and he exclaims—JACOBINISM!"[14]

This is a fascinating book, which compresses an admirable weight of scholarship and close, analytical reading into a small space to illuminate large issues. What constitutes an accurate account of a speech or a debate or indeed any event? And what is the relationship between accuracy and truth? That quirky, rowdy, noisy, undisciplined, drunken, corrupt and occasionally mutinous male club would always have been a nightmare to report accurately. Think of the hours! Shudder at the company! A major issue—as now—was actually being able to *hear* what people had said, and to *see* who had said it, let alone render a plausible account. Add to that the restrictions imposed by parliament to prevent or severely control reporting, in the interests of keeping the lower orders in their place, and it is extraordinary how much emerged, whatever its reliability.

Hessell expands her theme from the intriguing *minutiae* of the journalism of her four subjects, to query the whole basis of the nature of accuracy claims, and to explore the balance that journalism must needs strike between the mere Gradgrindian transcription of basic verifiable facts, quotes, etc., and the evocation of states of mind, human emotion, atmosphere, and perception that can creatively animate stories. Essential reading!

NOTES

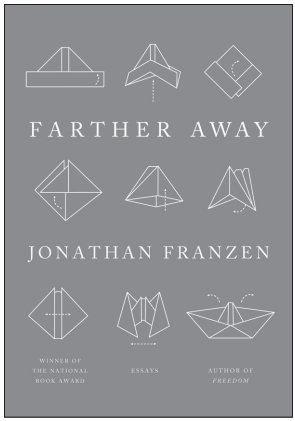
1. Sir Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George II*, London: Macmillan,1929; Sir Lewis Namier, *England in The Age of the American Revolution*, London: Macmillan, 1930.
2. Hansard (2012*) Story of Hansard*, http://www.hansard-westminster.co.uk/story.asp accessed 23 September 2012.
3. Hessell, ix.
4. Ibid., xi; my italics.
5. Ibid., 15.
6. Alvin Kernan, *Samuel Johnson and the Impact of Print*, Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989, 163, quoted by Hessell, 23.
7. Ibid., my italics.
8. Ibid., 50–57.
9. Ibid., 55.
10. Ibid., 57–58.
11. Ibid., 65.
12. Ibid., 66.
13. Ibid., 89.
14. Ibid., 91.

On an Island with Franzen the Birder

Farther Away
by Jonathan Franzen. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012. Hardcover, 321 pp, $26.

Reviewed by Mark Neuzil, University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, U.S.A.

Jonathan Franzen is a wonderful writer with a well-imagined grasp of how a good story fits together. Most famous for his four novels, including 2001's *The Corrections* (a National Book Award winner), Franzen has also written a memoir, a translation of Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, and two collections of essays. Franzen's second collection, *Farther Away* (2012), is what concerns us here.



Eight of the twenty-one chapters in *Farther Away* are, in a broad sense, reviews of authors or their works; four others are speeches, including a eulogy for his friend David Foster Wallace, and a half dozen more are short essays.

The remaining three stories in *Farther Away*, including the title piece, have Franzen committing journalism. The deft architecture evident in his novels can be seen in his stories, and carrying those techniques over from fiction to nonfiction serves to make the case that these chapters can be considered literary journalism.

Franzen is an avid birder, and the reporting he does includes stories on the status of avian species in the Mediterranean and China as he immerses himself in adventures in those locales. But the best story of the trio is the first, in which he gets dropped on a rugged Pacific island, 500 miles off the coast of Chile. The locals call it Masafuera ("Farther Away"), and it has inhabitants only during the fishing season.

Franzen is attempting an escape—pressures from the "nonstop" promotion of a novel, the suicide of Wallace, general boredom—to the same island used as a model by Daniel Defoe for *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719. Part of his task while on Masafuera is to scatter some ashes of Wallace at the request of his widow. This circumstance, plus the Defoe connection, is combined with Franzen's search for a particular rare bird, the Masafuero rayadito, to form a literary plot line that drives the story. When the weather turns dirty, his adventure intensifies along a treacherous mountain ridge:

> Although I was very determined to see the rayadito, there came a moment when I was afraid to take another step, and I was suddenly able to see myself: spread-eagled against a slippery rock face, in blinding rain and ferocious wind, with no assurance that I was going in the right direction. A sentence so clear that it seemed almost spoken popped into my head: *What you're doing is extremely dangerous.* And I thought of my dead friend (37).

Crusoe was alone on the island for years; Franzen for a few days, and that was enough. When Crusoe sees a footprint on "his" land after fifteen years of solitude, he struggles, rather than rejoices. "[A]ll it takes is one footprint of another real person to recall to us the endlessly interesting hazards of living relationships," Franzen writes (52).

In "The Ugly Mediterranean," the poaching of songbirds in Cyprus and nearby is the focus of the text. Immersion journalism amid lawbreakers is a hardy perennial of literary journalists, and although the illegal shooting or netting a three-ounce bird might not seem like the standard seamy underbelly of society, it makes for a good tale. My favorite scene is when Franzen and two companions are served twelve small birds in a discreet private dining room, the breast meat of which "looked like a dozen little gleaming yellowish-gray turds. 'You're the first American I've ever served,' the proprietor said" (105).

In "The Chinese Puffin," Franzen uses a Christmas present of a golf club head cover (the puffin) as the excuse to visit China, where it was made, and spend time with the fledgling Chinese bird-watching community and the factory. It doesn't have the suspense of a deserted island or Italian poachers, but readers are rewarded with a story that they probably did not know they were interested in, on birders in China.

Franzen was famously called by *Time* magazine the Great American Novelist on its cover; his tiff (since healed) with Oprah Winfrey and her book club made headlines in 2001, as well. As a leading twenty-first-century American writer, Franzen's life and these stories would be fruitful ground for classroom use.

An in-depth look . . .

Legacies of Literary Style in Music Journalism

By Todd Schack, Ithaca College, U.S.A.

The recent publication of two works of literary journalism about music, Will Hermes's Love Goes to Buildings on Fire *and John Swenson's* New Atlantis*, provides an excellent reminder that there is a rich literary journalistic heritage—especially since the 1960s—of writing about music. In the following essay, Todd Schack examines the hallmarks of style to which these recent authors are indebted.*

Works Discussed

Bangs, Lester. *Mainlines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*. Edited by John Morthland. New York: Anchor Books, 2003.

Bangs, Lester. *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung*. Edited by Greil Marcus. New York: Anchor Books, 1988.

Costello, Elvis. *"A Man out of Time Beats the Clock." Musician, October 1983, 52.*

Hermes, Will. *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire: Five Years in New York That Changed Music Forever*. New York: Faber & Faber, 2011.

Kent, Nick. *The Dark Stuff: Selected Writings on Rock Music*. Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2002.

Meltzer, Richard. *A Whore Just Like the Rest*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000.

Tosches, Nick. *Hellfire: The Jerry Lee Lewis Story*. New York: Grove Press, 1982.

Swenson, John. *New Atlantis: Musicians Battle for the Survival of New Orleans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

With the publication of two recent books, both of which are meticulously researched, highly entertaining, well-written romps through the music scenes of two different cities in two different eras, the jaded platitude that "music journalism is dead" is betrayed as either premature or dead wrong. With Will Hermes's *Love Goes to Buildings on Fire: Five Years in New York That Changed Music Forever*, and John Swenson's *New Atlantis: Musicians Battle for the Survival of New Orleans*, we have the opportunity to examine what music journalism does best: it provides a context for, and as such a historical understanding of, what music means to us culturally, socially,

and politically. And when it is done well, using the stylistic devices and writing techniques of the best of *literary* music journalism, it does so with an importance and an immediacy that situates music as a cultural endeavor that matters vitally.

Both Hermes and Swenson are carrying on a tradition of music journalism that was born at the same time as the New Journalism moment of the 1960s, and to which it bears some striking similarities. Certainly, the traditional literary devices, such as scenes, dialogue, status details, and immersive reporting are present in most, if not all of what we consider the best of music writing, from the likes of Richard Meltzer, Lester Bangs, Nick Kent, Greil Marcus, and Nick Tosches. But in their best work, music writers also carry on literary traditions that go beyond Tom Wolfe's checklist of devices, many of which I am here calling the *legacies of literary style* in music journalism: 1) a first-person, even Gonzo-style point of view that establishes both the writer and the reader in the moment, as well as authority of voice; 2) writing that makes the reader "hear" or "feel" the music—a form of synesthesia, and the most difficult to pull off; and 3) writing that makes the music make sense: it situates the moment (the band, the gig, the song) culturally, socially, historically—and helps create the "rock mythologies" that will come to define a certain moment in time.

I. The Music Journalism Perspective

For music journalists aspiring towards the literary, the use of first-person voice is essential. Since the writer is relegated to the sidelines anyway, the general rule of thumb is to make his or her stance on those sidelines as interesting as possible. Hence, the similarity with Hunter S. Thompson's Gonzo style—that is, if they can't *be* the music, at least they could *be there*, and that presence became a focal point.[1]

Of course, in the early days of magazines such as *Rolling Stone, Creem* and *New Musical Express*, the writing was as much about living the rock 'n' roll lifestyle as it was about the music. The pioneers of rock journalism went to extraordinary lengths of Thompson-esque excess, all of which bought them a sort of street credibility—both with readers, and more importantly, with the aristocrats of rock themselves. Most famous along these lines were Richard Meltzer and Lester Bangs.

Meltzer, who arguably was the first great rock journalist, certainly argues as much himself: "Before Lester Bangs was, I am (and he's dead). Which, heck, I dangle as neither credit nor debit—just my way of saying hi" (3), shows exactly this sort of living-the-life example in a piece entitled "Rock-Crit Blood 'n' Guts:

I was always a fucking zealot. The giddiest smartass to hold the banner high. This is among *writers* we're talking; the rock-roll flag of whatever. (Something to do with the night.) We'd all be at this party, for inst, for the fabulozoolous Rolling Stones at some fussy French—or was it Italian?—New York eatery. After '72 at the Garden. There's this huge fountain, *indoors*, this incredible fountain—so who's gonna JUMP in the thing? I look around, I don't see no candidates, Mick's asleep face-down on a table. So it's gotta be me—*got* to, right? 'Cause if not, if the option's so clear and *nobody* does it, rock-roll as we um uh know it will um uh *perish*, y'know? . . . that sort of trip. So I jump and they give me the boot, a big security jerk on each arm . . . you get the idea: I once really, truly *gave a shit*; I cared religiously (3).

Which is to say he was more than willing to make himself the story in order to have a story, a very Gonzo thing to do. In this, his archrival was beyond question the incorrigible Lester Bangs. In perhaps one of the most famous interviews of all time, the hilariously titled "Let Us Now Praise Famous Death Dwarves," Bangs does not so much interview Lou Reed as uses him as sounding board for Bangs's own neurotic ideas and to showcase his writing acrobatics:

> I decided to change my tack again. "Lou, we're gonna have to do it straight. I'll take off my sunglasses if you'll take off yours. " He did. I did. Focus in on shriveled body sprawled on the bed facing me . . . Lou's sallow skin almost as whitish yellow as his hair, whole face and frame so transcendently emaciated he had indeed become insectival. His eyes were rusty, like two copper coins lying in desert sands under the sun all day . . . Anyway, I was ready to ask my Big Question, the one I'd pondered over for months . . . . (2003a, 178)

Suffice it to say, the "Big Question" was more about Bangs than it was about Reed: "'Do you ever resent people for the way that you have lived out what they might think of as the dark side of their lives for them, vicariously, in your music or your life?' He didn't seem to have the slightest idea what I was talking about, shook his head" (178). This was what made Bangs so great: he was able to make the audience care more about his own rock 'n' roll writer persona than those of the famous rock 'n' rollers that he interviewed. Borrowing from this tradition (and here I refer more to the use of first-person point of view than the rock persona guise), both Will Hermes and John Swenson establish their voice and their authority in similar fashion.

For Swenson, who is chronicling the musical, social, and political events of New Orleans leading up to and following Hurricane Katrina, this first-person perspective takes on another layer of significance: Swenson, a long-time resident, was himself one of the displaced victims. As a beat writer covering the music scene for years, he knew scores of people who either left, stayed, returned, failed to return, or died, and he himself lived through the best and the worst that New Orleans saw of the storm and our nation's bungled response to it. Certainly this establishes his voice as authoritative, and makes his story intertwine in a significant way with those of the musicians whose stories he tells:

> The ride into the city was my first view of the miles of total devastation, my first taste of the oily, dusty death smell that pervaded New Orleans. I got off at the Elysian Fields exit of I-10 on the way into the Ninth Ward, where the destruction was total—awesome in some unimaginable way, familiar streets lined with gap-toothed skulls of ruined houses, mile after mile . . . Wind had removed a sizable portion of the roof on my Piety Street home and part of the side of the house. As a result rainwater had gotten in, bringing mold and ruin from above, but at least the house didn't need to be gutted. (16)

Thus he immediately shares the same dire situation as those he writes about, and solidifies his position as the right person to tell this story, as well as endearing his persona to the reader.

Will Hermes, who writes about the New York music scene in the early 1970s, employs a different tactic. He admits he was a "bridge-and-tunnel" teenager living in

Queens in the mid-seventies, and thus did not actually witness all of the iconic music moments "in the City" during his teen years. Instead, he utilizes his own "impressionable youth" perspective to signal a more important factor than being in-the-same-room with Patti Smith, or the New York Dolls, or whoever was playing that night in Manhattan. He is able to signal what the music meant—what it meant to him, an impressionable youth, and by proxy, to every adolescent who was at that moment in time dying to get out of the suburbs and into the city, where all the action was. Music was what gave that longing a voice:

> My greatest obsession remained music. I couldn't wait for new records to turn up at my local music store. I would check the ads in the Long Island press, strap on my army-navy store backpack, jump on my ten-speed racer, and ride the four miles to Korvettes in Douglaston to survey the latest titles and the cutouts, pop history shrink-wrapped at 99 cents a throw. (95)

Here Hermes casts himself as not only the record buying target audience (and thus raison d'être for the entire industry), but also establishes his voice as authoritative, one that was living the musical moment vicariously, if not in the flesh. Yet he was also able to steal his own moments, as he did what so many teenagers do: sneak out from under the protective yoke of mom and dad, and head to the city:

> Around this time, at the urging of a friend, I took the E train into the city to see Television at CBGB. My fake ID couldn't get me into the Bottom Line (to see Springsteen), but the handsome dark-haired woman at the door of CBGB barely looked at it. I wore a loud polyester-print Huk-A-Poo dress shirt, thinking it made me look older than fourteen. Too timid to attempt buying a beer, I found a place to stand near the side of the stage. The music was intense and dazzling. I recall Verlaine's hands, which seemed freakishly huge, like spiders. And I remember "Little Johnny Jewel," which seemed to go on forever. (147)

It is this perspective, one of a teenager to whom music is a matter of life and, if not death then at least suburban ennui, that we as readers can so readily identify: everybody knows that anxious feeling of youth that something is happening—some vital band is playing that you must see—somewhere, anywhere but here, and if you could just sneak out and get to the city to find it, you will be rewarded. It is this that Hermes taps into, establishing his voice as the right one to lead us on this ride through New York's glittering seventies.

II: Making Words Read Like Music

For music journalists, the special challenge has always been the representation of the musical performance in written prose. This is most likely the reason Elvis Costello, pace Martin Mull, famously quipped in an interview that: "Writing about music is like dancing about architecture . . . it's really a stupid thing to do" (1983, 52). By far the most difficult aspect to pull off is to make the readers actually feel the music, and when it is done properly with literary style, the writer strikes a delicate fine point, using a sort of synesthetic detailing with descriptive language, making us "hear" the music through words.

This is where it becomes possible to tell who the best writers of the genre are, due

to both musical acumen, the knowledge of what the musician is doing on stage or on record, and the command of language, the ability to translate sound to printed word. Certainly the standard was set with the likes of Bangs, et al., as their collective ability to spot musicians' craft and turn that into art on the page was what set them apart. For example, when Bangs reviewed Nico's *The Marble Index*, which he called "the greatest piece of avant-garde classical serious music of the last half of the twentieth century so far," he wrote of the song "Frozen Warnings":

> Through a pale morning's arctic sunlight glinting dimly off the snow, a bank of violas emits one endless shrill note which eventually becomes electronically distorted by points of ice panning back and forth through the space between your ears, descending and then impossibly ascending in volume and ineluctable intensity until they're almost unbearable though infinitely graceful in their beauty; at length they wind off into the skies trailing away like wisps of fading beams. (2003b, 212)

Or Nick Kent, describing the way Iggy Pop and his band The Stooges play when at their best:

> They were hell-bent on taking a time capsule right back to the darkest ages of music they could hope to sink into, back to that dim time when the world was one big, pulsating swamp which shook with the terrible thunderous rhythms of nature's raw elemental power. To this end they beat out this muddy, brutal, ecstatic music that grabbed anyone in its path roughly by the scruff of the neck and hurled them headlong onto the very wilderness of the senses that lies stretched out just beyond man's deepest primordial fears. For some, like myself, being exposed to music this raw and alive had a profoundly liberating effect. (245)

Sometimes, however, it's not the music itself that is the most important, but the atmosphere of place, or the demeanor of the artist, that tells us the most about the musical moment. For instance, in the following passage Nick Tosches captures the spirit, dark as it is, of Jerry Lee Lewis:

> He was the Killer and he was immortal—damned to be, for as long as there were good and evil to be torn between in agony. He would sit backstage in a thousand dank nightclubs, and he would know this, and he would swallow more pills and wash them down with three fingers more of whiskey, and he would know it even more. He would walk like a man to the stage, with his Churchill in one hand and his water glass of whiskey in the other, and he would pound the piano and sing his sinful songs, and he would beckon those before him, mortals, made not as he to destruction from the womb; he would beckon them to come, to stand with him awhile at the brink of Hell. Then he would be gone into the ancient night, to more pills and more whiskey, to where the black dogs never ceased barking and dawn never broke; he would go there. (188–89)

Both Hermes and Swenson tap into this descriptive language as well, and situate the music in similar fashion. In the following passage Swenson describes a quintessential New Orleans moment in the first post-Katrina Mardi Gras, one that few thought could have transpired amidst the devastation:

> The angry funk rocker "Rat a Tang Tang" was originally written about punishing someone . . . but in this instance it sounded like a musical curse on Katrina. Os-

> borne began chanting, "Indians, here dey come!" and Boudreaux approached the microphone. Sousaphone player Kirk Joseph stepped up and began honking away an accompaniment to the groove. Monk . . . picked up the chant and, with Jellybean rolling a second-line drum rhythm, the moment was pure New Orleans, a mixed group of black and white musicians hammering out a monster beat that had everybody in the place moving. . . . "Mardi Gras morning, well, here it come," Monk bellowed . . . the lines, repeated over and over with variations—took on a magical vibe as Monk transformed into the shaman, an elemental force that seemed to invoke the furious storm itself . . . Osborne's guitar line soared, the music took wing, and just as it hit another peak, the power went out again. (54-–55)

Swenson's descriptions are able to capture the moment, placing the reader in the room to not only feel the music with descriptors such as "a musical curse," chanting, honking, hammering, bellowed, but he is also able to translate that moment and make us know what it meant to be there, in that room, on that day, a "magical vibe," with Monk the "shaman, an elemental force," who would later say of the power failure: "I don't need no 'lectricity once the spirit takes hold." This moment, as Swenson writes, was "pure New Orleans." It takes a special writer to capture that, and Swenson manages to do so throughout the book.

Hermes, although his main goal is likewise sociocultural, manages to get that aspect across within a tight description of the music itself. Here he describes why "Piss Factory," the Patti Smith song, "is for the ages":

> Beginning quietly with [Richard] Sohl's simple chords and [Lenny] Kaye's alternately slithering and strutting lead, the men build a five-minute jam-vamp under Smith's prose-poetry, which dances to the music without clinging to it. She begins her story about working for thirty-six dollars a week in a sweatshop with women who threaten to beat her up for doing her piece-work too fast . . . Then she's yanked back to the foul workaday scent. . . . Smith is about to faint from the heat, but she fights it, Kaye's circling electric-guitar notes and Sohl's piano runs, part Debussy and part Jerry Lee Lewis, pulsing like the blood in her temples, lifting the song higher. Finally Smith decides to flee. She's naked now, confessing desire that's absurd, desperate, deeply true, exploded in flames. "I'm gonna get on that train and go to New York City," she sings as the song hits its peak, declaring her intent to be famous, to be a star, to never return. And the music keeps circling like wind in the aftermath of a storm, scattering ashes and debris. (88–89)

III: Making the Music Make Sense

But the most important element of music journalism, the one that makes the entire genre culturally relevant, is the ability of the journalist to make the music make sense. That is, how they situate the artist and his or her time, how they are able to know before anyone else does the importance—politically, socially, culturally—of a music movement, or a particular band, or singer, or performance. For instance, Bangs writes the following passage shortly after witnessing for the first time The Clash perform in England. He is back at their hotel, and duly amazed at how well they treat their fans—not patronizing, not bored or jaded, but truly interested in what they have to say. Bangs speaks for them, for their entire generation, and for all

their desires, political or otherwise:

> The politics of rock 'n' roll, in England or America or anywhere else, is that a whole lot of kids want to be fried out of their skins by the most scalding propulsion they can find, for a night they can pretend is the rest of their lives, and whether the next day they go back to work in shops or boredom on the dole or American TV doldrums in Mom 'n' Daddy's living room nothing can cancel the reality of that night in the revivifying flames when for once if only then in your life you were blasted outside of yourself and the monotony which defines most life anywhere at any time, when you supped on lightning and nothing else in the realms of the living or dead mattered at all. (2003a, 239)

Here Bangs is writing directly for a young Will Hermes, who admits that at that moment he was living those "American TV doldrums": "Like millions of others . . . I spent Saturday nights watching CBS: *All in the Family* at 8:00pm, *The Jeffersons* at 8:30, *Mary Tyler Moore* at 9:00, *Bob Newhart* at 9:30, *Carol Burnett* at 10:00" (107). But what's more important is that feeling, penned by Bangs, that music meant that at least for one moment you could step outside yourself and "sup on lightening," an explosive feeling of absolute freedom and youth. Kent also writes of this feeling, as he watched the New York Dolls:

> The music is raw and alive, played with reckless abandon until it becomes a joyous celebration of the whole "be young, be foolish, be happy" school of thought. Believe me, the records don't even begin to capture the special magic of the Dolls on a good night playing in a pissy little club to their elite little crowd of mascara-daubed misfits and vagrant vamps. Misty glitzy memories of the way we were. So cute. So vital. So star-crossed. (165–66)

Hermes was exactly that person, that young, foolish, happy person to whom the music mattered vitally. Writing about what Smith's debut album *Horses* and Springsteen's breakthrough record *Born to Run* meant to him and all the star-crossed youth of the time, he maintains:

> At core, both were telling stories of escape, from narrow hometowns and narrow conceptions of life's possibilities. And for both, escape equaled New York City, because if you grow up in Jersey or the Outer Boroughs—or other states or even nations beyond—New York was where you ran away to, the place real life was. (145–46)

For Swenson, the main aim is indeed the sociopolitical importance of music, and the dire role it played in bringing the city back from the brink:

> Much of the New Orleans we knew was dead and gone. The city had lost an essential part of its identity. The social clubs and neighborhood joints of African American enclaves like Treme, Mid-City, Gentilly, and the lower Ninth Ward, which nurtured the culture of street parades, brass bands, and the magnificence of the Mardi Gras Indians were gone, along with the departed residents of those ghost-town neighborhoods. Few believed that the intricate family-based institutions that had been built over the span of numerous generations would reassemble in force. (17)

Yet over the course of the book, Swenson details exactly this happening: how music became the catalyst that allowed those who returned to build again, to reas-

semble those "intricate family-based institutions," using the bonding material of music to recover that lost identity. Then, towards the end, and just when New Orleans seemed to be doing better both physically and spiritually (the New Orleans Saints had just won the 2010 Super Bowl, giving the city a joy-filled shot in the arm), the British Petroleum oil spill occurs. Swenson, turning inwards, writes: "As I drifted off to sleep, thinking of those now gone but still in our memories, I wondered . . . how many more Jazz Fests will take place? I thought about the oil spill, awed by its enormity, and wondered whether New Orleans would survive another summer. . . ." (264). At this point in the book, the reader is struck wondering whether all that had come before—all that the musicians of New Orleans had done for the city and its people—was for naught. But then Swenson breaks this spell: "Once again it was the musicians who best articulated the sense of loss people were experiencing and spoke out on behalf of the victims of this tragedy." (265)

Ultimately, these two books are about more than chronicling a music scene across the span of a few years in two different cities: they are sociopolitical cross-sections, detailing the ways in which music has a fundamental ability to draw people together, especially in hard times. New York in the seventies was ugly, dirty, and dangerous. But if you were punk, gay, Latino, or African American, you could not only find a home in that city's music scenes, you could be a part of something vital. Likewise, New Orleans post-Katrina is likened to the point of cliché as being a war-zone. But if you lived in Treme, Gentilly, the Ninth Ward, or other flood-ravaged sections of the Big Easy, according to Swenson, you were also witness to the rebirth of a spirit of a city the rest of the country had left for dead. And it was the music—always the music—through which that spirit manifested. This is one reason why music is, and always has been, so important. It is also a reason why music journalism is so crucial to our culture. And when the best of it is written squarely within the legacies of style of literary journalism, it creates those music mythologies that we will tell ourselves about ourselves for many generations.

Notes

1. It is interesting to note here the safe assumption that most music journalists would rather be creating music themselves than writing about it. Case in point: Meltzer, Bangs, Kent, and Tosches all tried—and failed, at least critically and commercially— to create their own bands.

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

Bill Reynolds, President
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

Norman Sims, First 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

Isabel Soares, Second Vice President
Universidade Técnica de Lisboa
Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais
e Políticas Pólo Universitário
do Alto da Ajuda
Rua Almerindo Lessa 1300-663
Lisboa , Portugal
+351-213-619-430
isoares@iscsp.utl.pt

David Abrahamson,
Secretary-Treasurer
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

John Bak, founding president, 2006-2008

Return address:

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.

Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 2013

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