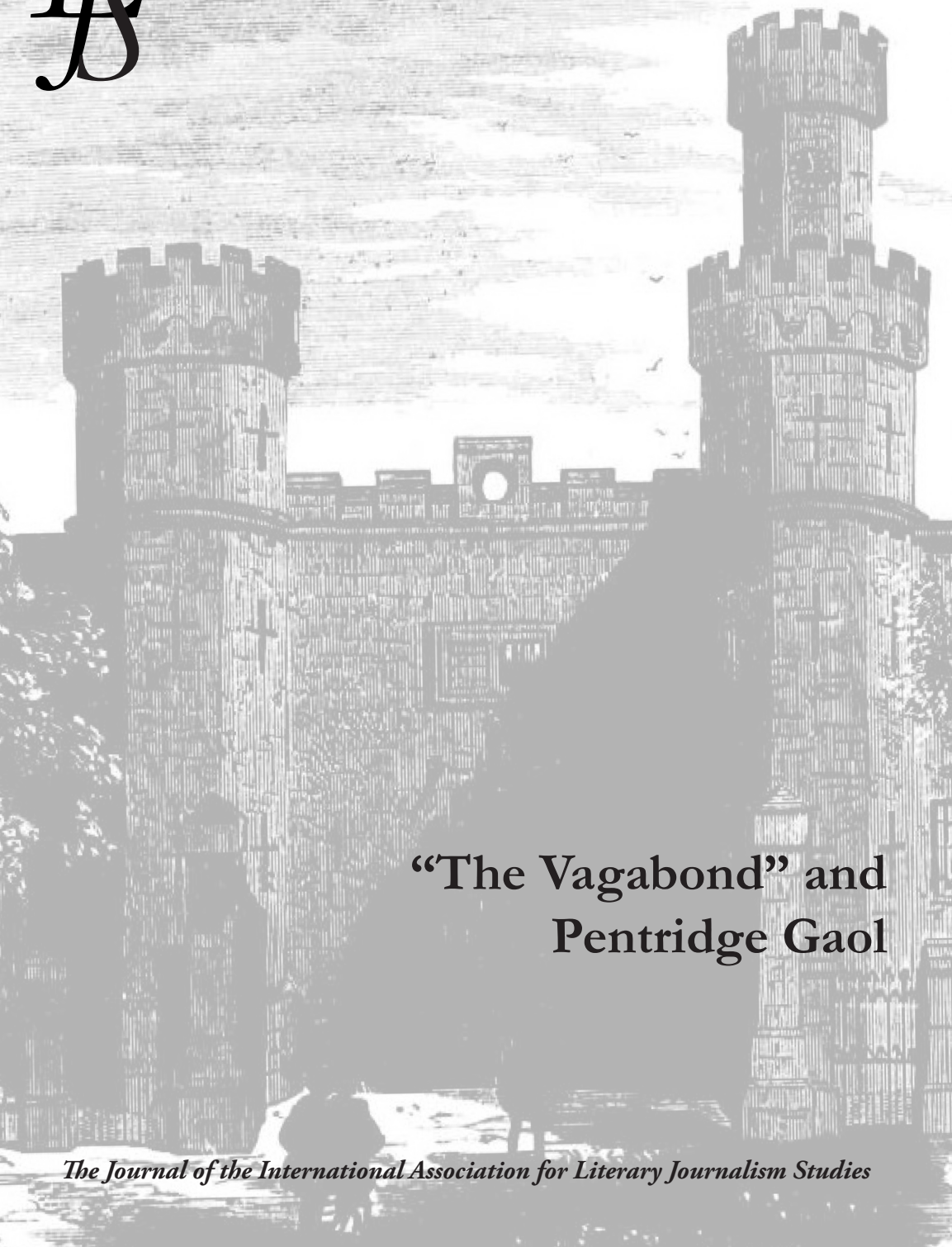
Literary Journalism Studies

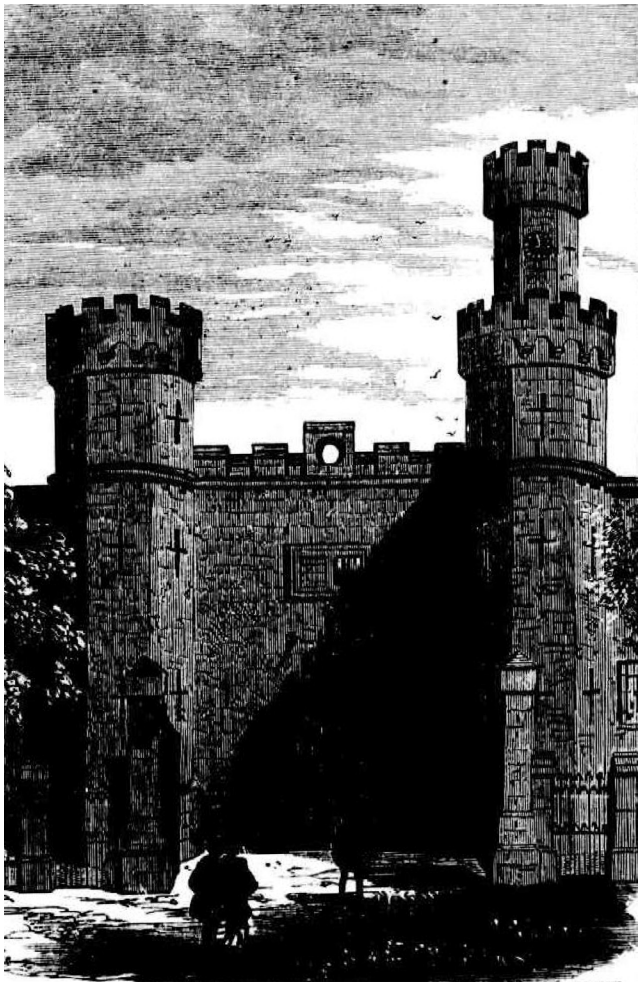
Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 2014



"The Vagabond" and Pentridge Gaol

The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

Our Cover



Our cover is taken from the above print of Pentridge gaol or prison in Coburg, Australia, presumably 1873. The prison was the subject of an article by "The Vagabond" in the Melbourne *Argus* in 1877. Willa McDonald examines the work of John Stanley James, who was known as "The Vagabond," as early Australian literary journalism. The orginal Pentridge Prison article follows. Image source: *The* (Melbourne) *Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil,* October 4, 1873, page 4. Courtesy National Library of Australia. Artist unknown.

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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>.

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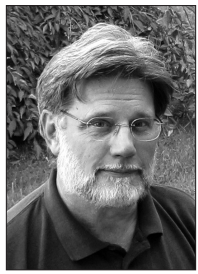
BOOK REVIEWS are invited. They should be 1,000–2,000 words and focus on the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editor based on merit. Reviewers 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…



In the last year, we have lost two stalwarts of the study of literary journalism. I would like to dedicate this issue to them.

John Tulloch died in October, and Sam G. Riley in March. Their passing is important to note, I believe, because in their scholarly efforts they were willing to take a gamble on a not much studied field called "literary journalism." Today, of course, we know it as a very much studied field, as reflected in the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, this publication, which is the official journal of the association, as well as other publications.

John, of course, was known for his many contributions in the more general field of journalism studies, including the founding of the Arts Journalism MA program at the University of Lincoln, one of the United Kingdom's top such programs, as well as being a staunch advocate for the study of ethics in journalism. But his was also one of the earliest names I heard associated with the study of literary journalism in the United Kingdom (from Jenny McKay), back when the study was more of a hit-or-miss affair in different countries, with pockets of scholars working diligently to advance the genre's study, but often unaware of each other. And he was also one of the major advocates for the form's international study, as reflected in the two volumes he co-edited, *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination* (2012, and forthcoming 2014). It has been because of the efforts of such pioneers that we can now say that literary journalism is a very much studied field.

John Tulloch

His colleague and friend at the University of Lincoln, Professor Richard Lance Keeble, commented: "John was a polymath and his vast reading shone through all his writings. A conversation with John was an education in itself. His studies of writers such as Charles Dickens, Ian Jack, Geoffrey Moorhouse, and Gordon Burn were original, brilliantly incisive, elegantly composed—and witty. Indeed, while he maintained a constant critique of the ethics of the corporate media, he always loved the tabloids for their cheeky irreverence."

Sam G. Riley at Virginia Tech similarly long endeared himself as both a scholar and gentleman. He authored ten books on the history of the magazine publishing industry; three books on newspaper columnists and their work; a two-book encyclopedia on African Americans and the US news media; and a book on celebrity culture.

"He was," recalled David Abrahamson, "a scholar's scholar and a man of extraordinarily gentlemanly manners—a very rare combination." As a long-standing advocate of literary journalism, Sam believed strongly in, and was undoubtedly the foremost advocate of, the literary merits of short-form newspaper columns.

And for me he was personally special. Some time back in the mid-1990s I attended one of my first scholarly conferences, which Sam was hosting in Virginia. I was making the transition from working journalist to academic, and was still a bit suspicious of what I saw at the time as a lot of academic folderol. Sam was one of the very first to encourage me in my scholarship. I can't emphasize enough just how important such an affirmation is for a young aspiring scholar, and how important it was for helping me make that passage from journalist to academic (and to discover that scholarship is not all folderol). Sam and I had been in touch about a month before his death, and we had planned to enjoy a glass of wine in Paris at the annual conference of the IALJS. Alas. . . .

Sam G. Riley

What is important is that both John and Sam had an enthusiasm for the subject and tried to pass it along to younger scholars. Thank you, John and Sam, and now in Paris we will raise a toast to you reposing amid the music of the spheres.

I hope readers will like this issue. It is very eclectic, and in some ways I like those issues the most because they remind us of what a many splendored genre is literary journalism. Please enjoy the richness of offerings. This is, also, my final issue. Bill Reynolds of Ryerson University in Toronto will be stepping up as the new editor, and I could not be more pleased. We had talked in the past (London, over some pints?) about such a possibility, and I'm glad it happened.

Looking back at the last five-plus years as founding editor, I am struck by the changes in the field. When I take the time to come up for air, I realize that there are assumptions I can no longer take for granted, such as that literary journalism is "not much studied," or that it has been "long neglected." True, there is still much, much to be done. For one thing, the academy still has not fully embraced literary journalism—or whatever we call it given the many possibilities—as a compelling and even profound discourse in society worthy of serious study alongside Shakespeare and the inverted pyramid. That is part of the genre's future, and I believe some day it will come. But of course, I am among the converted.

Putting out the journal can be exhausting. But it is always exhilarating. However, *Literary Journalism Studies* has not been a one-man effort. It could not have been done without the help of my fellow editors. And I single them out to thank individually: Nancy Roberts, Roberta Maguire, William Dow, and Lynn Cunningham. Then there are those who go back to the beginning: Jenny McKay, Tom Connery, Miles Maguire, and, of course, Bill Reynolds, my replacement. Finally, there is my publisher, David Abrahamson, who was always generous and gracious with his time,

brought vision to the enterprise, as well as a deep knowledge of academic publishing. I knew I could always draw on him. We didn't always have to agree, but certainly our exchanges deepened the conversation, a conversation that I hope gave rigor to the journal.

Most important, it is because of the efforts of all of these individuals—and still others—that we have now entered our sixth year of publication. But the contributions go beyond just putting out the journal. It is to these individuals I turned to when I had seemingly intractable style questions, or when I needed readers for papers about authors and subjects of which I was less knowledgeable. Moreover, through the efforts of the staff the journal is now listed in the MLA International Bibliography, and we have a growing bibliography on the IALJS site dedicated to scholarship on literary journalism. For such assistance, I can only offer you my heartfelt thanks.

With that, Mr. Toad and I will now wander off in search of new byways.

John C. Hartsock

Tracing the Seam: Narrative Journalism and Imaginings in South African Literature

Nick Mulgrew
Independent scholar, South Africa

Abstract: The epistemic violence that has replaced South Africa's violent past has for many reasons brought forth a multitude of texts that seek to portray South Africa and its fractured population, fusing literary modes with journalistic sensibility to create a body of work that is becoming entrenched as one of South Africa's most dynamic and celebrated literary genres. This paper provides a wide-ranging portrait of narrative journalism in South Africa: its differing relations to the country's fiction and journalism; its place within the contexts of postcolonialism, postmodernity, and media tabloidization; and its potential as a means of adequately depicting, articulating, and laying bare South Africa's scenes of unresolved cultural, political, and epistemological difference. This paper will also focus on the work of journalist Jonny Steinberg, whose heightened levels of narrative self-awareness and preoccupation with the internal lives of both narrator and subject can be argued to be typical features of South African narrative journalism and, in particular, the genre's engagement with—and navigation of—representational crises.

It has arguably become cliché to preface any attempt at providing a coherent overview of literature in South Africa—or any facet of it, for that matter—by labeling it as an ultimately quixotic endeavor. Such is the proliferation and entrenchment of this trope that a leading scholar of literature in South Africa felt the need to draw attention to it at the turn of the last century: "Introductions to South African literary culture conceived as an entity have a peculiar trademark," writes Leon de Kock. "They apologize for attempting to do the impossible and then go ahead anyway."[1] To crib from Gareth Cornwell's introduction to the *Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English Since 1945*, any introduction to any aspect of literature in South Africa must "necessarily negotiat[e] the shadow of its own impossibility."[2]

This rather self-effacing tradition of "rhetorical genuflection,"[3] in which one must consider the impossibility of coherently representing literature in South Africa while trying to represent it, is most likely linked to impossibilities and limitations of representation and imagination within many of the texts that make it up, particularly in works of fiction. As argued by Robert Thornton, "South African identities cross-cut each other in multiple ways and in multiple contexts," meaning that "there is no fundamental identity that any South African clings to in common with all, or even most other South Africans."[4] This multiplicity, fragmentation, and seeming irreconcilability of identities within the population of the country seeps into representations of individuals or groups of South Africans in literature. In relation to this instability and fractiousness of representation, de Kock chooses to explore the metaphor of the "seam," loquaciously arguing that any effort at bringing together or "suturing the incommensurate [in] an attempt to close the gap that defines it as incommensurate unavoidably bears the mark of its own crisis."[5] In other words, works of South African literature readily become sites of "simultaneous convergence and divergence . . . where a representational seam is the paradox qualifying any attempt to imagine organicism or unity" between individuals or groups;[6] or "where difference and sameness are hitched together [and] brought to self-awareness, denied or displaced into third terms."[7]

South Africa's histories of colonialism and apartheid, of separation and rejoining, find a concomitant in the fabric of its literature, or literatures: a patchwork of representation of cultures, languages, identities, and traditions, as much notable for its attempts at its components' coexistence as it is for their individual existence. It is in this way that narrative journalism/nonfiction plays an important role in literature and literature studies in South Africa, not because it can provide immediate solutions to issues of representation and imagination in the country's literature, nor because it can easily unravel the conditions that underpin its culture of rhetorical genuflection; but because it can better or more lucidly accomplish what fictional modes of representation and imaginings do not or, perhaps, cannot in South Africa at this point in time. Rather than making the seam invisible, it traces the seam, delineating the points of suture and the places—to continue the "stitching" better than "sewing" metaphor—at which the suture is strained or unraveled. The result of this quality contributes to "the indisputable fact," as Rob Nixon argues, "that nonfiction has proven over the past twenty years to be South Africa's most dynamic, inventive literary genre."[8] Further, the remark of author Marlene van Niekerk that narrative journalism "almost convinces one that fiction has become redundant in this country,"[9] made on the dust jacket of

Antony Altbeker's true-crime *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree* (2010), is one of a sort that is becoming increasingly prominent and increasingly debated.

In this paper, I will explore the virtues and limitations of narrative journalism and nonfiction—as well as the genres' foregrounding of these virtues and limitations in the works that best define it—in comparison with conventional fictional modes as part of the literary effort to uncover and understand South Africa's social divisions. In doing so, I will reflect briefly on the work of one of South Africa's most influential narrative journalists, Jonny Steinberg, as an illustration of these points, while attempting to bring together a wide-ranging portrait of the genre as it currently exists in South Africa. Chiefly, however, I will argue that narrative journalism/nonfiction allows new and more developed expositions of the architecture underlying representations and imaginations, both popular and personal, that delineate and inform South Africa's ongoing cultural schisms.

The Ordinary State of South Africa(n Literature)

South Africa's transition from pariah state to democratic society can be conceived of—to skew Nelson Mandela's "long walk to freedom"—as a "long walk to ordinariness."[10] In the decades after the dissolution of the apartheid state, the country has gradually become just another African postcolony: another country engaging with the "task of wresting the continent of Africa from the discursive grasp of the West"; or another country reimagining its identity in the shadow of an "inglorious past";[11] or, to the outside world, another rather unexceptional place. The seeming incomprehensibility or tragedy of some events in the country's recent history, such as former president Thabo Mbeki's AIDS denialism, threats of media suppression surrounding the tabling of the Protection of State Information Bill, and continually high murder and rape statistics, has, in Rob Nixon's words, "hastened South Africa's slide toward just one more strange foreign place, another unredemptive, unengaging elsewhere."[12]

The material and corporeal violence of South Africa's political and social history has been matched by a literary "violence of representation" within the country itself.[13] In the transitional period from apartheid to democracy, the "bloody nightmares" of colonialism and apartheid became usurped by countrywide violence: not in the guise of civil war, as much of the world had expected, and not just in the form of widespread violent crime, but an epistemic violence, one driven chiefly by contentions about how South Africans should—or, for that matter, could—reconcile their identities with that of the new nation. Difficulties arose in many South Africans' attempts to identify with their countrymen, people with whom they may consider to share very little other than the landscape they inhabit.[14]

At the beginning of the 1990s—the decade that saw the unbanning of the African National Congress, Mandela's release from prison, and the first steps toward a democratic dispensation—"the concept of a shared national literature—like that of a shared national culture—beckoned ever more invitingly."[15] As the decade wore on, however, fictional output from South African writers, both white and black, became a mélange of styles with thematic and stylistic concerns influenced by the legacy of apartheid and its effects on different cultural and racial groups. While white writers like André Brink and Ivan Vladislavić abandoned a seeming "oppositional obligation to document [and] to bear witness"[16] in favor of postmodern or magical realist modes, black writers did "not [find] it so easy to dismiss the claims of realism," instead endeavoring to "[attest] to the social legacy of inequality [and make] a "usable past" out of the years of political struggle."[17] As such, some black writers produced works of "documentary" fiction, works that testified to the legacy of apartheid as it was and is experienced by those who suffered most under it. Two quintessential examples of such "documentary" fiction are K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents*, an exposition of gangsterism, prostitution, and poverty in the postcard city of Cape Town, and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, a self-styled "Novel of Postapartheid South Africa"—replete with the cutting short of young lives due to violence, xenophobia, and HIV—set in one of Johannesburg's most violent inner-city areas.[18] Other black writers expanded upon the postapartheid (or post-anti-apartheid) template, such as Zakes Mda, whose blend of folklore, magical realism, and contemporary realist modes in his novels—such as *The Heart of Redness* (2000), *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), and *The Sculptors of Mapungubwe* (2013)—seeks to address the misrepresentation of black histories during the precolonial, colonial, and apartheid eras.

With the stripping of their race's politically entrenched cultural ascendency, many white writers found themselves stuck in limbo, as part of a people who were "no longer European [but] not yet African."[19] In particular, writers of nonfiction, such as Antjie Krog, wrote of a landscape from which they felt excluded by virtue of their whiteness, arguing further that every South African "ha[s] been living apart in such a particular Western or African framework [for so long] that we often do not know what the truth is about ourselves and others."[20] As she insists in *Begging to Be Black*, the third in her triptych of books of journalism and memoir (after *Country of My Skull* and *A Change of Tongue*), any attempts by her to "imagine black [would be] to insult black."[21] Elsewhere she states that

> I find most imagined works more filled with the preoccupations, perceptions, and prejudices of the writer and his or her white, black, and coloured background than with a real imagined us.[22]

Although South African writers may want to present what they think they may know of the country, the only thing they may find themselves certain of is that they lack the authority to present their knowledge or their experience as "truth."

It must be said that these sorts of representational concerns are not unique to the South African context, nor are they novel in the contexts of postmodernity or globalization, or even within the histories of narrative journalism in other countries. In the United States, for example, the "New Journalism" flourished in the context of the Vietnam War and populist counterculture during the 1960s, when an increasingly literate public turned to "alternative forms of written journalism that could better explain the vertiginous events around them" and "account for [their] new social realities."[23] In revolution-era Latin America, in which thirty-seven countries underwent 277 changes of government in fifty years,[24] a reemergence of militant and political nonfiction within the region's intelligentsia gave birth to "*testimonio,*" a form of narrative journalism that is "ancillary to and supporting of politics" and was especially politicized in those countries caught in the spread of authoritarian governments.[25] Both *testimonio* and the New Journalism, although informed by dissimilar cultures and ideologies,[26] attempted to make sense of new political attitudes and dispensations as they occurred.

The South African condition is somewhat different. While narrative journalistic movements such as New Journalism and *testimonio* were founded and found their strongest ideological expression within reasonably well-defined and identified periods of social and political tumult, South African narrative journalism seeks to portray the lingering and more nebulous legacies of such a period. As de Kock argues, the epistemic condition of the South African population is anomalous, simply because it "remains . . . a scene of largely unresolved difference"[27] and largely incomplete reconciliation between and within population groups. This is despite the attempts of sites and institutions of national healing such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One may be tempted to agree with the skeptical commissioner in Krog's *Country of My Skull,* who states that, despite its undeniable representational shortcomings, it is "only literature [that] can perform this miracle of reconciliation."[28]

But what kind of literature, and which texts? One might be tempted, as many have done in the past, to leave aside the inherent contradiction that lies within the positing of literature-affected change in a country in which most of the population has no access to contemporary local literature, whether by consequence of finance, location, epistemology, or even something as simple as the languages in which they are able to read.[29] But as Cornwell states,

> An obvious consequence of [South Africa's] linguistic and cultural diversity is that South Africa does not have—and has never had, may well never have—a single national literature, in the sense of a coherent body of writings to which all its citizens has access and with whose representations they can all identify.[30]

In another sobering instance of de Kock's tradition of "rhetorical genuflection," one must qualify all talk of literature-based reconciliation in South Africa with the caveat that not all in South Africa have direct or indirect access to printed literature.

Jonny Steinberg and the "Path Inward"

Taking all this into account, one may be able to identify nonfiction as the literary form that is most useful with regard to any attempts to negotiate the gaps of imagination left by apartheid, that is, within contexts in which the printed word possesses any sort of cultural power in this country. It cannot be ignored that the commercial and critical popularity of nonfiction has been increasing on scales both local and global. This is purportedly in response to an increasingly influential global postmodernity: scholars in the field of narrative studies state, for example, that the issues of the postmodern world can no longer be employed

> within the traditional genres of tragedy, *Bildungsroman*, adventure story, triumphalist narrative, and so on. As we move into the heart of the postmodern condition, the challenge of achieving some measure of narrative integrity, far from being obviated, may in fact become intensified. Moreover, the very attempt to move away from the self may in fact lead toward it. How, in the face of such multiplicitous array of possible selves, is one to find direction about how best to live? And how, in the face of so voluminous a library of possible narratives, is one to determine how best to tell one's story? At times the "path inward" may appear to be the only one to take.[31]

This engagement with the "path inward"—a sustained engagement with one's inner self—is a feature of many South African narrative journalistic texts. This is for reasons that are postcolonial as well as postmodernist: the "multiplicitous array of possible selves" might not just refer to the possible selves of the writer and the reader in the fictional space—in the genres of *Bildungsroman*, tragedy, and so on—but might also be extended to the selves of the subject as they are viewed and constructed in the nonfictional space. In postcolonial contexts, and especially South Africa's, political and social forces create a space in which individual and social identity is both fractured and in flux, leaving issues of representation at the center of the challenge of achieving narrative integrity or verisimilitude. In cases of both postcolonial

and postmodern nonfiction, the "path inward" becomes a technique for both grounding a narrative and negotiating the multiplicity of inner selves, social positions, and identities of the actors in that narrative. In doing so, the author might establish a context based on an actor's (or actors') experience in which the narrative can position itself and be said to attain some form of subjective integrity or verity, a basis from which broader social insights or hypotheses might be drawn and tested.

In no South African nonfiction writer's work is the "path inward"—appearing as both preoccupation and narrative technique—more apparent than Jonny Steinberg's. Steinberg is one of South African nonfiction's heavyweights, best known for his book-length narrative nonfiction, including *Midlands* (2002) and *The Number* (2004)—which both won South Africa's most illustrious nonfiction prize, the *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award—as well as *Three Letter Plague* (2008) and *Little Liberia* (2010). His narrative agility in particular allows him to construct terse and delicate mappings of seemingly opaque social phenomena throughout South Africa's many provinces—witchcraft and HIV stigma in the rural villages of Eastern Cape, centuries-old prison gangs in the Western Cape, racially-charged land disputes in Kwazulu-Natal—as well as the lives of the Liberian diaspora in New York City.

Steinberg's work is characterized by an at-times overwhelming narrative presence, founded on—and driven by—his relationships with his subjects. Over and above their intricate navigations of their subjects, his books provide an illuminating study of a journalist negotiating the transactions of intimate emotions and interiors between himself and the people about whom he writes. In both *Midlands* and his later work, Steinberg seeks, by his own admission, to show the "unloved and unlovable parts" of his subjects.[32] Although he argues that the exposure of the unloved and unlovable parts of a subject is a tenet of all nonfiction writing,[33] its purpose is not entirely voyeuristic, and stands in opposition to the ways in which reality television or tabloid journalism also expose the unlovable parts of people. Away from what Nixon describes as the mainstream media's creative and financial commodification of reality,[34] Steinberg's exposure of his subjects—and himself, as we will see—is an attempt to fruitfully tell larger truths about the people about which, and the places in which, he writes.

Steinberg's books are founded on extensive portraits of people whose lives give strong articulation to prominent social issues, doing so as he travels through the country's prisons, townships, informal settlements, HIV-ravaged villages, and other hotbeds of personal and collective strife. Not seeking to only uncover the angst or misfortune of his subjects, Steinberg also engages with the political and social mechanics behind subjects of national impor-

tance or occurrence—in his books set in South Africa, themes such as land redistribution, racism, prison life, poverty, HIV, and witchcraft, things that South Africans talk about "all the time"[35] but usually only in "special languages"—of jargon, journalese, or conceptual terminology—that "speak . . . abstractly" about social ills.[36]

In light of this, Steinberg seeks to tell the "untold"[37] personal manifestations of South Africa's social ills, giving expression to the disappointment and shame that typify the life experiences of many in postapartheid South Africa, lives in which democratic rights to and ambitions toward freedom, comfort, and safety have not adequately materialized. As much as South Africa is a complicated place, Steinberg's depictions of South African realities are complex and manifold and, as such, are often thematically and spatially disconnected from each other. Running through all of his work, however, is Steinberg's belief that "narrative gets to shame quicker than any other device":[38] Steinberg's rather scholarly sounding expositions of the broader topic of each book, of which they take up sizable portions, are grounded by the personal narratives, remembered experiences, and emotions—in other words, the "inward" lives—of each of the books' human subjects. The strategy would seem, then, that a useful and persuasive mapping of shame or disappointment in South African lives must be connected to the actual lived experience of a South African, in order to circumvent the abstractions and conjecture that characterize much of the discourse surrounding South Africa's social ills, to tell the societal through the individual, and vice versa.

Another large feature of Steinberg's work is an acute self-awareness on the part of the narrator—a self-awareness that often leaks into the action of the narrative itself. Rather than merely showing the process of constructing and writing his stories, Steinberg often chooses to make that process the story itself. In *Three Letter Plague*, for instance, he attempts to empathize with the victims of social stigma and public shame surrounding HIV and AIDS by invoking his own HIV-related shame from his youth, attempting to use his own experiences—of the process of testing for HIV after a sexual encounter while he was a student—to fluently "describe the architecture of shame":[39] "I thought to myself," he says to the man whose reluctance to test for HIV he is trying to understand, "if I can relive my own experience, I can understand yours better."[40]

One need only look to the sort of caveat that regularly prefaces his books[41] to note that Steinberg's narratives, above and beyond being narratives constructed about his subjects, are also very much narratives constructed about himself. Aware of his own professional and personal shortcomings of

empathy and understanding, Steinberg's qualification of the perceived faults in his narratives is an interesting narrative device, enabling him to dwell on the ethics of "special transgressions" and transactions, such as the process of "a black man selling his interior to a white man"—the intricate and invasive process of his writing about his subject—that he perceives to be one of the principal narrative forces in *Three Letter Plague*.[42] They are also a tactical means of imbuing his narratives with apparent verisimilitude and, therefore, trustworthiness. Somewhat contradictorily, by pointing out his narratives' faults and his shortcomings in providing a perfect or comprehensive rendering of his subjects, he attempts to draw attention to what about them approximates the truth (at least in a subjective sense); or rather, by constructing himself as a morally aware consciousness that is sensitive to any potential ethical lapses in his journalism, he invites, and intends to keep, the trust of the reader.

A case in point is Steinberg's dislike of *Midlands*' primary character, a white farmer mourning the apparently racially motivated murder of his son on his farm. This provided a number of dilemmas for Steinberg, who was aware of the fact that his depiction of the farmer was less than flattering. In the book's preface he notes: "Every journalist hurts the person about whom he writes. . . . Everybody who is written about has an image of what he will look like on the printed page. He is always disappointed."[43] This caveat, and many more like it in the book, is a strategy of mitigation, a means of cover-up attempting to work against any potential perceptions of bias or unfairness on his part by the reader. Steinberg addressed this tendency of his to qualify his perceptions of his subjects in his books by arguing that, although media and literature trends are placing a premium on the exposure of the unloved and unlovable parts of people, these depictions must be seen as fairly developed:

> A narrative non-fiction writer who writes about a real living person will have readers who expect to confront a specific literary construction and, if he or she doesn't see it, they will close the book, and perhaps even accuse the writer of an ethical lapse.[44]

By conforming to these expected constructions of the unlovable parts of people or communities, that is, ostensibly fair and well-grounded opinions and analysis of these things, an author invites the readers' trust, engaging them in a form of contract or relationship. Although the contract between author and reader exists alongside a similar contract between author and subject—that is, the subject expects to be depicted fairly in exchange for his or her story[45]—Steinberg states that there is "not much of a choice [between the two] as the reader cannot be betrayed. Without the reader, there is no book."[46]

This does not only apply to those subjects that the author obviously dislikes, however. The intensity of his interactions (approximating a friendship) with ex-prison-gangster Magadien Wentzel in *The Number* necessitates that significant passages of the book are dedicated to various professional dilemmas: Steinberg dwells and writes almost monologically on, among other things, the ethics of paying his subjects for their stories;[47] the ethics of informing Wentzel that many of his memories about his life—such as his enrollment at a university—were actually false;[48] and the ethics of the exchanges of money and gifts between the two men that occur.[49] Steinberg's journalistic awareness in his first book transforms into a hyperawareness in the one that follows: whereas his professional considerations in *Midlands* are mostly contained in its preface and in short reflective phrases—he states at one point that he "messed up [an] interview pretty badly," for example[50] —his involvement in the life of his subject in *The Number*, spending hours in his prison cell before his release and in the various houses in which he lives afterward, causes his interior monologue to sometimes become conflated with the book's greater narrative. Steinberg argues that his personal involvement in the events of *The Number* is a result of his own shyness and development of a close (if difficult) relationship with Wentzel, not a result of a dominant disposition that one would readily assume would precipitate such a presence: "Because I find people get very uncomfortable having spent a year reading their life story out," he says of Wentzel, "my own presence [and] the measure of my own personal presence shaped the story I wrote."[51] Regardless of his reasons for it, however, this turning inward creates an effect of narrative grounding: by offering the inner selves of both writer and subject to the reader, and delineating the path along which the relationship between writer and subject travels throughout the course of the narrative, Steinberg is able to offer their differing cultural, social, and epistemological positions, to expose them and explain them, so as to attempt to imbue the narrative with a sense of authorial honesty and, in turn, verisimilitude. In taking the inward path, the path toward both his and his subject's inner selves, Steinberg chooses not to resolve the differences between writer and subject, but instead unmasks them, laying them bare. As such, the narrative—in de Kock's terminology—bears the mark of its own crisis, both reflecting and placing itself among South Africa's many sites of unresolved difference.

Imaginations and Receptions

This concurrent focus on the interior of both author and subject finds echo in South African narrative journalism broadly, and especially in its most recent waves. This great interior turn is not a uniquely South African

phenomenon, however. In addition to its relation to the concerns of postmodernity and the status of the postcolony, it also reflects a global tendency toward the concurrent exposure of the interior selves of subject and author, primarily driven by a shift in audience tastes and expectations, in response (in turn) to changes in technology in the modern era.

In South African narrative journalism there exists a tendency—as in Steinberg's work—for memoir or facets of memoir to creep into or be used as an investigative device during works of broader exposition. As part of *Native Nostalgia* (2009), for example, Jacob Dlamini explores his own township childhood as part of an investigation into the seemingly discomforting possibility that black South Africans can remember their youths during apartheid with fondness. Hugh Lewin's *Stones Against the Mirror* (2012) is a recollection of the author's betrayal—and subsequent incarceration as a political prisoner—by a close comrade, while additionally placing and contextualizing the role and motivations of white activists during the Struggle. And one of the most famous works of South African nonfiction, Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* (1990), is memoir and tribal history running both in tandem and in opposition to each other, as the author attempts to reconcile his emotional connection to his Boer lineage while attempting to disavow his tribe's history of racism and cruelty.

In Krog's *A Change of Tongue*, the author's brother Andries relays a rather domestic rendering of the reasons that authors and readers increasingly take the "path inward" in their consumption and construction of narratives. Paraphrasing his mother, he says:

> In the old days, fiction could free you to go to a different place. But nowadays this larger world is so incessantly present in your yard and on your *stoep* [porch] and in your guest room and in your kitchen, it takes up so many seats at your table, it always has a whole mouthful to say about your food. Because of television and newspapers, you are now saddled with this other world. . . . You wonder desperately how you are going to overcome it. Intimacy with your own world is the one thing that enables you to survive this ever-present other world.[52]

In a colloquium on narrative journalism at the University of Cape Town, Steinberg relayed similar reasons for this shift in global and local audiences' media consumption habits from fictional modes to nonfiction:

> On a very simple, almost banal level, I think it has a lot to do with television and how personalized it became in the 1960s. The idea of sitting in your living room and having a real person's life laid before you is something that is culturally profound.[53]

Both make a pertinent point. In addition to the decidedly highbrow considerations of postmodernity, there has undoubtedly also been a more domestic force at work. The televisual mediation of people's personal lives into other people's living rooms around the world has in many ways changed "the texture and sensuality of our experience and how we live and understand our lives."[54] Although television only made its first appearances in South African homes in 1975, its cultural repercussions were felt in other media before that. Whereas popular magazines like *Fair Lady* and *Drum* used to regularly publish short stories and excerpts of novels during the 1950s and '60s, in later decades the editorial emphasis of magazines began to shift toward the dissemination of "real-life" stories that showed, as Steinberg paraphrased Israeli novelist David Grosman, a person's "shattered soul and crumbled consciousness."[55] "Today," Steinberg added, "you'd never dream of seeing a piece of fiction published in *Fair Lady*."[56] Further, Nixon argues that "the twenty-first century has witnessed—across visual, aural and verbal media—a new normal that places a great creative and commercial premium on making a show of reality."[57]

A similar trend can be seen in the rise of the South African tabloid press since 2000. The *Daily Sun,* an English-language tabloid launched in 2002, is currently South Africa's most-read newspaper, with an estimated daily readership of five million people,[58] around ten percent of the current estimated South African population. The *Sun*'s publisher, Deon du Plessis, claims that there exists a functioning second-hand market for the paper in some communities,[59] such is the demand for tabloid news and its modes of "personalisation and [its] focus on private concerns,"[60] the mapping of the specific and intimate occurrences of broader social and political phenomena. While a popular perception of tabloid journalism is that it "lowers the standards of public discourse,"[61] a less snobbish viewpoint is that, in South Africa especially, tabloids adopt conversational modes to tell stories that engage with a wider public on a personal and more relatable level. Such is its effectiveness, write Larry Strelitz and Lynette Steenveld, that "the mainstream press are increasingly using these same techniques . . . and so the lines between some tabloids and some of the mainstream press are becoming increasingly blurred."[62]

This means that the narrativization of personal lives in local literature is matched by a similar trend in the press. And it so happens that a shift of tastes from fiction to nonfiction narratives also provides writers with different and more useful means and modes of exploring South African topics. Steinberg posits that narrative trends—in narrative nonfiction and journalism broadly—focus on the "unloved and unlovable parts of people,"[63] but this seems like too much a cynical viewpoint to accept unreservedly. A better

qualification of trends can perhaps be found with Krog, who insists that what is being experienced is a reversal of past narrative trends: "Where we initially used facts to enable our fiction to arrive at the truth, we now use . . . fictional elements . . . to enable our facts to arrive at the truth."[64]

The Matter of Distance

But what exactly constitutes a South African truth? Such a notion is patently problematic, not only because the idea of a universal "truth" is somewhat asinine, and not only because of the latent historical prevalence of "unresolved difference" between social groups, but also because of, in the words of Malvern van Wyk Smith, a related trend of "Southern African writers [tending to keep a] distance from cultures other than their own,"[65] limiting their abilities to reliably render cultures other than their own. Compounding this, writers might also feel uneasy straying into contested cultural or social territories in the first place, as authors with the gumption to stray into other imaginative territories often found themselves on the end of some rather heavy-handed criticism: for example, Pamela Jooste's fictional depiction of Cape colored life under apartheid, *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter* (1998), was dismissed by some reviewers as a contradictorily racialized attempt at an antiracial narrative vision.[66] Interestingly, imaginings or reimaginings of one's own culture might have also attracted criticism. In the years before the release of *Dance with a Poor Man's Daughter*, reviewers commented on a wave of novels by white writers—such as Justin Cartwright, Mark Behr, and Peter Godwin—who looked to "describe the memories of . . . the loss of white innocence and the bitterness brought on by apartheid," but instead created works about which "nothing . . . seem[ed] real."[67] Reviewer Ronald Suresh Roberts termed this "New White Writing" as, variously, "more of a malaise than a genre"; "the language more of the suburban or the expatriate self-help manual than of literature"; and writing that "tends to erase adulthood among the privileged, if adulthood means actively reckoning with responsibility."[68] Under particular scrutiny from Roberts was Jo-Anne Richards's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (1996), a novel about the life of a half-English, half-Afrikaans family on a farm in the Eastern Cape, alternately narrated through the eyes of a young girl and those of her older, married self in the late 1980s. The book, a best seller in South African terms, was said by Roberts to be characterized by "a peculiarly South African whingeing" through which runs "the idea that white apartheid childhood was an untroubled time of rubber duckies and wholesomeness; pure life," naive, and devoid of ethical quandary.[69]

While Roberts's critique was itself met with opposition, a point still stands: there exists a preoccupation in South African letters with the politics

(and apolitics) of identity, remembrance, and the veracity of imagination, whether one is imagining one's own culture or the culture of another. This is exacerbated by the country's history of cultural and racial separation, which informs the not particularly surprising assertion that literature in South Africa—particularly fiction—has been and is a "fertile ground for foundational binary inscription," especially "blatant dualisms" between—and this list is by no means exhaustive—white and black, oppressor and oppressed, liberator and liberated and, increasingly, rich and poor.[70]

On initial reading, many contemporary South African nonfiction texts do very little to change the perception that South African writers prefer to keep an imaginative distance from cultures other than the ones with which they are immediately familiar. This, however, may come down to a crucial shift in ideology and methodology: instead of employing prescriptive viewpoints of "other" cultures, authors are more readily employing descriptive immersive modes more readily associated with journalistic practice in order to more faithfully describe the disposition of other cultures. Further, some writers have developed an acute awareness of their own epistemic and empathetic shortcomings, often translating it into a feature of their writing. Whereas Jooste attempted to employ a voice that was not her own to describe events that were not her own, authors are increasingly focalizing the experience through their own cultural lenses, often attempting to mitigate any potential interpretative *faux pas* with a great deal of self-reflexivity, self-awareness, and self-censure. Steinberg, as was mentioned earlier, inserts caveat upon caveat of his personal and professional shortcomings in each of his book-length works of narrative journalism. In the acknowledgements of *Three Letter Plague*, for example, he states, "I needn't have to add, but will nonetheless, that all errors of fact and foolishness of perspective are my own."[71] By utilizing such techniques the author is able to paint "an ambitious social canvas"[72] that is qualified not by any claims to truth, but rather by a recognition of the limitations of the author, ostensibly imbuing his or her narrative with honesty and verisimilitude. As such, they proudly bear what de Kock might call the "mark of the seam":[73] the acknowledgment that representation of South African narratives exists in a "shadow of doubleness"[74]—or another instance of rhetorical genuflection, writ large.

The Promise of Nonfiction?

One of the principal literary means of rendering postapartheid South Africa has therefore shifted away from attempts at comprehensive imaginings of the racial or cultural "other" to dedicated attempts at understanding the other through immersive, fundamentally journalistic techniques. One might look to Krog, who has the singular distinction of working and earning

critical acclamation as a poet, author, and journalist, for substantiation of this: she asserts that the daily happenings of South African society, in contexts both personal and collective, simply cannot be imagined, as the happenings in one community are usually beyond the comprehensive understanding of the members of another community.[75] To quote Steinberg, and to put the matter much more indelicately, South Africa remains a country in which "you couldn't make this shit up."[76,]

This might initially seem to lend weight to the tired axiom that truth is stranger than fiction. In practice, however, one must be careful not to catalog the shortcomings of fiction and imagination in contemporary South Africa without considering the successes of some South African authors in creating telling fictive domains in their work. As such, the failure of imaginings as discussed in this paper should not be taken as a general indictment of the capacity of South African fiction to fulfill reconciliatory or representative functions in the ways in which nonfiction is purported to do. Indeed, in a recent discussion of creative nonfiction, Duncan Brown, the Dean of Arts at the University of the Western Cape, argued that it would be foolish to "make the argument that creative non-fiction can do things that fiction cannot in South Africa."[77] Cornwell argued in an interview that this might seem to be the case to some observers because South African "readers are under-educated and lazy, and [the country's] writers are on the whole not that interesting, or not as interesting as" its nonfiction writers.[78]

Whether or not Cornwell's remark is correct, one should still consider those fictive domains in South African fiction that can engage with South African realities in affecting ways. The ways in which they do so, moreover, are telling with regard to the role and success of imagination in South African literary works. J. M. Coetzee is a case in point. Examining his oeuvre, one might argue that South African fiction can—and does—readily engage with the country's political and social psyches, as well as its underwritten history: one need only look to public debates about perceived racism and pessimism surrounding the Booker Prize-winning *Disgrace* (1999), the master/slave dynamics of *Dusklands* (1974), or the meditation on authority and torture that is *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) as a gauge of the level of nuanced engagement that fiction can attain with the country's past and present. There is a caveat here, however: Coetzee does not engage with history in the same ways as Krog or Steinberg does, nor in the same way as other white writers like Jooste or Richards. Much the same as the Magistrate views and attempts to relate to the naked body of a "barbarian" girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee treats the history of South Africa as one that is impenetrable and unknowable: it "lies before [him] in the dust, disembodied, monstrous."[79] Coetzee's

awareness of the limitations of articulation and empathy leads him away from attempts to "mimetically reproduc[e] the historical content of apartheid,"[80] and toward engagement with its underwritten—and often corporeal—effects: David Lurie's failed attempts to empathize with his daughter's rape in her own home by a group of young black youths in *Disgrace*; Jacobus Coetzee's massacre of a "Hottentot" village in *Dusklands*; and the Magistrate's failed empathetic connections with the scarred barbarian girl and her tribe in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In "confronting the ethical problem of aestheticization"[81] in apartheid history and choosing to render it "untranslatable,"[82] Coetzee's fiction is an exception that proves the rule.

In South African fiction, it may very well be the case that, as Coetzee's Magistrate postulates, "whatever can be articulated is falsely put," and that "which has not been articulated has to be lived through."[83] The truth may be that writers, in any conceivable social position, simply "don't know this country well enough to write fiction about it," no matter how strongly they may hope to understand it.[84] The author of fiction who hopes to articulate the experience of another South African "other" may find him- or herself in the position of Egan, the protagonist of "Afritude Sauce," one of four stories that make up Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*. At the story's midpoint, white Egan finds himself dining in a kitschy African restaurant in the company of a number of black men. As his companions shift the language of conversation from English to Sotho, Egan, who does not know a word of the language and is therefore thrust to the peripheries of the discussion, indulges in a quintessentially white South African fantasy:

> He imagined himself at the end of the evening, as they were parting in the soothingly lit lobby of the hotel, putting out a hand to Louis Bhengu and saying in perfect Sotho, 'Well, gentlemen, thank you for a very entertaining evening.' But he couldn't even guess at the shape of the words in his mouth.[85]

Writers of nonfiction do not need to guess at unfamiliar syllables, nor do they need to attempt to articulate an unknown reality in an unknown tongue, under the guise of a different skin. "That is why I stay with nonfiction," writes Krog in *Begging to Be Black*,

> listening, engaging, observing [and] translating, until one can hopefully begin to sense a thinning of the skin, negotiate possible small openings at places where imaginings can begin to begin.[86]

Because of this increased sense of self-awareness and limitation, narrative journalism, in addition to its obligation to factual representation,[87] "also seeks to understand feelings, emotions, and expectations"; in other words, "the consciousness behind events and actions that can provide reflexive cultural insights into other times and places."[88]

For the duration in which fictional imaginings remain impossible or even simply inadequate, Krog argues, nonfiction will continue to be a more reliable medium for telling South African truths than fiction, a medium in which writers can more readily make sense of the country's complex social dynamics. This is not to say that fiction does not have the potential to render South African truths, but the failure of imaginings and empathy in many cases implores the writer of fiction to appeal to the country's underwritten history, as in Coetzee's case, to "leave us with the terrible, irreconcilable sight of the abused body, stripped bare of the explanatory narratives of [history]."[89] Furthermore, the journalistic impetus behind the creation of nonfiction texts in a transitional society, whether they are rendered in the traditions of fictional texts or not, remains as strong as ever. As Steinberg argues,

> We have lived through historic times and we need to record them. South Africa's rules are being rewritten. . . . I wanted to write it down: Why? How? Nothing happens here *sui generis*.[90]

Only when the rules are explained, and the differences become even slightly less opaque, can imaginings between South Africans "begin to begin." Without these epistemic connections and attempts at resolving difference, South Africans may continue to "have very little understanding of the full conditions in which [they] live," and, as Rian Malan perhaps hyperbolically argues, "if we don't have the ability to look at [this] truth long enough, salvation will never be revealed."[91] For now, the imperative may be—in fiction, nonfiction and the spaces between the two—for writers to give their imaginings less credence (unless, of course, their purpose is to decry their own impossibilities) in their engaging with South Africa in its still-early stages of self-definition.

Conclusion

In the face of a multiplicity of disconnected realities, narrative journalism is one of the most—if not the most—fruitful means for delineating the contours along which these realities run, and where the disconnections between them occur. Although South Africa's history may necessitate that the country and all depictions of it will always carry the mark of the seam—that the sutures in South African society will forever be visible in the works that try to depict it or parts of it—narrative journalism arguably enables one to get as close as possible to the edge of the epistemic and ontological precipices that divide segments of South Africa's population from one other. This is often done by the means of its writers taking the path inward: by declaring their own limitations in the construction of their narratives. Even in bringing

light to the "secret pieces" of people,[92] to their unloved and unlovable parts, narrative journalism in South Africa likely won't show South Africans to be similar to each other, or even that one day South Africa's scenes of unresolved difference may be reconciled. It may, however, show the parts of the country that one day might be.

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Notes

1. Leon De Kock, "South Africa in the Global Imaginary: An Introduction," *Poetics Today* 22, no. 2 (2001): 263.

2. Gareth Cornwell, "Long Walk to Ordinariness: South African Literature in English since 1945," in *The Columbia Guide to South African Literature in English since 1945*, Gareth Cornwell, Dirk Klopper, and Craig Mackenzie (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

3. De Kock, "Global Imaginary," 263.

4. Robert Thornton, "The Potentials of Boundaries in South Africa: Steps towards a Theory of the Social Edge," in *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, eds. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger (London: Zed Books, 1998), quoted in De Kock, "Global Imaginary," 277.

5. De Kock, "Global Imaginary," 276.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid, 277.

8. Rob Nixon, "Non-fiction Booms, North and South: A Transatlantic Perspective," *Safundi* 1–2, no. 12 (2012): 29.

9. Antony Altbeker, *Fruit of a Poisoned Tree: A True Story of Murder and the Miscarriage of Justice* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers SA, 2010).

10. Cornwell, "Long Walk to Ordinariness," 35.

11. Ibid., 34.

12. Nixon, "Non-fiction Booms," 29.

13. Leon de Kock, "Does South African Literature Still Exist? Or: South African Literature Is Dead, Long Live Literature in South Africa," *English in Africa* 32, no. 2 (2005): 74.

14. De Kock, "Global Imaginary," 289.

15. Cornwell, "Long Walk to Ordinariness," 2.

16. Ibid., 31.

17. Ibid., 32.

18. Mpe and Duiker, like many of their subjects, both died young, and within one month of each other. Mpe was thirty-four when he died in December 2004; Duiker was thirty when he hanged himself in January 2005.

19. Carli Coetzee, "'They Never Wept, the Men of My Race': Antjie Krog's 'Country of My Skull' and the White South African Signature," *Journal of Southern African* Studies 27, no. 4 (2001): 686.

20. Antjie Krog, "Fact Bordering Fiction and the Honesty of 'I,'" *River Teeth: A Journal of Nonfiction Narrative* 8, no. 2 (2007): 35.

21. Antjie Krog, *Begging to be Black* (Cape Town: Random House Struik, 2009), 268.

22. Krog, "Fact Bordering Fiction," 37–38.

23. Pablo Calvi, "Latin America's Own 'New Journalism,'" *Literary Journalism Studies* 2, no. 2 (2010): 64.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 77.

26. While the New Journalism, for example, claimed in many cases to be chiefly an artistic form of literature, *testimonio* was overtly a political form that had to adapt to often-tumultuous political climates: Latin American authors often retreated to allegorical modes, and therefore not strictly nonfictional modes, "in order to portray current social conditions without unduly exposing themselves to persecution." Calvi, "Latin America's Own 'New Journalism,'" 77.

27. De Kock, "Global Imaginary," 264.

28. Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (Cape Town: Random House, 1998), 18.

29. Research from the South African Book Development Council suggests that less than one percent of the South African population "regularly buy books," and only fourteen percent "regularly read books." Nick Mulgrew, "Literacy: Once Upon a Time, Parents Taught Their Children to Read," *Mail & Guardian*, October 19, 2012, http://mg.co.za/article/2012-10-19-00-once-upon-a-time-parents-taught.

30. Cornwell, "Long Walk to Ordinariness," 2.

31. Mark Freeman and Jens Brockmeier, "Narrative Integrity: Autobiographical Identity and the Meaning of the 'Good Life,'" in *Narrative and Identity: Studies in Autobiography, Self and Culture*, eds. Jens Brockmeier and Donal Carbaugh (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2001), 92.

32. Jonny Steinberg, "The Ethics of Narrative Non-fiction in a Voyeuristic Age," (seminar, HUMA: Institute for Humanities in Africa, University of Cape Town, July 26, 2011).

33. Ibid.
34. Nixon, "Non-fiction Booms."
35. Jonny Steinberg, "An Eerie Silence," in *Foreign Policy*, April 25, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/04/25/an_eerie_silence/.
36. Ibid.
37. "Jonny Steinberg on *The Number*," April 11, 2011, Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town.
38. "Jonny Steinberg on *Three Letter Plague*," May 11, 2011, Department of English, University of Cape Town.
39. Jonny Steinberg, *Three Letter Plague* (Jeppestown, SA: Jonathan Ball, 2008), 293.
40. Ibid., 296.
41. See, for example, Steinberg, *Three Letter Plague*, viii.
42. "Jonny Steinberg on *Three-Letter Plague*."
43. Jonny Steinberg, *Midlands* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2002), x.
44. Steinberg, "Ethics of Narrative Non-fiction."
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Jonny Steinberg, *The Number* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2004), 385.
48. Ibid., 135.
49. Ibid., 387.
50. Steinberg, *Midlands*, 39.
51. "Jonny Steinberg on *The Number*."
52. Antjie Krog, *A Change of Tongue* (Cape Town: Random House Struik, 2003), 362.
53. Steinberg, "The Ethics of Narrative Non-fiction."
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Rob Nixon, "Non-fiction Booms."
58. Media24, "Daily Sun," http://www.media24.com/en/newspapers/emerging-markets/daily-sun.html.
59. Herman Wasserman, *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa: True Story!* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).
60. Jostein Grisprud, "The Aesthetics and Politics of Melodrama," in Larry Strelitz and Lynette Steenveld, "Thinking about South African Tabloid Newspapers," *Ecquid Novi*: 26, no. 2 (2005): 267. Originally published in *Journalism and Popular Culture*, eds. Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (London: Sage, 1992).
61. H. Örnebring and A.M. Jönsson, "Tabloid Journalism and the Public Sphere: A Historical

Perspective on Tabloid Journalism," in Strelitz and Steenveld, "Thinking about South African Tabloid Newspapers," 266. Originally published in *Journalism Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 283.
62. Larry Strelitz and Lynette Steenveld, "Thinking about South African Tabloid Newspapers," *Ecquid Novi* 26, no. 2 (2005): 267.

63. Steinberg, "Ethics of Narrative Non-fiction."

64. Krog, "Fact Bordering Fiction," 36.

65. Malvern van Wyk Smith, "White Writing/Writing Black: The Anxiety of Non-Influence," in *Rethinking South African Literary History,* eds. Johannes A. Smit, Johan van Wyk, and Jean-Philippe Wade (Durban: Y Press, 1996), 83.

66. Carolyn Basset, "Review: Whose Dance?" http://www.africafiles.org/article.asp?ID=3771/.

67. Lourens Ackermann, "The Dreadfulness of Roast Chicken—and What It Says about SA," *Sunday Times*, April 13, 1997, 21.

68. Ronald Suresh Roberts, "New White Writing Launders Apartheid Childhood, Packing It with Roast Chickens and Rubber Duckies," *Saturday Independent*, April 12, 1996, 22.

69. Ibid.

70. De Kock, "Global Imaginary," 285.

71. Steinberg, *Three Letter Plague*, viii.

72. Nixon, "Non-fiction Booms."

73. De Kock, "Global Imaginary," 289.

74. Ibid., 289.

75. Krog, "Fact Bordering Fiction," 38.

76. "Antjie Krog, Jonny Steinberg, and Duncan Brown in Conversation on Creative Non-fiction," March 1, 2011, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape. Moreover, it is interesting to note once again that this is not a case of South African exceptionalism. Steinberg has also remarked that there are plenty of other countries in which "you couldn't make this shit up," most notably Liberia, the country that provides the backdrop for his fifth narrative journalistic book, *Little Liberia*.

77. Ibid.

78. Gareth Cornwell, email interview with author, October 19, 2011.

79. J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980), 87.

80. Samuel Durrant, "Bearing Witness to Apartheid: J.M. Coetzee's Inconsolable Works of Mourning," *Contemporary Literature* 40, no. 3 (1999): 460.

81. Ibid., 434.

82. Ibid.

83. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, 64.

84. "Antjie Krog, Jonny Steinberg, and Duncan Brown in Conversation on Creative Non-fiction."

85. Ivan Vladislavić, *The Exploded View* (Johannesburg: Random House, 2004), 88.

86. Krog, *Begging to be Black*, 268.

87. The veracity of these facts, of course, might change from writer to writer and work to work.

88. Norman Sims, "The Problem and Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," *Literary Journalism Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009): 8.

89. Durrant, "Bearing Witness," 460.

90. "Antjie Krog, Jonny Steinberg, and Duncan Brown in Conversation on Creative Non-fiction.,"

91. Kevin Bloom, "Analysis: Are Journalism Schools to Blame for 'Bad Media,'" *The Daily Maverick*, http://dailymaverick.co.za/article/2010-08-26-analysis-are-journalism-schools-to-blame-for-bad-media/.

92. Jonny Steinberg, *Little Liberia* (Jeppestown, SA: Jonathan Ball, 2011), 264.

Journalistic Critique through Parody in Stephen Crane's "An Experiment in Misery"

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Abstract: This article considers Stephen Crane's 1894 *New York Press* publication "An Experiment in Misery" as both an example and critique of immersion-style "experiment" writing that was common at the time. Contrary to several interpretations, I view the sketch under the rubric of parody: a creative repurposing of an established genre with the goal of both celebrating the genre's strengths and exposing its weaknesses. This article first describes the ways in which Crane's text fits the genre then analyzes the ironic narrative distance that signals the presence of parody. The text ultimately offers a journalistic meta-critique by replicating and lampooning common acts of journalistic practice, such as the use of an exemplar to stand in for an entire class, the expectation that the lives of the poor can be easily observed, and the presumption that insight gained through experience could be adequately transmitted to a middle-class readership

From his classic war novel *The Red Badge of Courage* to his short stories, Stephen Crane's fiction is characterized by a fierce economy of style, an innovative use of imagery, and an iconoclastic take on narrative conceit. In addition to his fiction works, his journalism has likewise gained attention for its vividness, its fresh treatment of new themes, and its bold use of imagery to estrange everyday sensations and describe them anew for readers. However, despite the general acknowledgement of his artistic achievement, literary analysis has been unevenly applied to Crane's journalism as compared to his fiction, especially in terms of the use of parody. For example, in his monograph *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism*, Eric Solomon only briefly mentions Crane's journalism, and only to point out that it contains much more straightforward social critique than his fiction.[1] This particular blind

spot regarding Crane's nonfiction reflects the strict division between journalism and fiction common to many contemporary readings of Crane's work.

Viewing Crane's work from the perspective of literary journalism offers a way out of this limiting binary, while revealing a new interpretation of the artistic and social significance of his newspaper pieces. Rather than falling into either a "fact" or "fiction" category, Michael Robertson describes Crane's work as fitting into a more fluid "fact-fiction discourse" common in the 1890s.[2] Likewise, Thomas Connery notes that, although the turn of the century was characterized by the increasing separation between objective, fact-driven journalism and fictive storytelling, literary journalism offered a third option outside this dichotomy, one that "gave readers another version of reality, an interpretation of culture different from that of either most conventional journalism or most fiction that contained elements of both."[3] As a growing number of critical studies, historical accounts, and anthologies show, Crane's journalism is a foundational example of the creative potential to be found in this fluid space between fact and fiction.[4]

By acknowledging the amount of literary freedom accorded to Crane's journalism, we can more fully appreciate his use of parody. As a case study, I will examine Crane's 1894 *New York Press* piece "An Experiment in Misery" through this lens, though several other works would benefit from a similar treatment, including the companion sketch "An Experiment in Luxury," published a week later in the same journal.[5] I focus on "An Experiment in Misery" particularly because Crane keeps closer to the generic conceit of the "experiment" sketch so common in newspapers of the day, thus leading to a more nuanced and ultimately more successful parody. I argue that highlighting the generic context of the sketch and the basis for ironic parody reveals how "An Experiment in Misery" offers a meta-critique—that is, a critical assessment of journalistic technique conducted within the form itself.

"Experiments": Form and Parody

To summarize briefly, "An Experiment in Misery" follows the adventures of a youth who attempts to understand the perspective of tramps and hoboes by "passing" as one for an evening. The original publication in the *New York Press* contains a narrative frame that was later removed when Crane republished the piece in a short story collection.[6] The excised frame depicts the youth and an older, authoritative man—presumably his editor—as they stand contemplating a poor man. The youth expresses his desire to understand the tramp's "point of view," and the elder advises him that this can only be achieved through experience. Following this advice, the youth dons shabby clothing and sets out "to try to eat as the tramp may eat, and sleep as the

wanderers sleep."[7] After this introduction, the youth immediately falls into desperation and is heckled by neighborhood children. His attempt to get at the heart of the downtrodden experience leads him to a seven-cent boarding house and the company of a fellow tramp, dubbed "the assassin." After a nightmarish evening, the youth awakes to find himself at ease in his new world and conversant in both the dialect and customs of the destitute. He shares a final meal with the assassin, sits with him on a park bench, and ultimately perceives his fundamental isolation from the wealthier city residents, and even the city itself. In the subsequently removed closing frame, the youth once again meets with the elder, who asks whether the youth has been able to discover the point of view of the tramp. "I don't know that I did,...but at any rate I think mine own has undergone a considerable alteration."[8]

The basic conceit of this sketch would have come as no surprise to readers of the *Press* in 1894. Indeed, in the months before the publication of "An Experiment in Misery" there were already two stories published in the newspaper under the same pretext.[9] Although the "experiment" was a well-known form in newspaper reportage of the time, subsequent criticism of Crane's sketch has not always taken this into account. In the 1960s and '70s, it was common to see an emphasis on the stylistic and structural devices that Crane employs, but little consideration given to the context in which the story first appeared. These critical works helped increase awareness among literary scholars about the stylistic achievements of Crane's journalism and its exposure of social ills.[10] However, disregarding the historical context leaves these interpretations devoid of a sense that many of the devices that Crane uses to "reveal" the lives of the poor were so common as to appear clichéd to the readership at the time, and as I will argue, they actually function to critique the very aim of "exposing" the plight of the poor at all.[11]

In his analysis of the "experiment" form, Thomas Connery notes that there are several factors typical of this type of story, such as reluctance on journalists' part to expose themselves to living conditions of the poor.[12] As an example, the well-known reportage of Nellie Bly featured many of the same elements, particularly her foray into the Blackwell Island Insane Asylum that was originally published in the *World* and collected into a book in 1887. Similar to "An Experiment in Misery," Bly's account begins with a frame explaining her mission: a skeptical editor gives her the assignment.[13] Her strategy to get admitted to the insane asylum also involves dressing in shabby clothing and checking into a boarding house, where she then feigns insanity. In addition to her Blackwell Island reports, Bly also conducted several similar investigative pieces, including trying to get a job through an employment agency in order to expose the agency's manipulation of the jobless.[14] Such

repetition of form and conceit would indicate that these "experiments" were widely recognized among the newspaper readership.

The assertion that Crane was consciously replicating and critiquing the experiment form also finds support from his biography. Although "An Experiment in Misery" describes the youth's shock at the conditions of the streets and the boarding house, Crane had been familiar with these locations for some time already, making the youth's reaction likely to be little more than a generic conceit. Crane was not raised in a life of poverty; however, he spent much time in the years between 1891 and 1895 exploring the slums of the Bowery and the Tenderloin districts of New York City, living in strained conditions while working as a journalist.[15] According to R. W. Stallman's account, from 1891 he was living with friends in shared boarding houses and making frequent trips to the Bowery.[16] These experiences imply that while Crane was not without prospects himself, he was more familiar with the lives of the poor than "An Experiment in Misery" would lead readers to assume.

These factors suggest that Crane took a critical approach to the "experiment" form, and that the parody in "An Experiment in Misery" is not simply aimed at the "youth" or the poor, but rather the genre itself. For the purposes of this analysis, I would like to follow Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody as repetition of a codified form accompanied by critical distance. Hutcheon explains that in modern parody, critical distance is usually achieved through the tool of irony, which can be "double-directed" at both the new form and the old, rather than simply ridiculing the form being parodied.[17] In the case of Crane's journalism, the irony functions to mock both the investigator/journalist by portraying him as a naive young man, and also the form of "experiment" sketches by showing just how conducive that form can be for such naive explorations. By the designation of parody, I do not wish to imply that Crane intends to undermine the entire enterprise of investigative journalism, but rather to bring into relief practices that should not be taken for granted. As a reminder of parody's flexibility in this manner, Hutcheon notes that "this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive."[18]

In "An Experiment in Misery," we first recognize the presence of this type of irony in the narrative frame. After the youth expresses his desire to take on the experiment, the text reads: "from those words begins this veracious narrative of an experiment in misery."[19] Such phrasing encapsulates the programmatic nature of the sketch. The frame continues, describing how "the youth went forth" [20] on his mission, a phrase that Trachtenberg notes is ironic, "directed at the hint of naive chivalric adventuresomeness in the youth."[21] From the very first lines of the piece, a reader of Crane's era would be aware

that the article closely conforms to formal expectations and jokingly acknowledges them as such. Further, this opening clues us in that the narrator has a different perspective on the events that follow than the youth does, implying a distance between narrator and investigator that is the primary vehicle for the piece's irony.

The use of the third person further emphasizes the critical distance between narrator and character. The primary indication of this divergence in perspective is the presence of the epithet "youth" to describe the investigator-journalist.[22] While we might initially read this as a contrast to the "elder" editor figure, the term's continued use urges us to understand the character's "youth" in relation to the narrator's superior age and authority instead. Naturally, any bit of investigative reportage would involve a slightly wiser narrator describing the activities of his past self, but this feature is oddly emphasized in Crane's article. This is done humorously, I would argue, emphasizing what is to be assumed as the incredible amount of knowledge and experience gained by spending a single night in a boarding house.

These features set "An Experiment in Misery" apart from its notable contemporaries. For example, in *How the Other Half Lives*, published in 1890, one of the important bases for Jacob Riis's authority is the interweaving of personal experience into his sociohistorical description of the tenements. The pronoun "I" appears in anecdotal moments, such as when Riis accidentally sets fire to a house when taking a picture of beggars in Blind Man's Alley, only to find out that the walls of the tenement were too filthy to burn.[23] This anecdote is interjected into an otherwise impersonal account to serve as an example that illustrates the whole, as well as to give Riis the authority to speak on behalf of the beggars. The authority of these personal experiences relies on the fact that the narrator and the character are one, and that the experiences of the one directly inform the interpretations of the other. Similarly, in Nellie Bly's *Ten Days in a Mad-house*, there is very little distinction between the narrator and the character. We are privy to the character Bly's thoughts as she proceeds on her mission, but we do not receive additional commentary from a wiser narrator. Crane's account differs from these two notable and widely read examples in that he does not utilize the first person account to generate authority. For both Riis and Bly, experience serves as straightforward evidence that buttresses a larger claim about society or life. The distance achieved through Crane's ironic frame and third-person characterization of the youth would be damaging to the muckraking intentions of Riis and Bly. But what Crane sacrifices in authority, he gains in flexibility. His distanced, ironic narrator allows him to cast his eye not only on the destitute, but also on the journalist observing the destitute.

Journalistic Folly and Critique

In the 1910 collection *Types from City Streets*, journalist Hutchins Hapgood argues that people who have experienced the most extreme aspects of deprivation—or even refinement—inherently make better subjects than the vulgar and prevaricating middle classes: "People who have reached 'de limit' are full of rich material for literature. They have nothing to conceal."[24] As can be seen in Hapgood's writings, the lives and experiences of the poor were thought to be transparent and infinitely interpretable. In his essay "Literature in Low Life," Hapgood argues that "poor and uneducated persons, the law-abiding unfortunates and the criminal unfortunates alike, are more quickly, more completely, and more easily got at than the ordinary respectable man or woman."[25] This attitude that the poor are more transparent leads him to remark that "when a man seeks his stuff for writing from low life he is at least sure of one thing, namely, that what he sees is genuine. He will not be deceived."[26] One could certainly interpret this quote as a straightforward attitude toward the creative potential to be found in realistic depictions of the poor;[27] the fact that we still hold up several accounts of the destitute as exemplars of engaged journalism speaks to just that point. However, statements such as Hapgood's also serve to illuminate the biases that journalists can have toward the veracity of their own subjective practices. In other words, a journalist who "seeks his stuff. . . from low life" is unduly biased to believe that everything he sees—so long as it is low—is "genuine" and is an accurate reflection of an entire class of people.

In "An Experiment in Misery" the youth fulfills this stereotypical approach to investigative journalism among the poor. He assumes that one night spent in abject misery is enough to understand the "point of view" of the destitute, and much of his experience is colored by this expectation. The story opens with him seeking out the most typical of ways to get to know the other: by finding an extreme example that might epitomize the rest. Failing this, he goes on to find a community into which he can blend seamlessly. He eventually finds "aimless men strewn in front of saloons and lodging-houses, standing sadly, patiently, reminding one vaguely of the attitudes of chickens in a storm," and he responds by "align[ing] himself with these men, and turn[ing] slowly to occupy himself with the flowing life of the great street."[28] Instead of emotionally or psychologically "aligning" himself with the crowd, as would be his ultimate goal, he does so spatially. This spatial reorientation underscores the shallowness of this way of knowing the other. In fact, what he observes in the following paragraphs tells us more about his own expectations than it does the city, or certainly the lives of its inhabitants.

The youth sets out to expose a dark and punishing existence, and the power of his imagination makes the environment so. After the narrator "aligns himself" with the others, what he sees of the "flowing life of the great street" is not the life of humans, but rather an uncannily animated cityscape. In particular, he views the train station "which upon its leg-like pillars seemed to resemble some monstrous kind of crab squatting over the street. The quick fat puffings of the engines could be heard."[29] Further, the youth describes a saloon offering free soup and beer as a carnivorous, even cannibalistic, being with a "voracious air." The passage continues: "The swing doors, snapping to and fro like ravenous lips, made gratified smacks as the saloon gorged itself with plump men, eating with astounding and endless appetite, smiling in some indescribable manner as the men came in all directions like sacrifices to a heathenish superstition."[30] In these scenes, the youth's metaphorical description runs away with him. We see this specifically in the detail that describes the men as being "plump." Are we really to believe that these paupers are accurately described as plump? The power of the youth's metaphor overwhelms the narrative to give a misleading portrait of the clientele of a saloon that offers free soup to the poor. The fact that the dominant metaphor of environment-as-predator overpowers what might be more accurate descriptions of the men indicates the faultiness of the youth's "experience." His perceptions are colored both by his own expectations and his desire to weave a compelling narrative for his readers and himself. This trend is further emphasized as the youth seeks to fulfill the next part of his clichéd journey: the discovery of an exemplar—the epitome of deprivation that will stand in for the miseries of an entire class.

The use of a representative example is not uncommon in multiple forms of nonfiction writing. As James Clifford notes of the ethnographic style developing in this period and continuing until the 1960s, one of the major features is a "synechdochic rhetorical stance."[31] That is, ethnographers focused on specific themes and used them to illuminate the entire culture through example. Although, as Clifford notes, it took years for postmodern ethnography to challenge the underlying assumptions behind a synechdochic stance, we see beginnings of this critique in Crane's article. The critique is especially sharp when depicting the ways in which the youth is guided in selecting his example: he chooses one that coincides with preconceived expectations of what it means to be destitute. Rather naively, "he looked about him searching for an outcast of highest degree."[32]

As we might expect, the narrator of "An Experiment in Misery" mocks this tactic. At one point, the youth seeks out a man "whose wondrous seediness promised that he would have a knowledge of cheap lodging-houses."[33] By

using the word "wondrous," the narrator reflects and exaggerates the youth's pleasure in finding an example whose seediness meets—or even exceeds—his expectations. After this humorous reminder of the youth's expectations, we have the first description of his primary informant, henceforth known as "the assassin":

> His head was a fuddle of bushy hair and whiskers, from which his eyes peered with a guilty slant. In a close scrutiny it was possible to distinguish the cruel lines of a mouth which looked as if its lips had just closed with satisfaction over some tender and piteous morsel. He appeared like an assassin steeped in crimes performed awkwardly.[34]

This seemingly deft portrayal is undermined in the next sentence: "But at this time his voice was tuned to the coaxing key of an affectionate puppy."[35] And indeed, although the label "the assassin" sticks, it is clear that the first sketch based on physiognomy was entirely misleading. As we learn from the assassin's later rants in the light of day (if his words are to be trusted), he is harmless, most likely being guilty of nothing more than his own pauperism.

The assassin proves instrumental in introducing the youth to the primal scene of "experiment" reportage: the boarding house. We see the representative nature of the scene when an indescribable stench seems to rise from "the exhalations from a hundred pairs of reeking lips; the fumes from a thousand bygone debauches; the expression of a thousand present miseries."[36] The youth's encounter registers as so extreme that a single moment, sight, or smell can be multiplied outward to represent the suffering of all the masses. Thus his *one* encounter speaks to him of "a *hundred* pairs of reeking lips," which, to the youth, are capable of speaking for "a *thousand* present miseries" (emphasis mine). The figurative language in the scene suggests that the youth's mathematics is the result of his own imaginings, rather than a viable method for understanding the other. Rather than valorize the youth's ability to learn from experience, this scene exposes a faulty understanding of the generalizability of a single moment to speak for the lives of many.

The boarding house scene—and indeed the entire sketch—reaches a turning point when the youth is about to fall asleep and he listens to the wails of the other men in the room. The narrator's description includes examples of journalistic tendencies to adopt a synechdochic stance and to assume that the inner worlds of the poor are easily interpreted. The passage reads:

> The sound in its high piercing beginnings, that dwindled to final melancholy moans, expressed a red and grim tragedy of the unfathomable possibilities of the man's dreams. But to the youth these were not merely the shrieks of a vision-pierced man: they were an utterance of the meaning of the room and its occupants. It was to him the protest of the wretch who

> feels the touch of the imperturbable granite wheels, and who then cries with an impersonal eloquence, with a strength not from him, giving voice to the wail of a whole section, a class, a people. This, weaving into the young man's brain, and mingling with his views of the vast and sombre shadows that, like mighty black fingers, curled around the naked bodies, made the young man so that he did not sleep, but lay carving the biographies for these men from his meagre experience. At times the fellow in the corner howled in a writhing agony of his imaginations.[37]

Similar to the scene discussed above, this passage also emphasizes the youth's assumption that one example can stand in for the experience of an entire group. For instance, the scream is "an utterance of the meaning of the room and its occupants," not simply of the man's dreams. Further, his scream represents "the wail of a whole section, a class, a people." While the narrator offers no concrete evidence to suggest that cry of the dreaming man actually reflects class-consciousness, the youth nonetheless interprets it as so.

Further, the fact that the man's screams seem "an utterance of the meaning of the room and its occupants" shows that the youth is liable to interpret an isolated incident as full of meaning, thus conforming to the view that the lives of the destitute are easily discernable. We should not fail to read this in juxtaposition with what the narrator has told us about the "*unfathomable* possibilities of the man's dreams" (emphasis added). The youth is inferring meaning, in what Trachtenberg describes as an "ideological romance,"[38] even while we have been told that this is impossible. This is further emphasized when the youth "lay carving biographies for these men" based on the wailings of one man. At the same time, the narrator points out the inadequacy of the youth's knowledge for such a task, noting that these biographies come from his "*meagre* experience" (emphasis added)—a distinction that would not be clear to the youth himself.

As a final point, I would like to draw attention to the ambiguity of the last line, which can be read as the distanced narrator's critique of the youth's interpretive imaginings. It is unclear whether the man howls "in a writhing agony of his [own] imagination" or of the youth's imagination. The mere possibility that the unidentified—and invisible—man could be suffering under the weight of the youth's imaginings broaches the issue of the violence of representation. This echoes an earlier moment in the text, when the youth gazes upon a man sleeping with his eyes slightly opened. While the youth feels threatened by the man's gaze, the man himself is reduced under the youth's gaze to being "like a body stretched out expectant of the surgeon's knife."[39] Such descriptions suggest the unequal power dynamics at play in the youth's act of representation.

Knowledge Gained Yet Incommunicable?

After this pivotal scene the tone and manner of the story change, bringing critical complications. In the morning the youth awakens to find the horrors of the evening abated by the light of day. This marks an immediate transformation: he is now one of the destitute, well versed in their customs and expectations. He reconnects with the assassin and easily develops rapport, speaking in the same dialect as his guide. The tone of the narrator is lightly humorous, remarking on the youth's sudden proficiency in dialect and manner: "They spent a few moments in dexterous exchanges of phrases."[40] The youth even intuitively knows how to buy the assassin dinner without appearing to be charitable. This picture of mutual cultural understanding culminates when the two return to City Hall Park: "[T]he two wanderers sat down in the little circle of benches sanctified by traditions of their class. They huddled in their old garments, slumbrously conscious of the march of hours which for them had no meaning."[41] At this point in the narrative, it appears that the youth has ceased to interpret each of his observations according to his expectations and instead responds organically to the culture surrounding his new social position.

The closing of the sketch depicts the youth as he watches the well-dressed passersby, who pay him no notice: "They expressed to the young man his infinite distance from all that he valued. Social position, comfort, the pleasures of living, were unconquerable kingdoms. He felt a sudden awe."[42] The last line preceding the closing frame reads: "He confessed himself an outcast, and his eyes from under the lowered rim of his hat began to glance guiltily, wearing the criminal expression that comes with certain convictions."[43] Here the narrator describes most clearly the change that has occurred in the youth—namely, that he has learned something unforeseen, something that could not be accepted by the mainstream public that surrounds him and would judge him as a criminal. Although the narrator describes his expression from the outside, he fails to offer us insight into the thoughts that are occupying the youth's mind. When compared to the complete access to the youth's imaginations displayed in the nighttime scene, this is surprising indeed. Although we may not be as oblivious as the passersby who pay him no attention, the ending ultimately emphasizes that we must find the world of the destitute a likewise "unconquerable kingdom."

Many of the most perceptive readings of "An Experiment in Misery" focus on this "epiphany" scene as the pivotal point. Michael Robertson, for example, argues that the convictions the youth has are "ideas about social inequality that the larger society would consider criminal."[44] The youth's newly gained understanding of social inequality is the means to a profound transfor-

mation of self and, as Robertson argues, the sketch "is a fundamentally radical work that challenges belief in a stable identity."[45] In a nuanced reading that accounts for the sketch's journalistic context and critique, Alan Trachtenberg likewise takes these closing remarks at face value. He describes the convictions as the youth's knowledge that he is an outcast.[46] As in Robertson's interpretation, this knowledge leads the youth to a transformation wrought by experience.

A common trend in these interpretations is a tendency to read early portions of the sketch in light of the experience-induced epiphany depicted in the final City Hall Park scene. The ironic stance of the first half of the sketch thus leads to an uneasy tension. For example, Benedict Giamo notices Crane's ironic tone in the first section (in his overly ceremonious use of religious imagery in the saloon scene), but remarks, "[S]een in the light of his successive stages, [the irony] is perhaps a final remnant of his sense of distance and detachment, the lingering of his naturalistic interest in retaining the objective rendering of events."[47] We see in this train of thought the need to dispel the earlier sense of irony in order to allow a straightforward reading of the final scene.[48]

I, however, would like to propose a reading of the closing scene that stems from the parodic tone established in the first half of the sketch. This interpretation is supported by an acknowledgement that the reintegrated youth makes in the closing frame—one that is not explored by the critics discussed above. When asked if he could ascertain the "point of view" of the tramp, he replies "I don't know that I did. . . but at any rate I think mine own has undergone a considerable alteration."[49] The interpretations cited above do not address why the youth would either fail to understand his epiphany, or fail to communicate it to the elder by declaring, "I don't know."

Further, in order for us to accept the conclusion that the youth has actually undergone a transformation orchestrated by means of the strategies lampooned in the first section, we might have to accept that those strategies are, in fact, legitimate for acquiring some type of knowledge of the other. I resist such an interpretation, since I do not believe it in keeping with the ironic distance of the narrator. Instead, I propose that this passage—while indeed depicting the youth having undergone a transformation—still adheres to the same critique of the "experiment" form. I argue that there is a fundamental "if, then" structure underlying the second half of the story that goes as follows: *Even if the youth managed to understand the point of view of the other through immersion, then he would still be unable to explain it to his uninitiated, middle-class readership*. The narrator's strategy of zooming out and obscuring the youth's thoughts is not a gesture of respect for the youth's change in

subjectivity or hard-earned knowledge, but is rather a final critique of the method of experiment writing.

Ultimately, the stakes of such interpretation are high: even critics that recognize the strategic use of irony, such as Trachtenberg and Giamo, view Crane's experiment as a productive one. Trachtenberg writes: "[T]he experiment transforms the youth, and it is through that transformation that the life of the city's strangers becomes manifest."[50] Giamo writes: "Crane indicates the value placed upon direct experience and encounter as a source of knowledge for personal as well as cultural change."[51] While I do not wish to imply that Crane is ready to throw the baby out with the bathwater when it comes to "experiment" sketches, I am leery of suggestions that the youth has actually undergone the profound transformations described in the terms above, or that the reader learns anything about the destitute in the piece. The reader has much to learn, however, about what *not* to do when attempting to responsibly represent a marginalized other.

Conclusion

Thus, I argue that Stephen Crane's "An Experiment in Misery" offers a multipronged critique of common journalistic practices. In the first half of the story, the youth executes several clichéd moves toward understanding the destitute, such as developing rapport with an exemplar and generalizing the informant's experience to the entire social group, while the narrator ironically undermines these practices by hinting at their failure to represent the real situation (the "assassin" is completely harmless, the youth makes up class-struggle allegories based on his "meagre experience"). The strategy of critique shifts after the pivotal nighttime scene, though Crane's intentions do not. The story ends suggesting that the youth has finally learned something, while at the same time failing to communicate to the reader what that something actually is. This serves as a final critique on the project of not only understanding the lives of others, but also representing those lives to other readers.

While Crane's "An Experiment in Misery" is by no means a common example, I would argue that this type of narrative stance, which widens the gap between narrator and character, is a forerunner for a characteristic feature of the genre of literary journalism. By toying with the power of the third-person narrator, free indirect discourse, and strategic irony, Crane was able to craft a critique of journalism that can still be read as a part of the genre. While such works of meta-critique do not always offer positive suggestions for reform, they are a useful way of drawing attention to problems in an established field without completely alienating the readership. The distanced critical stance, while not always ironic in later examples of literary journalism, allows greater

room for ambiguity and polysemy, reflecting the moral and ethical complexity inherent in representing disadvantaged others.

If we return briefly to the discussion of the role of parody in the development of the genre, we can see why so many have looked to Crane when tracing a history of literary journalism. Hutcheon follows the Russian formalists in suggesting that parody is a powerful means not only of critiquing genre but reforming it through increased awareness. In her words, "[P]arody was seen [by the Formalists] as a dialectic substitution of formal elements whose functions have become mechanized or automatic. At this point, the elements are 'refunctionalized,' to use their term. A new form develops out of the old, without really destroying it."[52] Seen within this lens, Crane "refunctionalizes" those tired aspects of the "experiment" form in order to make a larger statement about the limitations of representing the other. In doing so, he creates a hybrid form capable of transmitting a subtler message about the politics inherent in portraying the lives of the destitute.

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Notes

1. Eric Solomon, *Stephen Crane: From Parody to Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 45.

2. Michael Robertson, *Stephen Crane, Journalism, and the Making of Modern American Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 5–6.

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

4. For example, Crane is included in the following anthologies of literary journalism, among others: Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds., *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997); Thomas B. Connery, ed., *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (New York: Greenwood, 1992).

5. Like "An Experiment in Misery," "An Experiment in Luxury" parodies the

experience of a naive youth as he seeks to understand a different social class. "Luxury" specifically documents his mercurial shifts in mood and opinion in a manner similar to Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage*. Much of the piece is focused on mocking the wealthy, and by shifting the critique onto them, Crane exposes the one-sidedness of the voyeuristic "slumming" sketches so popular in newspapers of the time. Indeed, Robertson points out that the use of the "experiment" form to portray the wealthy was a novel approach at the time. Robertson, *Stephen Crane*, 102.

6. The most notable difference between the early *New York Press* version and the later version is the subtraction of the narrative frame discussed above. This change has had notable effects on the interpretation of the piece. For example, James Nagel notes that the removal of the "journalistic context" frame "gave the story much more of the sense of fiction." Nagel, "Structure and Theme in Crane's 'An Experiment in Misery,'" in *Studies in Short Fiction* 10, no. 2 (1973): 169. Similarly, Scott Penney remarks that "the editorial omission makes the character's predicament more psychologically tenuous. . . . By removing the original frame of the story, Crane removes its safety props and highlights the anxiety of the protagonist." Scott Penney, "The Veracious Narrative of 'An Experiment in Misery': Crane's Park Row and Bowery," *Stephen Crane Studies* 3, no. 1 (1994): 2. In general, most scholars consider the edited version superior because it leaves many thematic elements open to suggestion rather than directly stated, and it adds key metaphors, which contribute to the psychological effect of the youth's descent into poverty. For example, Alan Trachtenberg writes: "To intensify attention on the experience itself, and to indicate that the social drama of displacing one's normal perspective already is internalized in the action, Crane discarded the opening and closing frames when he republished the story in a collection of 1898. In his revision he also added to the opening paragraphs a number of physical details which reinforce and particularize the sense of misery." Alan Trachtenberg, "Experiments in Another Country: Stephen Crane's City Sketches," *Southern Review* 10, no. 2 (1974): 280–1.

7. Stephen Crane, "An Experiment in Misery," in *The Portable Stephen Crane,* ed. Joseph Katz (New York: Penguin, 1969), 154.

8. Ibid., 165.

9. Robertson, *Stephen Crane*, 96.

10. For example, Maurice Bassan argues for appreciating how metaphor and structure are closely entwined in the story, working not only to "define clearly Crane's emotional attitude toward his subject, but to commit the reader himself to an act of identification and sympathy." In his interpretation, the purpose of this identification is a straightforward appeal on the part of the suffering poor. Maurice Bassan, "The Design of Stephen Crane's Bowery 'Experiment,'" *Studies in Short Fiction* 1, no. 2 (1964): 130. Likewise, James Nagel sees the purpose of this piece as the exposure of the ills of society, showing how the environment contributes to the state of the oppressed social classes. James Nagel, "Structure and Theme," 169–174.

11. Although later critics of "An Experiment in Misery," such as Alan Trachtenberg and Scott Penney, have noted this context and interpreted the story within

it, even discussing the presence of journalistic meta-critique, they shy away from labeling the entire work a parody, instead reading the closing scenes and the youth's transformation in earnest.

12. Thomas B. Connery, *Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 167.

13. Nellie Bly, *Ten Days in a Mad-house* (1887; repr., Cedar Lake, MI: Feather Trail, 2009), 6.

14. Ibid., 77–83.

15. David M. Fine, "Abraham Cahan, Stephen Crane and the Romantic Tenement Tale of the Nineties," *American Studies* 14, no. 1 (1973): 96.

16. R. W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Biography* (New York: George Braziler, 1968), 68–9.

17. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 31–2. We see this type of parody in Crane's fictional works as well. For example, Crane's 1893 novel *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* inverts several of the classic themes of naturalistic city novels so popular in Crane's era. His more successful novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), likewise parodies the war novels of the day, which relied on the themes of heroism and romance.

18. Ibid., 32.

19. Crane, "Experiment," 154.

20. Ibid.

21. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 281.

22. This is will remind readers of Henry Fleming in *The Red Badge of Courage*, who is referred to as the "youth" for the majority of the book. Both uses of "the youth" hint at the naïveté of the protagonist, since the forms lampooned—the war novel and the experiment sketch—emphasize the bravery and savvy of their central characters: the war hero and the intrepid journalist.

23. Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, ed. Lorenzo Domínguez (1890; repr., New York: Chelenzo Ink, 2012), 26.

24. Hutchins Hapgood, *Types from City Streets* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1910), 22.

25. Ibid., 14–5.

26. Ibid., 24.

27. Connery, *Journalism and Realism*, 166–7.

28. Crane, "Experiment," 153.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., 156.

31. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 31.

32. Crane, "Experiment," 153.

33. Ibid., 156.

34. Ibid., 157.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 158.

37. Ibid., 160–1.
38. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 283.
39. Crane, "Experiment," 160.
40. Ibid., 163.
41. Ibid., 165.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Robertson, *Stephen Crane*, 101.
46. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 284.
47. Benedict Giamo, *On the Bowery: Confronting Homelessness in American Society* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 95.
48. Such a dual structure is in fact a common feature of Crane's fiction, indicating that the irony may not be a "residue" but rather a constitutive element in the meaning of the text. This change in tone brings to mind Eric Solomon's discussion of the dual structure of *The Red Badge of Courage*. Solomon argues that the first half of the novel is parody aimed at exposing romanticized and clichéd war narratives. The second half, however, is realism aimed at expressing the truth of a situation once cliché has been swept away. Solomon refers to this as "the author's basic approach to fiction: the movement from parody to realism." Solomon, *Stephen Crane*, 74–7.
49. Crane, "Experiment," 165.
50. Trachtenberg, "Experiments," 284.
51. Giamo, *On the Bowery*, 100.
52. Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 35–6.

Literary Journalism on the Air: What David Isay's Travels in the Footsteps of Joseph Mitchell Can Tell Us about the Nature of Multimedia

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Abtract: Multimedia is an aspect of contemporary journalistic practice that, like literary journalism, gains power in its borrowing of conventions from distinctive traditions. Using the "borderlands" construct that has often been applied to literary journalism, this article sets out to explore the functioning of multimedia. Specifically, it takes a radio documentary that was in some ways consciously modeled on the work of Joseph Mitchell and explores how the journalism in it changed as it crossed media borders to become a newspaper article and later a chapter in a book that made extensive use of photography. The findings, particularly about the instability of a story as it moves through different formats, may help to explain a theme that has emerged in recent scholarship about multimedia, namely a disappointment that its potential has gone largely unfulfilled.

A sturdy and serviceable metaphor for understanding literary journalism is that of a borderland, a place where traditions, identities, and expectations come from different directions to intersect and intermingle. It is an apt description as works in this genre draw their force by combining both literary and journalistic techniques, and critics have usefully employed this construct.[1] The border framework helps to define and delineate the qualities of literary journalism by creating a pair of contrasting backgrounds that help to highlight the key characteristics of the genre and the contributions derived from its respective sources. The literary aspects of a work stand out when we consider it in relation to a piece of traditionally constructed objective

journalism, and the facticity may stand in greater relief when we compare it to an example of invented literature. In a field where definitional issues have resisted resolution, an added advantage of the borderlands figure is that it allows for a certain ambiguity to linger while inviting further exploration of the phenomenon it describes.

An aspect of contemporary journalistic practice that, like literary journalism, gains power in its borrowing of conventions from distinctive traditions is multimedia. Like literary journalism, multimedia is a term that is widely applied without clear consensus about what it encompasses and often without acknowledgment of its antecedents. Just as it represents a chance for traditional journalism to explore new techniques and formats, multimedia allows literary journalism to move beyond its roots as a genre that relies primarily on the printed word. Given the overlaps between literary journalism and multimedia journalism, and their shared prospects for evolution and development, it may be fruitful to borrow a borderlands framework for studying multimedia, considering how it crosses boundaries as a way of trying to locate the distinctive contributions of its elementary forms. An opportunity to do so arises with the journalism of David Isay, who is best known as a radio documentarian but who has also published in print, both in newspaper and book formats, and who has consciously modeled some his work on that of *New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell. By examining one of Isay's major projects, *The Sunshine Hotel*, as it migrated to multiple media formats, this paper will attempt to address one of the key questions that has emerged in the scholarship about multimedia journalism, namely why its use and development have lagged behind its apparent potential. The paper will also examine some of the borders of literary journalism by situating Isay's productions within the aesthetic tradition of Mitchell.

As Deuze has noted, definitions of multimedia must encompass a range of possibilities. He defines two "ideal-typical . . . 'endpoints,'" one being a web-based presentation using two or more forms of media and the other being the presentation of a story through different media in an "integrated" but not necessarily simultaneous way.[2] Isay's work arguably represents a little bit of both, since much of it is currently available on the web using multiple media formats even though it may have started out in a single medium and then migrated to other media formats.

What to make of multimedia journalism is a question that a few scholars have attempted to answer but with limited results, likely because the ability to move easily from one media platform to another and to incorporate different kinds of storytelling tools is still a relatively new phenomenon. While much of Isay's *Sunshine* documentary predates the explosion of online multimedia

journalism that began with the new century, it is still a worthy object of study for a couple of reasons. For one thing, all of the different versions of the story proceed from and are ultimately controlled by one person. This comparison, then, is not like that of a book or article that is sold off to be made into a movie or television program by a separate creative team. In addition, because the subject matter is relatively narrow, it may be easier to see the influence of medium-specific characteristics that could influence how a story is told. Finally, there may be an advantage in that the *Sunshine* series is in some ways technologically primitive, lacking, for example, an audio-slideshow, a Flash-powered animation, or a video component (although a film documentary about the Sunshine Hotel was made subsequently in an independent effort by Michael Dominic, a New York photographer). This primitiveness may allow for a closer examination of the phenomenon under study here, namely how one story can be told in different media forms and how those different forms may have an influence on how the story is told.

While the scholarship on multimedia journalism at this stage is, not surprisingly, somewhat tentative, there are several themes that have been articulated about the phenomenon. One of them is that multimedia efforts to date have failed to take full advantage of the range of options that are now available.[3] Another is that traditional social roles and self-conceptions of journalists may hinder the development of multimedia, which may be used to maximum effect when it allows for collaborations, either among different journalists or between the journalist and the nonjournalist, which can alter established notions of control.[4] Furthermore, there is the issue of technical competence and the fact that while it is technologically possible for a single journalist to write, photograph, record, and videotape a story, it is unlikely to find someone who is equally adept at working in those different media.[5]

In a summary of scholarship about online journalism, Steensen provides an extensive review of the state of multimedia and particularly the way that the "promises of new technology" went largely unfulfilled through the first decade of the new century.[6] After reviewing a series of studies using a variety of research methodologies, Steensen concludes that "multimedia remains the least developed of the assets offered to journalism by Internet technology."[7] His examination of studies based on interviews and surveys finds that "technical issues obstructed the materialization of multimedia content."[8] Examining the issue from the perspective of users, Steensen notes two studies indicating that text-only versions of stories had more value than multimedia versions. By tracing the evolution of the *Sunshine* project across different media, it becomes possible to consider these observations more closely and to test their validity.

Isay has received some of the top honors in journalism, including five Peabodys and two Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards, but he got his start in the field by accident. Walking through New York's East Village one day when he was in his early twenties, he came upon two recovered addicts who were planning an addiction museum. Sensing the story possibilities, he called around to radio and television stations, looking for a reporter to do the piece. But the best that he could do was to get an invitation from one radio station to go out and cover the story himself, which he did, subsequently attracting the attention of a producer at National Public Radio, who reedited Isay's work and put in on NPR's *Weekend All Things Considered*.[9]

Since then Isay has produced a large body of work, including nine books that he has written, edited, or contributed to. All of the books are collaborative efforts, and four of them make extensive use of photographs while two others incorporate them in a less ambitious way. He has also produced roughly seventy radio documentaries, some of which are the basis of books. Since 2003 Isay has headed an ambitious oral history project called StoryCorps, which has recorded more than 50,000 interviews and contributes a weekly segment to NPR's *Morning Edition*. StoryCorps has also produced a series of short animated films that have been broadcast on the Public Broadcasting System's *POV* program.

Isay was born into a long line of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, and there is an intriguing psychological dimension to his work. On his mother's side, both of his grandparents worked in the field of psychological analysis, his grandfather as a psychiatrist and his grandmother as the author of a syndicated column called "Human Relations." Their son is a psychoanalyst, and their daughter, David's mother, is a longtime book editor whose early career focused on topics such as psychology and psychiatry. In 1964 she married Richard Isay, a psychiatry professor who has written extensively about homosexuality.

Like an analyst who is trying to lead a patient to new insights, David Isay has described his goal as taking his audience to places they "probably wouldn't want to go."[10] He has done most of his work in radio, a medium that is particularly good for creating a feeling of intimacy. Significantly, his work revolves around the posing of questions and recording of answers, a kind of talk therapy. "When you're doing an interview, it can be this very intense sort of verbal exchange," he said in 2001. "I come from a family of therapists. And that's enjoyable to me."[11] The focus of Isay's work is often a personal kind of investigation, in which he explores universal issues by capturing an individual's perspective or experience. Perhaps his greatest knack is for finding the surprise twist, like the Mississippi police sergeant who is also

his synagogue's acting rabbi, or the secret to be revealed, such as the sounds of a Georgia prison execution gone awry.

In his pursuit of surprises and secrets, Isay seems to be reliving what he has described as "the big drama" in his life. At 22, a recent graduate of New York University expecting to study medicine, Isay paid an unscheduled visit to his father's Manhattan office, where he found a man who was apparently living there. After initially claiming that the man was a patient, Isay's father acknowledged that they were lovers. "That was a complicated thing for me," Isay said later. The incident led him to seek "underdogs, because my dad was kind of an underdog." The revelation also motivated him in "trying to find out about secrets, because my dad being gay was a big secret, and I'm not so sure it was such a great idea to keep it for as long as it was kept."[12]

Although most of Isay's creations consist of radio broadcasts or other sound files, they share many similarities with the words in print format that has been the object of most literary journalism scholarship. These traits include a deep concern for getting the facts right coupled with what might be called artistic techniques to heighten the audience's experience of those facts. One way to demonstrate Isay's rightful position in the literary journalism tradition is to compare his work with that of Joseph Mitchell, whom Isay cites as a source of inspiration and in whose footsteps he quite literally followed to produce *The Sunshine Hotel*. Excerpts from this 1998 radio documentary were published as a feature article in the *New York Times*, which in turn became the basis for a chapter in a collaborative book project with photographer Harvey Wang, *Flophouse: Life on the Bowery.* Isay initially thought about calling his radio documentary "Up in the Old Hotel" after Mitchell's short story and collection of short stories, which Isay used as a guidebook to see where Mitchell had gone before him.[13]

A quotation from a Mitchell article that appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1940 and that was later collected in *Up in the Old Hotel* serves as an epigraph to *Flophouse*:

> "The Alabama Hotel, the Comet, and the Uncle Sam House," he said, in a declamatory voice, "the Dandy, the Defender, the Niagara, the Owl, the Victoria House and the Grand Windsor Hotel, the Houston, the Mascot, the Palace, the Progress, the Palma House and the White House Hotel, the Newport, the Crystal, the Lion and the Marathon. All flophouses. All on the Bowery. Each and all my home, sweet home."[14]

Indeed the first similarity that Isay and Mitchell share is subject matter. Both of them provide respectful, even affectionate, accounts of ordinary people living on the margins of society. Sims describes Mitchell as writing "so often about disappointed old men and women for whom nothing had turned

out the way they thought it would."[15] This is not very much different from Isay's description of his work: "I do stories about people that I like, who are for the most part probably either ignored or misunderstood or not thought about."[16] In another context he wrote that his stories are about "eccentrics, visionaries, dreamers, believers: men and women in pursuit of *something,* and holding on to that at all costs."[17]

The artistry of both men is such that critics have questioned the degree to which their work was based on journalistic fact and the degree to which it was shaped for aesthetic effect. Mitchell did, of course, acknowledge that one of his characters, Hugh G. Flood, was a composite, but he also identified the real-life sources of his composite creation and argued for its essential truthfulness "I wanted these stories to be truthful rather than factual, but they are solidly based on facts."[18] Similarly, Isay has drawn questions about the veracity of his radio documentaries, which are known for their rich audio backgrounds and their reliance on the voices of ordinary people rather than those of credentialed experts. His answer is straightforward: "When we go in, we do the basic journalistic work, the research, the background, the digging, talking to people, getting to know them, and checking their stories as best we can."[19] Even in his current oral history project, which draws its strength by accumulating accounts that are in the best sense of the term "folklore," Isay stresses the importance of making sure the stories that are broadcast over NPR can be relied upon as true. "When StoryCorps goes on the air, that story is fact-checked to death," he says.[20]

Isay and Mitchell also share a patient, time-consuming approach to their subjects in which they expend enormous time and effort to gather detailed information. When it comes time to present that information, they then work almost equally as hard at making their own presence as little-noticed as possible. Mitchell, describing his method, says, "My whole idea of reporting—particularly reporting on conversation—is to talk to a man or a woman long enough under different circumstance . . . until, in effect, they reveal their inner selves."[21] In contemporary terminology, what Mitchell was engaged in would be called "immersion journalism," a time-consuming process through which the reporter absorbs and, in effect, experiences the reality of the subject and then reflects that experience back through words, sounds, images, or other media elements. In Isay's words, the process "is a matter of going into a dark place and doing a lot of recording and then creating this space through audio where people can step into this other world."[22] As Sims has noted, "no casual technique" can account for Mitchell's ability to reveal the inner selves of his subjects, and Isay also is remarkable for his recognition of the need to invest time in gathering material so that he can select out and reconstruct the

words and sounds he needs to achieve his desired effects. *The Sunshine Hotel*, which in its finished form took up about twenty-three-and-a-half minutes of airtime, began as seventy hours of raw tape, which Isay edited down.[23]

A key technique that both men use is to minimize the overt presence of the journalist in the finished piece as a way of maintaining the audience's engagement with the subject matter. The goal is to create an experience that is not undone by an awareness of the inherent artifice. "You hope the reader won't be aware," Mitchell told Sims. The intrusion of obvious symbolism will break the illusion, Mitchell added. "You want to take the reader to the last sentence. I don't want to take him there just by *fact*. I want to take the reader there by going through an experience that I had that was revealing." One of Isay's trademarks in his later documentaries has been the elimination of the journalist/narrator, the standard technique of having the voice of omniscience make connections for the listener or introduce the observations of a subject matter expert. In language remarkably similar to Mitchell's, Isay has explained his rationale for this approach:

> The idea was to bring you into a space, and I mean I always just thought of it as taking you some place you probably didn't want to go and having you be in this, like, very close place, which is a great way to do radio, and also having it be so interesting that you couldn't turn off the radio. So I always imagine myself, like, kind of lifting people up from behind and then, like, dragging them on this journey, and then when they realize they've been done, when they realize they are somewhere they don't want to be, then the whole thing is done, then dropping them off. [24]

To make this technique work, Isay "zeroed himself out" so that the audience is more fully engaged with the subject.[25]

> And every time my voice would come in, it would pull you out of that place, the flophouse, whatever it is. Immediately you're out of it. You're not with the people. You're with some voice of wisdom.[26]

Just as Mitchell often merged his sensibility with that of his subject, Isay is trying to accomplish something similar. He is clear about his source of inspiration for this approach: "It's kind of a Joseph Mitchell sort of thing. But he was, you know, an absolute master."[27]

Ultimately, the greatest commonality between the two artists is the way they construct their stories and transform the people and things that are found there into symbols that can be used to explore the psychology of their subjects and themselves. As Norman Sims has noted about Mitchell's masterwork, *Joe Gould's Secret*, "Mitchell used both structure and symbolism purposefully" in an examination of such matters as a writer's motivations, the nature of secrets,

the frailty of human existence, and the quest for purpose and meaning.[28] Isay similarly applies these literary elements in his radio documentary *Sunshine Hotel*. Although listeners may not recognize it on a first listening, the documentary is structured as an epic descent into the netherworld, framed at the beginning and end by matched sequences of sound. After a scene-setting welcome from the manager of the hotel, the next two voices to be heard are of a tenant "checking out" and of another who is moving in. Some twenty-three minutes later, as the documentary is wrapping up, the order is reversed as the manager first checks in a new tenant and then bids farewell to another tenant who is leaving. (Only the tenant who is leaving at the end is identified by name in the broadcast transcript.)

The manager, who serves as the piece's narrator, provides the structural framework as well as a symbolic presence. His name is Nathan Smith, and like Virgil in Dante's *Inferno*, he serves a tour guide, taking the listener from one part of the hotel to another and along the way introducing various residents. They tell their stories in highly condensed form, sometimes only a few sentences, that have been woven tightly together. The guests give the true accounts of their lives, but it is not hard to make the leap to understand them as aspects of the human personality. Eddie Barrett, a guitarist who worked as "band boy" for Tito Puente until suffering a mental breakdown, represents the compulsiveness of human behavior, the urge to retreat into repetition of the familiar. Smith, the narrator, remarks, "The funny thing about Eddie is that he always plays the same songs over and over and over again."[29] Without missing a beat, comes Eddie's voice:

> Maybe I might sit down and come up with a new tune in my mind, but by the time I pick up the guitar, I done forgot the tune I had in my mind, see?[30]

Another one of the inhabitants who also exemplifies an aspect of the human unconscious is Anthony "Fat Tony" Coppolla, a 420-pound example of the unconstrained id. His impulsive and uncontrollable eating has ballooned his body so that he can no longer wear regular clothes and instead covers himself with a sheet. In the radio broadcast, he explains.

> Sometimes I knock off a twenty-six-ounce can of Chef Boyardee Ravioli. That is for five people in the family. And I be eating it cold right out of the can. That is a load of eats! That's a lot of grub there.[31]

Given his size and lack of clothing, he rarely leaves the hotel. He overcomes his lack of mobility through the use of the hotel's runner, a Vietnam veteran named Bruce Davis who represents a kind of fantasy thinking that can elevate a routine task into a heroic deed. Here is an excerpt from the original radio transcript, where the italics signify the speaker commenting

on the action that's taking place, alternating between interior and exterior monologue:

> BRUCE: *It's a work of constant steps and most of them are mental.*
>
> *(Footsteps.)*
>
> BRUCE: Tea, two sugars, one Rolaid, two packs of Monarchs, large Bacitracin.
>
> BRUCE: *And walking all the time, you've got people constantly distracting you. Distraction's your biggest enemy.*
>
> BRUCE: *(Mumbles.)* All I need is a tea with two sugars.
>
> BRUCE: *You get to store. . . .*
>
> BRUCE: Yeah, tea with two sugars.
>
> BRUCE: *You got to realize that you got to constantly be on guard, constantly be in guard. You're in the hustler's capital of the planet. Every third person you meet is trying to hustle you out of your money, store clerks included.*[32]

The other characters in this real-life radio play include a 30-year-old Russian immigrant named Max who gets arrested for shoplifting, a former psychiatric patient named Lawrence, and Paul Donoghue, "the only deaf-mute crack addict on the Bowery."[33]

Isay's depiction of the Sunshine Hotel developed from news clippings on flophouses that he had been collecting over time. With a nudge from a colleague, Stacy Abramson, Isay began to focus on the project in the spring of 1997. Initially, they had little success, as both flophouse owners and residents shied away from outside attention. Their breakthrough came in January 1998, when Smith, the Sunshine manager and eventual narrator, agreed to help. He secured permission from the hotel owners for the radio journalists to have the run of the place. "We spent two months at the flop, recording day and night," Isay recalled in an author's note that appeared in the book version of the work.[34]

Although the radio form of this story is the urtext from which the other versions derived, it was not the first to be exposed to the public. The documentary was broadcast on NPR September 18, 1998, but five days earlier the *New York Times* had devoted almost two full pages to a montage of photographs by Harvey Wang and interview transcripts interspersed with explanatory comments by Isay and Abramson. A book contract followed, and Isay and Abramson went back to the Bowery to record additional skid row stories.

The resulting book included a chapter on the Sunshine Hotel, consisting of edited interview transcripts, color photographs of the interior of the hotel, and black-and-white photographs of residents. Two other versions of *Sunshine* exist, one in the form of a transcript of the radio documentary, which is posted on one of Isay's websites, along with the audio from the NPR broadcast. The transcript does not track precisely with the broadcast but instead includes several segments that were left out of the NPR version, including one in which a hotel resident is taken away by ambulance. Isay also issued the documentary on compact disc.

From Isay's perspective, the use of one medium or another to tell a story is not a matter of one medium being better than another. To him the story is what it's important; the way it is told is secondary so long as the medium is used to maximum effect. "For me it's about telling everyday people's stories, stories that interest me," he said. "It's 'by any means necessary,' whatever the medium is."[35] Because of his experience in working across media, Isay has a perspective that includes several points that may be easily overlooked, or even difficult to accept from the standpoint of mainstream journalism. First of all, and perhaps most challenging to traditional standards, Isay does not believe that an account in one medium needs to be an exact replica of an account in another medium even if the underlying event is the same. Specifically, he argues that words that are spoken on tape do not need to, and should not, track with words that are printed on paper. "Words and phrases that read well are not always the strongest spoken moments," he writes in a note to *Mom*, his 2010 collection of recorded stories about mothers. "And the reverse is also the case. As a result, a story may vary slightly from audio to print."[36]

An example of this kind of slight and subtle change can be found in the interview with Sunshine Hotel resident "Max R." For the radio documentary, he is recorded as making this comment:

> Most of the people just lay on their bed all day in their cubicle, watching TV or listening to the radio or staring into space or sleeping, and just keep vegetating in these little cells. With fluorescent light overhead coming through the chicken wire. And, so uh?, that's their life.[37]

In print, both the book and the newspaper, this quote is altered in a way that seems almost trivial but may also be a reflection of a meticulous level of care. The first sentence is separated into two complete sentences, following the addition of a pronoun, and the wording of the penultimate sentence is rearranged to clarify, and perhaps emphasize, that each lodger's cubicle is topped by chicken wire:

> Most the people just lay on their bed all day watching TV or listening to the radio or staring into space or sleeping. They just keep vegetating in these little cells with the fluorescent light coming through the chicken wire overhead, and that's their life.[38]

The print versions appear as part of longer interview transcripts while the radio documentary consists of short snippets of speech. On tape, for example, Max's story is told through three brief statements by him separated by comments from the hotel manager/narrator. In print the editing that occurred may have been done for clarity within the context of the overall transcript rather than for reasons related to a particular passage that was changed.

Isay also addresses the issue of why journalists with traditional training or a skill set that is built around the written word may be slow to embrace the possibilities of new technology. As he explains it, working in different media entails increasing levels of complexity that may not be immediately apparent. "In some ways print is easier, right?, because in audio you can't change the words." Print, he argues, only has to "read right." But audio also has to have the right sound.

> With print I can change tense and stuff that like. . . . If someone is off-mike, you can still put it in print. In radio it has to sound right, the tone of voice has to be right, it has to be crystal clear in order for it to work and to be something that rises to that level of poetry.[39]

In Isay's view, working in print is like working in one dimension, working in radio is like working in two dimensions, and the addition of visual elements adds a third dimension.[40]

When it comes to visuals, Isay freely acknowledges that he is out of his element and reliant on collaborators. It's not simply that he is less proficient in dealing with images; photography is a skill that he does not possess. "I never took photographs for anything," he says. Jokingly, he quotes his photo collaborator on *Flophouse*: "Harvey Wang used to say I had a wooden eye."[41] Wang and Isay worked together for years on several different projects that became books, their styles are complementary, and their joint efforts have been artistic and journalistic successes. But their example may be the exception that proves the rule, namely, that cross-media efforts can unify to become more than the sum of their parts rather than being limited in one component.

An examination of the three main versions of *Sunshine* shows how the work changes as it moves from medium to medium and what is gained or lost along the way. Leaving aside questions of aesthetics, one can begin by examining the actual content in each version and offering some assessment of how that varies. In all, thirty-five individuals are identified by name and two

others are identified by occupation (Clerk, Ambulance Man). An unnamed Tenant, a designation that may apply to separate individuals, is listed in the radio transcript. Three of the named residents in the radio transcript were cut from the actual broadcast and also do not appear in either the book or newspaper version. One indication of how the work was changed to suit the different media is that only six of these men appear in all three finished versions: Nathan Smith, Vic K., Vinnie Gigante, Anthony Coppola, Bruce Davis and Max R. The radio transcript includes by far the largest number of individuals, twenty-nine; the book includes seventeen; and the newspaper eight. The book also includes two portraits of tenants who are not identified by name.

In the newspaper, the first and perhaps most obvious shift is that the dominant voice is no longer that of Nathan Smith, the hotel manager, but of the journalists, Isay and Abramson. They provide a thirteen-paragraph opening as well as shorter introductions to each of the residents whose stories are told. The piece itself is structured as a series of vignettes built around extended quotations, ranging from five to seven paragraphs, and Wang's portraiture. It takes up the top half of the paper's City section, all of a left-side interior page, and columns one and two of the facing page. It includes thirteen pictures. One figure appears in the newspaper who does not appear in the other versions: Joseph Braddy, a former drug dealer who has taught himself sign language to communicate with a hotel resident, Paul Donoghue, who can neither speak nor hear. Braddy is not in the radio documentary, but Donoghue, despite his limited vocal ability, is. He can be heard grunting ever so briefly after an introduction from Smith.

Isay has attempted to maintain some aspects of the narrative structure of the radio documentary, by quoting Smith at the beginning and the end of the main section of the article. The vignette on Smith is the first to appear after the introduction by Isay and Abramson, and in it Smith provides an overall description of the hotel and also explains his desire to be one of those who check out of the Sunshine. His closing quote comes in the final vignette, about Max R., after it has been explained that this resident has lost his room after being arrested for shoplifting. This is another instance of a printed quote that differs from the audio recording. In the newspaper, Smith says: "He's just a clean-out now. Nothing personal. I'm going to clean him out and sell his room. Immediately if not sooner."[42] But the audio version is longer and includes a more specific time frame for replacing Max with a new tenant: "He's just a clean-out now. Nothing personal. He's a clean-out, and I'm gonna clean him out and sell his room. Maybe tomorrow. I'll probably sell it tomorrow, more than likely."[43] While both quotes contain overlapping and generally equivalent content, they are not the same. The standard at the

Times, as articulated by the *Times*, is that the paper "does not 'clean up' quotations" and that readers "should be able to assume that every word between quotation marks is what the speaker or writer said."[44] The discrepancy in the Smith quotes highlights the fact that Smith's narration in the radio broadcast is more than some artfully edited commentary that was pieced together from unrehearsed conversations to provide a coherent arc for the story. As Isay explains in the liner notes for the CD version, Smith was an active collaborator in developing the script for the radio documentary and spent many hours in a recording studio.[45]

While the newspaper account lacks the symbolic and structural grace of the radio broadcast, as well as some of the breadth of voices and perspectives, it is richer in overall information content, both because of Wang's photographs and because of the space provided for extended excerpts from the interviews with residents. For example Smith, in the radio broadcast, describes the range of people who have been residents: "I've had everything here from a priest to a murderer. You wouldn't believe the characters that stay here at the Sunshine."[46] In the newspaper, Smith is able to provide added detail about the murderer, who turns out to have been "the cannibal Daniel Rakowitz." Readers learn that Smith threw Rakowitz out of the Sunshine for keeping twenty-seven gerbils in his room. "Next thing I know he's serving a girl in a stew to the homeless in Tompkins Square Park," Smith recalls. "But he was a down dude—a very nice guy."[47] Another example of the greater depth provided by the newspaper is in the interview with Vincent Giganti, who is presented as a possible relative of mobster Vincent (Chin) Gigante. He has throat cancer and uses a mechanical voice box, which is captured movingly in the radio broadcast. But the radio script does not have time to provide a full account of Giganti's experience with the Sunshine Hotel. As teenagers he and a friend used to drive by with rolls of pennies that they would throw on the sidewalk so that they could watch the Bowery bums go scurrying after the coins. "And God forbid, I knew I'd end up in this same damn place," Giganti is quoted as saying in the newspaper. "This is what kills me—I think of it every day."[48]

In their introduction to the individual vignettes, Isay and Abramson describe the Sunshine Hotel as a "chaotic, bizarre, depressing and fascinating place."[49] The pictures and interview transcripts serve to justify this characterization, but the modular, rectangular layout that sets off the individual vignettes in boxes serves to undercut at least two of these impressions. The layout is extremely orderly, sending a visual clue that undermines any sense of chaos. Similarly, while the individual stories may be bizarre, their presentation provides a sense of normalcy and decorum. The stories are shaped, at least visually, to fit the proprieties of the *Times*.

By contrast the book *Flophouse* was published in a nonstandard format: eight and a quarter inches square. This format is an immediate visual and tactile signal that the book is out of the ordinary and idiosyncratic. It also serves to showcase Wang's photos, which were all shot in a square format. In the newspaper, the images are reduced, with most of them no more than the width of one or two newspaper columns; in the book nearly all of his images are six inches on a side. The use of the square format, as opposed to the more common rectangle of 35mm film, helps Wang to accomplish one of his artistic goals, namely, to reduce the obvious presence of the photographer, a strategy that is in keeping with Isay's effort to emulate Mitchell's method of minimizing the overt presence of the journalist. "I strive in my work to be as honest as possible, and I tried to be objective when making the pictures in the book," Wang wrote in a 2001 essay about the photography in *Flophouse*. "Though the residents are responding to me and are active participants in the picture-making process, I hoped that I would remain 'invisible.'"[50]

Photographs play a much bigger role in the book than in the newspaper. In a typical spread, an interview excerpt appears on the left-hand page, rarely coming close to filling it, and the right-hand page is a portrait of the person whose oral history it accompanies. While Wang's portraits are displayed to much stronger effect in the book, they remain complements to the oral histories rather than drivers of the narrative. In fact, Wang's photographs were usually taken after the taping of the oral histories, which he used to prepare for his shoots, "to get a sense of the subject's story."[51]

Aside from expanding on the content in the newspaper story, the book chapter also presents aspects of the Bowery that are not apparent in the other two versions. For example, one of the residents who appear only in the book, Matthew Griffin, is gay, and another who appears only in the book, Cashmere, is transsexual. It's suggested that two of the residents are a couple: They share a room, and their story is told as an interlocking dialog. In addition, the book is more ethnically inclusive, presenting an oral history and photo of a Tibetan immigrant named Sering Wang Du. Both the book and radio versions include only whites and African-Americans.

Some of the oral histories in the book are quite short. Carl Albino, who is photographed looking away from the camera as he plays a game of solitaire, says simply this:

> This is a roof over my head. I live within my means. You never live above your means. I mind my own business. I stay by myself. I don't bother anybody, and nobody bothers me. If they say, "Hello," I say, "Hello." If not, I go about my business. It's a roof over my head.[52]

But in most cases the residents speak at some length about their back-

ground, their reasons for being at the Sunshine Hotel, and their outlook on their future. The manager, for example, describes how his predecessor committed suicide: "Shot himself in that bed right there—the very same bed I happen to sleep in today."[53]

The story of the Sunshine Hotel changes slightly but perceptibly as it moves from medium to medium, and it isn't simply a matter of shifting emphasis. The story is bound up in its medium, and none of them is complete on its own. In the radio version, the hotel residents become more than their actual selves to take on symbolic roles in an exploration of the human psychology of failed lives or unfulfilled promise. The newspaper returns the residents to their places in an urban drama that is in all essentials realistic, situated within the city's ecosystem of political, social, and financial tensions. In the book version of their story, the residents are transformed into objects of art, haunting images of human existence that are woven together with fragmentary texts that, like the photographs they accompany, present only a glimpse, however heartfelt, of lives that are far removed from those of both artist and audience. It is no coincidence that each of those texts is described as an "oral history," another allusion to Mitchell and his stories about Joe Gould—the writer's subject, character, and alter ego.[54]

This phenomenon of modification is similar to what happens when a text is adapted for the cinema in some ways, but it is also distinctive because of the overlay of journalistic truth-telling and the expectation that a journalistic account will conform with the facts of a story. A movie can tell a different story from the book on which it is based and still be satisfactory so long as it makes the most of the cinematic conventions within which it is presented. Multimedia, or cross-platform, journalism, on the other hand, will be assessed not only on its use of the capabilities of different media but also on the degree to which it approaches truth. Each part will be judged, as will the totality.

The simplicity and easy availability of technological tools for storytelling—digital voice recorders, still and video cameras, editing software—may serve to obscure the complexity of the situation they create. As shown in the crossing of media borders with *Sunshine,* the medium may not be the whole message, but it does play a significant role in calling out aspects of a story that can be especially well told in a given format. In the selection of which details to include, multimedia journalists must factor in which details are most significant in telling a story and which ones are most conducive for their chosen medium or media. Like Isay, they may also decide that certain elements, such as quotes or points of view, can appropriately be altered to suit a given medium.

Another way in which the opportunities of multimedia may be deceptive is that the opening of possibilities for cross-platform storytelling may not result in stories being told in more satisfying ways. If Isay is correct in his assessment that working in multimedia is akin to working in multiple dimensions with increasing levels of complexity, the production of multimedia journalism will require both unusual talent and significant investments of time. In the end, however, it is the inherent instability of multimedia journalism that may hold its greatest promise—as well as the bar to wider to acceptance and use. There are reasons why borderlands are unsettled, both in the sense of lacking coherence and lacking inhabitants. Those who travel through the borderlands may return with amazing stories. But it is not at all clear that journalists, or their audiences, would be willing to embrace a mode of storytelling that not only tells true stories in new and different ways but that also tells different versions of the same true story all at once.

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Notes

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2. Mark Deuze, "What Is Multimedia Journalism?" *Journalism Studies* 5, no. 2 (2004): 140.

3. Ibid., 141.

4. Susan Jacobson, "Emerging Models of Multimedia Journalism: A Content Analysis of Multimedia Packages Published on nytimes.com," *Atlantic Journal of Communication* 18, no. 2 (2010): 74.

5. Deuze, "Multimedia Journalism," 145.

6. Steen Steensen, "Online Journalism and the Promises of New Technology," *Journalism Studies*, 12, no. 3 (2011): 311-327.

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8. Ibid.

9. David Isay, *Listening Is an Act of Love* (New York: Penguin, 2007): 250–52.

10. David Isay, interview by Miles Maguire, July 30, 2010.

11. Melissa Ludtke, "Radio Documentaries Take Listeners into Dark Corners," *Nieman Reports,* Fall 2001, http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/101584/Radio-Documentaries-Take-Listeners-Into-Dark-Corners.aspx.

12. David Stewart, "Audio Producer David Isay: Curiosity . . . Respect . . . Trust," *Current*, April 23, 2001, http://www.current.org/people/peop0108isay2.html.

13. Ibid.

14. Joseph Mitchell, *Up in the Old Hotel* (New York: Pantheon, 1992): 33–34.

15. Norman Sims, "Joseph Mitchell," in *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, ed. Thomas B. Connery (New York: Greenwood, 1992): 206.

16. Ludtke, "Radio Documentaries."

17. David Isay, *Holding On* (New York: Norton, 1996): 11–12.

18. Mitchell, "Old Hotel," 373.

19. Ludtke, "Radio Documentaries."

20. Isay interview.

21. Sims, "Joseph Mitchell," 207.

22. Ludtke, "Radio Documentaries."

23. Stewart, "Audio Producer David Isay."

24. Isay interview.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007): 184.

29. David Isay, *The Sunshine Hotel*, transcript, http://soundportraits.org/on-air/the_sunshine_hotel/transcript.php.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. David Isay and Stacy Abramson, *Flophouse: Life on the Bowery* (New York: Random House, 2000): 147.

35. Isay interview.

36. David Isay, *Mom: A Celebration of Mothers from StoryCorps* (New York: Penguin, 2010): 5.

37. Isay, *Sunshine* transcript.

38. Isay and Abramson, *Flophouse*, 128; David Isay and Stacy Abramson, "The Sunshine Hotel," *New York Times*, September 13, 1998, City section, 13.

39. Isay interview.

40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Isay and Abramson, "Sunshine," *New York Times*, 13.
43. Isay, *Sunshine* transcript.
44. New York Times Co., "Guidelines on Integrity," http://www. Nytco.com/company/business_units/integrity.html.
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51. Ibid.
52. Isay and Abramson, *Flophouse*, 120.
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54. Sims, "Joseph Mitchell," 1992.

A Vagabond: The Literary Journalism of John Stanley James

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Abstract: The English-born John Stanley James—also known as Julian Thomas—began to write anonymously for the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper in 1876 under the nom de plum of "A Vagabond." The pieces he contributed, later collected in *The Vagabond Paper*s (1877), were first-hand accounts of life inside some of the strictest Australian institutions, including the Alfred Hospital, Pentridge Gaol, the Immigrants' Home, and lunatic asylums. Although his accounts demonstrated literary pretensions, a cultivated flamboyance, and a pleasure in the self-aggrandizement of his anonymous narrator, they were nevertheless compassionate pleas for social reform. Later James contributed travel accounts to Australian newspapers following visits to the South Pacific and China. This paper traces and analyzes the work of James writing as "A Vagabond," and argues for his recognition as one of the earliest exponents of Australian literary journalism.

In the mid-1870s, anonymous reports of life in colonial Melbourne began to surface in the *Argus* newspaper under the nom de plume "A Vagabond." These stories of the everyday experiences of some of the poorest and least powerful members of Melbourne society were an instant hit with the paper's readership. To gain his material, the Vagabond went undercover, often as an inmate or lowly employee, to write exposés of the workings of some of the colony's harshest institutions, including Pentridge Gaol, the Immigrants' Home, the Alfred Hospital, the Benevolent Asylum, and lunatic asylums. The stories were factual and lengthy, and betrayed an empathy with the subject matter that was in contrast to the sensationalist campaigns against poverty running in the English and American presses in the late nineteenth century. The Vagabond's writings stirred passions, changed opinions, and prompted more than one public enquiry. Their detailed accuracy has drawn the attention

of historians, but little attention has been paid to them as early examples of Australian literary journalism. This paper examines the work of John Stanley James (also known as Julian Thomas) writing as "A Vagabond" and his role as a pioneer of the development of literary journalism in Australia.

It is well established through the work of historians such as Hartsock and Sims that American literary journalism has a long pedigree.[1] Despite Tom Wolfe's claim that he and his fellow "New Journalists" of the 1960s and '70s invented a new form of literature, it is established that American literary journalism includes the nineteenth-century writers Mark Twain and Stephen Crane, and arguably dates back as far as Daniel Defoe.[2] Australia, too, can claim a long lineage for the genre, with the writing of John Stanley James demonstrating it was practiced in the early days of the colony. James was writing as the "Vagabond" a quarter of a century before the founding of the Australian Federation in 1901, when Melbourne was still an outpost of the British Empire. His work was a precursor to other outstanding examples of Australian literary journalism that appeared in the late nineteenth century. Henry Lawson's pieces about the Australian bush were published in the *Brisbane Boomerang*, the *Worker* and the *Bulletin* magazine throughout the 1890s.[3] Bruce Elder claims Lawson's articles gave readers some of the first accurate depictions of Australian rural life in language as "raw as Ernest Hemingway or Raymond Carver."[4] Throughout the same decade, Banjo Patterson was also featured in the *Bulletin*, later becoming a Boer War correspondent (1899–1900) sending dispatches in both prose and poetry to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* newspapers.[5] James predated by nearly two decades both these better-known writers whose works are closely allied with the development of an Australian literary and national identity.

Internationally, James was one of the first of a string of journalists who emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century with true stories of life in the slums of the world's major English-speaking cities. Poverty was a growing issue in the press at the time, and universally thought of as a social ill that needed to be solved. Tensions between rich and poor were being fuelled by a developing urban underclass, repeated economic crises, and increasingly obvious social inequalities. Besides a number of declared social reformers, journalists, and writers—including Nellie Bly, Jacob Riis, Jack London, Josiah Flynt, Stephen Crane, Walter Wyckoff, and Bessie and Marie Van Vorst—began to report on poverty and its consequences. They wrote for a reading audience that was variously curious, disturbed in conscience, fearful of class violence, and concerned in case they, too, by some misfortune, should fall into the ranks of the poor. James, closest perhaps in style and outlook to Josiah Flynt,

wrote about the poor nonjudgmentally, with a humanity that comes from a shared understanding. He was a complex man; a man of his time, carrying the bigotry, racism, and sexism of his day. He was also morally conservative and openly judgmental of some of the more obvious by-products of destitution—prostitution and thievery. Yet James was never condescending to the poor simply because of their lack of means or social plight. In his view, there was nothing noble about poverty—no one should be sentenced to it—but nor was it a reason, of itself, to condemn a person.

The Vagabond Papers

James's first-hand, anonymous reports for the *Argus* newspaper over the course of 1876 were anything but dry reporting. Embodying many of the stylistic techniques accepted today as characteristic of literary journalism—including the use of scenes, a strong authorial point of view, and a conversational writing style—they were written with the primary aim of exposing the underbelly of institutional life in colonial Melbourne. To this end, the articles are packed with broader research and pragmatic reflections, while boasting suggestions for compassionate reform. To gather his material, James went undercover, immersing himself in his subjects for periods of time. For example, he spent three weeks as a porter in the Alfred Hospital; a month as an attendant in the Kew and Yarra Bend lunatic asylums; and three days as an inmate in the Benevolent Asylum (which had been built to house Melbourne's ill and destitute). In the preface to the first volume of *The Vagabond Papers*, James described his work as:

> [S]triking out a new line in Australian journalism. . . . investigating the social life and public institutions of Melbourne from a point of view unattainable to the majority. I have everywhere been on "the inside track," and write from that eligible vantage point.[6]

As will be explored more fully, James wrote his shrewdly observed accounts of daily life in these institutions with flamboyance and dramatic flair. Lengthy, vivid, detailed, and accurate, their popularity grew over the course of the year they were published by the *Argus*, fuelled by their readability and their often controversial content, and by increasing curiosity about the identity of their author. In 1877–78 they were collated and published in five volumes as *The Vagabond Papers,* by the publisher George Robertson. An abridged version of the books was republished in one volume in 1969 by the historian Michael Cannon. Cannon, who included a contextualizing preface, arranged the contents in six sections: "Down and Out," "Life in Prison," "Middle Class Morality," "Cold Charity," "Manly Sports," and "The Demi-Monde."[7]

Informing Life Events

Born in 1843, James was the only son of a solicitor who ran a practice in Wolverhampton in Staffordshire, England. James's choice of "A Vagabond" as his pen name, and his compassion for society's most powerless, have been traced by Cannon to the experiences of his childhood.[8] His family may have been respectable, but life at home was devoid of affection, particularly from his father. At the age of twelve, James ran away from his English boarding school in what proved a defining experience at the cusp of adolescence. As he himself described it:

> "Fagging" and bullying were then much in vogue, and I suffered from both. I fought the "cock of the school" for an hour, until I was in a far worse condition than many a pugilist after a prize fight. The only result was that I was severely punished by the headmaster. Then my soul grew hard within me, and I only thought of vengeance. In a short time I was again called on to "fag" by my tormentor. I refused, and the bully persuasively twisted my arm. After he had tortured me for a few minutes he let me go, and then, flying to primal man's first means of offence, everywhere provided by nature, I seized a sharp stone. The missile struck my antagonist fair on the temple . . . I was seized, and taken before the masters, and then locked up in my room. For two days I remained there, fed on bread and water. The headmaster once visited me, and in a severe lecture intimated that —— would die, and I should be hanged. At least if he did recover I most likely would be handed over to the police, and endure public ignominy. I hardened my heart. The sense of the injustice of things in this world, which the very young perhaps alone feel, made me defiant. What did I care if my tormentor died? Care? I hoped he would die! . . . So on the third night I dropped from the window by the aid of the sheets, and before morning was in a large town fifteen miles off. . . . And when, three days after my absconding, I read a handbill describing my appearance and offering £100 reward for my recovery, I looked on this as an endeavor to capture a criminal, and not as the frightened efforts of the headmaster to undo his foolish work. For long months he thought I had drowned myself, and the school suffered considerably through the scandal.[9]

As Cannon reports, James did not head for home, where there was little warmth or understanding. Instead he sold his clothes for some "common, rough garments" and "began to tramp across England sleeping in villages, market-towns and cities frequenting threepenny and sixpenny lodging-houses used by hawkers, vagrants and beggars." Says Cannon, "In the indiscriminate mixture of humanity in the dormitories, he found 'much that was disgusting,' but he remembered the rough comradeship of the men with an affection that was its own bitter commentary on the icy nature of his home."[10]

Eventually, James did go home, completing his education at Walsall High School. He began an article clerkship with his father, but the reconciliation was short-lived. He soon fell in love, but his father forbade the liaison. So, around 1860, still a teenager, James fled to London. There he earned a living copying legal documents while lodging with a policeman who entertained and intrigued him with stories of his experiences on the beat. Consequently, James began to freelance crime news for the London newspapers, a move that in turn introduced him to London's low life and to the discipline of writing for an audience. After stints in more secure employment, as a booking clerk and then a stationmaster, a life that clearly did not suit his wandering nature, James returned to London's Grub Street.

A trip to Paris followed. It was 1870, the eve of both the Siege of Paris by the Prussians in the Franco-German War and the end of the Second French Empire. Parisian political tensions, which had been running high as part of a continued call for a democratic republic, were at breaking point in the face of the encroaching Prussian armed forces and consequent food rationing and unemployment. Within a few months, the rebellions would escalate into the establishment of the short-lived Paris Commune.[11]

The English were hungry for news of the riots across the channel. But within forty-eight hours of landing in Paris, James found himself on the wrong side of the authorities. By his own account, he was imprisoned as a spy for six weeks (until released on representations of the British embassy) because of his sympathy with the French Secessionists, the party that had been plotting to depose Napoleon III, and his acquaintance with one of the leading insurrectionists, Gustave Flourens: "In my callow days I was a rebel, and from Garibaldians to Fenians I have ever since had a sneaking fondness for those in arms against constituted authority."[12]

In 1872, he again found himself in sympathy with the oppressed when he traveled to Warwickshire to report on farm laborers' attempts to form an agricultural union and the working conditions—particularly the starvation-level wages—of its prospective members. Typically, James ignored the official statements of both sides, but instead went to see for himself what life was like for the farm laborers. He found their living conditions appalling, describing overcrowded cottages with poor sanitation, leaking roofs, and cracked walls. As Hugh Anderson comments, it was the sort of reporting at which James excelled: "[H]is style was direct and simple; he was sympathetic to the cause; and he possessed the 'news nose' of a hungry Fleet-Street 'penny-a-liner.'"[13]

After one last unsuccessful attempt to revive his relationship with his family, James gave up on England altogether. About 1872, when he was thirty, he dropped his family name and sailed to America, where he disembarked

as Julian Thomas, ready to begin afresh.[14] In the competitive arena of New York journalism, that was not to be. Unwilling to claim the work he had done as a journalist in England under the name of James, he had to begin again, with no friends or contacts and nothing to show for his previous career. After spending time in Virginia, where he claimed he married a rich widow, he migrated again as Julian Thomas, this time to Australia, fetching up in Melbourne sick, despondent, and almost broke—living the life of a vagabond and styling himself as an American with a largely fabricated American history.

James turned to freelancing. His first newspaper job in Australia was to write short notes on events of the week for Melbourne's *Punch*, but he clearly had higher ambitions. He turned up late one night in 1876 at the more reputable *Argus* and demanded that the night porter let him in to see the editor. The resulting row was loud enough to draw out Hugh George, the general manager. In George's words:

> I asked, "What is it you want?" And the man replied, "I'm a journalist, and if this is the first-chop paper I take it for, that ought to be enough." "Come into my room," said I. When he got under the light his general get-up did not indicate prosperity, but he had eyes in his head, and they met mine in a way I liked. I took him short, however. "Now, what is it?" "I want to know if there is any show for a man who is a journalist on this paper." "It depends altogether on what sort of a journalist that man is." "That makes it easy, boss. He's the best (rather unquotable) journalist in this city." The audacity of that took me. I said, "Journalism does not seem to have brought you much wealth; in fact, I should judge that a sovereign would not come amiss to-night." "You're a white man! Shake!" We shook, and he left with a promise to let me have some copy the next day. The copy came to hand. That man was "The Vagabond," and his engagement was the most profitable contract in that department I ever made for the *Argus.*[15]

And so the Vagabond was born.

Avoiding "Miserabilism"

There was certainly precedent that showed the profitability of journalism that reported to middle-class readers on the evils of poverty. Jean Chalaby, in his study *The Invention of Journalism,*[16] describes this field as "miserabilism." Its first exponent was James Greenwood, who in January 1866 wrote a series of four articles called "A Night in a Workhouse" for the *Pall Mall Gazette.* The *Gazette* was a fledgling newspaper written for "gentlemen" readers and edited by Greenwood's brother, Frederick. James Greenwood chose the nom de plume "The Amateur Casual."[17] He began the series by warning readers that "no language with which I am acquainted is capable of conveying an adequate conception of the spectacle I then encountered." His articles

described "horrors with which [he] was surrounded" and from which there was no "escape."[18] As Chalaby notes, poverty in itself is not newsworthy,[19] but journalists, by personifying the issue and bringing it to the public attention, "had struck what would reveal itself to be a gold-mine. . . . depicting the poverty and deprivation of the masses to upper-class readers."[20]

Greenwood's work saved his paper from bankruptcy, doubling its readership in three days, and demonstrating the economic advantages of sensationalist reporting. As Seth Koven notes, the articles "created a new mode of journalistic reporting—incognito social investigation using cross-class dress—and a new style of sensational and self-consciously theatrical writing about the poor."[21] While Dickens and Mayhew had previously trawled the London slums to write about the poor, they had done so as sympathetic outsiders. Greenwood had gone a further step, masquerading as a tramp to experience firsthand what life was like spending a night in a ward for the homeless.

John Stanley James was influenced by these stories. Mimicking Greenwood's headline and subject matter, his first story for the *Argus* was titled "A Night in the Model Lodging House," the tale of his experiences going undercover in the equivalent of a London poorhouse—a sixpenny-a-night laborer's dormitory. James went on to write many more articles. He became a hall porter at the Alfred Hospital, an inmate of the Benevolent Society and the Sailors' Home, a dispenser of medicines at Pentridge Gaol, an attendant at Kew Lunatic Asylum, and dined in sixpenny restaurants and whiled away time at the Melbourne General Cemetery, observing keenly the goings on around him.

Yet, James's journalism differed from his English predecessors' in important ways, one of which was its concentration on powerlessness rather than poverty as the driving subject matter. James—as narrator, usually writing in the first person present tense—positioned himself as advocate for the marginalized and oppressed. He stood for those sections of Melbourne society that formed an underclass because they were without status in the colony, a position that poverty inevitably accompanied but did not necessarily cause. He reinforced this message to readers with his nom de plume, "A Vagabond," which was chosen to reflect his use of immersion as a journalistic technique.. Although his narrative voice suggested he had connections with society's powerful, the Vagabond's point of view was not the eye of the higher classes looking in fascinated horror, pity, or contempt at the poor. He spurned the temptation to turn his subjects into a spectacle, always describing life on the edge with empathy and good humor, despite his reputation personally as a man with a hot temper and prickly personality.

Avoiding Sentimentality

As Michael Ignatieff has described it, "[S]entimental art, by definition, sacrifices nuance, ambivalence, and complexity in favor of strong emotion."[22] Unlike the perpetrators of Chalaby's "miserabilism," James's writing is marked by its lack of sensationalism. Alan Trachtenberg described Jacob Riis's writing as sensational in *How the Other Half Lives* because "the reader is not permitted to cross into the inner world of the slum—into its own point of view."[23] That is not a fault of James's reporting. Unlike journalists who dropped briefly into the poor areas of London or New York for their stories, James spent large parts of his life on society's margins just as his subjects did. He knew their world well and wrote about it, not with the attitude of a voyeur, but rather that of a participant. A passage from that first story, "A Night in the Model Lodging-House," serves as an example of his realist approach:

> I see that many of the lodgers are old hands, and appear to have their regular beds, to which they make their way as to their home. There has been little talking up to this, those who have gone to bed early being evidently tired out, but now two men at the end of the room nearest me begin an argument. . . . This is interrupted by the entrance of a decently-dressed youth, whom they tell not to keep them awake tonight. "I assure you, gentlemen," says the youth as he takes off his coat, "that I went to sleep last night with my finger between my teeth, and this morning it was quite sore, but I'd do anything rather than disturb you." I wonder with what strange malady he can be afflicted that involves such a curious mode of taking rest, till by the conversation I gather that before his time he has taken to gnash and grind his teeth, awakening all his neighbors. . . . And now it was nearly twelve o'clock, and a natty little figure dressed in clothes of a fashionable cut, and swinging a cane, walked down to a bed nearly opposite mine. The walk was that of a gentleman, and of one accustomed to field sports, but the new comer was evidently quite at home here, as he went straight to his bed—a sure sign that he was not a new hand.[24]

In this passage, James has located himself in the same community he writes about. Homelessness was a state he knew well, and it allows him to describe the experience, and the men he encountered, without condescension.

Hartsock has described empathy as an essential characteristic of literary journalism, so far as it avoids "reinforcing difference and [shows] commonalities instead."[25] Sensationalism, he says, fails to "close the distance between [the writer's] (and by implication [the] reader's) subjectivity and the Other as object."[26] Sensationalism, in other words, intentionally blurs factuality to stir readers' emotions and create comfortable distance from what is described. Although known to occasionally embroider the facts of his own life, James

generally wrote not only with accuracy about the details of the lives of his subjects but also with empathy.

Unlike Greenwood and his followers, James did not lump the poor into a class for whom there was no hope. As someone who had been destitute himself, and as an immigrant with an antiauthoritarian bent, James believed morality was closely tied to material circumstances. It particularly pained him to see young people sentenced to a life of hardship, and he frequently commented in his writings about the possibilities, if not the need, for rescue and reform when well-placed help was given. Although conservative—especially when it came to women—it infuriated him when the rigid morality of the nineteenth century combined with destitution to drive young people into theft, violence, and/or prostitution. He was not religious and his views could be strongly anti-Church, but he had some sympathy for the people—often members of religious orders—who genuinely attempted to improve the lot of the poor.

In the story "The Magdalen Asylum," he describes an encounter with a girl who "had been a barmaid, had been tempted and had gone 'crooked'; the child was dead, but her mother, enraged by neighbors' sneers, had turned her out of doors."[27] James tracked down the mother and confirmed the girl's story:

> It is true they had a row, and she told Annie to clear out. She could not be disgraced with her in the house any longer. She had made her bed, and must lie in it. Thus said the mother. I spoke a few plain truths to that lady, which I am afraid only made her more bitter against her daughter. "I suppose you're one of her gentlemen, come here to gammon me to keep her for you," said the woman, firing up. Indignant, I left; but a few moments after I had a hearty laugh at my own foolishness, and I felt that I deserved all I got.

James found Annie a position in a country tavern and persuaded the mother to provide her with clothes and see her off to her new job by train. "Why spin this long tedious yarn?" he asks. "Well, only to show how the forces of society work against the weak, and as an example of how many stray ones there are who, with a little charitable feeling, may be kept from sinking lower, and, warned by the past, may be kept straight for the future."[28]

His story "The Waifs and Strays of Sydney" is another case in point. Here he describes how he tracked a young match-seller to his home.

> I persuaded Father Petre to accompany me to the Kelly-Cawmill home. He is as anxious as myself that something should be done to rescue this child from the degrading nocturnal life he is leading. . . . Proceedings I trust will shortly be taken to rescue Baby Kelly from his present life, and to give him a chance for the future."[29]

In Australia, James had seen firsthand the link between opportunity and social responsibility. Convicts had routinely become exemplary citizens when given the chance, including such eminent figures from a generation earlier as the colonial surgeon William Redfern, the colonial architect Francis Greenway, and the magistrate Andrew Thompson. It was a chance he sometimes would go out of his way to secure for the young people he wrote about.

Immersion Journalism

In going undercover, James stretched the boundaries of the practice of immersion journalism, assuming a range of identities and spending not just one night, as Greenwood had done, but sometimes extended periods of time immersed in the worlds of his subjects. It was a technique that resulted in engaging, persuasive copy, particularly when told in James's strong narrative voice. At the time they were written, James's articles were highly controversial and drew a great many letters to the editor, both for and against. Cannon gives us a taste of some of the furore that resulted from the Vagabond's stories in the following passage from his introduction to the 1969 edition of *The Vagabond Papers*:

> Did a well-known doctor perform lithotomy operations with his pocket-knife when proper surgical instruments were available? A public inquiry gravely established that the doctor had merely boasted, in front of his patients, that he could do the job with his pen-knife. Were elderly inmates of the Benevolent Asylum purposely starved to death in a primitive form of euthanasia? The authorities heatedly denied it, whereupon 114 inmates wrote to the committee supporting and expanding the Vagabond's observations. Were the bodies of pauper children thrown into a common grave at the Melbourne General Cemetery and interred without benefit of clergy? The cemetery chaplain said it was not so, whereupon J. H. Stanton, a citizen of note, testified that he had recently seen a weeping mother running through the cemetery trying to keep up with a wagon going at "a fair trot." Bumping from side to side was a coffin containing the body of her child, which was dumped into a grave without ceremony.[30]

While James's enjoyed embellishing his own biography, it seems that his articles were factually reliable. The institutions he criticized in his articles failed to silence him, despite the public controversies. No charge of falsity against him ever stuck. James continued to write, and to keep his anonymity as the Vagabond, well into 1877, while the managers of the public and Church-run institutions quaked at the thought he might turn up at any time in their establishments. As Cannon goes on to point out, when attempts such as those noted in the quote above by disgruntled members of the establishment "failed to challenge seriously the factual basis of the Vagabond's articles.

. . . some public authorities and even journalists envious of his success began to attack his [immersive] methods." James admitted to his readers that his "mode of writing, and of obtaining information, is considered highly irregular, if not absolutely immoral," but he was unconcerned as long as he had the approval of his editor and readers.[31] He has always had the support of Australia's historians, who have noted the historical importance of his body of work as a rare and valuable record of Australian colonial life, both urban and rural.[32]

Storytelling

James used all the skills of the literary craft. Besides being a journalist, he was also a poet and a playwright. One poem—"Sorrow, Love and I"—was published in 1889 in Frank Cates's *Gags, A Miscellany in Prose and Verse*.[33] While some biographers, such as J. B. (John Butler) Cooper[34] and Cannon, have questioned James's success as a dramatist, Eric Irvin argues he was a very successful playwright, writing and producing several plays over his lifetime that ran to much acclaim in a number of Australian cities.[35] These included *No Mercy*, a free adaptation of *La Mort Civile* by the Italian dramatist Paolo Giacometti, and an original work, *The Nihilists, or Russia as It Is*, that ran to five acts. Says Irvin, "The truth is that there were few newspaper men with literary inclinations in nineteenth century Australia who were not connected in one way or another with the theatre—as reviewers, eager spectators, active dramatists, or amateur actors."[36]

James's skill as a dramatist is evident in his articles —he writes scenes, uses dialogue and description, and creates a strong sense of character (not least his own) to enliven his writing and bring home his points. One of the most notable features of James's work is the light-heartedness he sometimes chose to bring to the grimmest of topics. An almost Gonzo-like humor could surface in his stories, though not always as forcefully as in this excerpt from "A Month in Pentridge," where he describes with gusto being called on to extract a prisoner's tooth:

> "You can pull out teeth, I suppose?" said the doctor, turning to me. I sort of hesitated. "Who was the man?" I asked. "The hangman Gately, but they call him Balleyram here," was the reply. I accepted the doctor's case of instruments with alacrity, and expressed my readiness to pull out every tooth in "Balleyram's" head. I have never had any practice in dentistry, and this was my maiden effort in that line. With any other subject I certainly should have hesitated, as I dislike giving needless pain; but Gately I had little sympathy for. . . . "Now, then, old man, let's have a look at this tooth." He opened his foul jaws. Faugh! "Sit down." "Oh, doctor, don't hurt me," he cried, as, with a professional air, I opened the pocket-case, and spread the forceps on the

> little table. "Oh!" he cried, as the first pull broke off a piece of the tooth, the forceps slipping. "Just hold his head, and if he stirs bang it against the wall," said I to one of the warders. There was a laugh—the new dispenser was "a queer sort," evidently. I took out the largest and strongest pair of forceps, which would pull a tooth out of a crocodile. One grip, a roar from Gately, a twist of the wrist, and out came the tusk. With the consciousness of talent, I wiped the instruments carefully, whilst the warders looked on admiringly. "I must get you to look at my teeth," said one of them. "Have it out now," said I. "If there's one thing I can do better than another, it's this—I'm—on teeth." The warder shuddered, and said he hadn't time just then.[37]

James displayed a virtuosity in storytelling by using scenes, dialogue and description, humor, and character. The last is clearly demonstrated in this excerpt where the character of the warder is shown shifting from admiring the Vagabond's skill as tooth puller to shuddering at the thought of having his own tooth extracted by James.

After Melbourne

James's work as the Vagabond made him a public figure, to the extent that "The Vag" featured as a character in the 1877 Melbourne Christmas pantomime.[38] Melbourne *Punch* satirized his work, publishing an article titled "Three weeks in a Nunnery in which the Vagabond Got a Job as a Cook to the Mother Superior in order to Discover Whether She Ate Meat on Fridays."[39] Crowds curious "almost to the point of frenzy" as to his real identity gathered on the station platform where it was reported that the Vagabond regularly caught a train.[40] The subterfuge couldn't be sustained, and eventually James claimed his identity as the journalist Julian Thomas, bringing the reports of the Vagabond to an end, though not before James milked his fame as far as he could, outrageously embroidering his American past and claiming falsely that he fought in the American Civil War.

James left the *Argus* in 1877 and, following his editor there, Hugh George, sailed north to contribute similar reports on Sydney's underclass to the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The Sydney articles never achieved the influence or popularity of the earlier Melbourne pieces. In November of that year, he traveled to Cooktown in Australia's far north to report for the *Argus* on the influx of Chinese gold diggers. Later, James went on to work for various Australian papers as a correspondent in New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, New Guinea, Tonga, Samoa, and China. Although his writings—collected in *Cannibals and Convicts* (1886) and *Occident and Orient* (1882)—betray a racism and anti-Semitism unacceptable today, they also show an author who was unusually willing to side with those who were the weakest in the power equations of colonialism.

At times, he used his skill as a literary journalist to powerful effect. His vivid accounts of a native uprising in New Caledonia in 1878, and the brutal response to it (specifically his eyewitness account of the killing of five Kanaks, including a thirteen-year-old boy), shocked his Sydney readers much more than the descriptions of their own slums and swayed public opinion against the French colonial administration.[41] His reports from New Hebrides for the *Age* on "blackbirding," the practice of recruiting labor for the canefields, alleged "slavery pure and simple" perpetrated by the New Hebrides Company. He claimed the planters bought natives for ten pounds per head without any contract rights, and that irons and the lash were used on men and women who refused to work.[42]

James spent the latter part of his life moving in and out of journalism, and in and out of poverty. His forthright approach did not always suit the policies of the newspaper proprietors. In 1884, he signed a three-year agreement to travel rural Victoria to describe the country towns for a series for the *Argus*. His articles on Victoria finished abruptly when the residents of Mooroopna took offence at his reporting and a town meeting resolved to boycott the *Argus*. James resigned rather than be recalled to Melbourne.[43]

James's professional reputation suffered as a consequence of one of the last major assignments of his career, when he traveled for the *Age* to report on political unrest in Samoa and Tonga in 1887. Civil war threatened Samoa, where the British and the Germans were backing rival tribal chiefs, but order was restored, just as James arrived, with the reinstatement of the British puppet-chief. James sailed on to Tonga where the Reverend Shirley Baker was prime minister under the native King George I. Baker, a former Wesleyan missionary, had renounced the Wesleyans, who opposed his leadership, and had set up his own church, the Free Tongan Methodist Church. In his articles for the *Age*, James supported Baker's policies, which caused the Wesleyan-backed Melbourne *Spectator* to attack James, accusing him of taking bribes from Baker with money from the Tongan treasury. James retaliated with a libel action against the *Spectator*. While he won the case, the damage against the reputation of "The Vagabond" was assessed by the jury at a farthing—a coin that James later wore on his watch chain. While the verdict helped him partially save face, and he continued to write occasional articles for the *Age*, his career as a journalist never fully recovered.[44]

Subsequently, the parliamentarian Ephraim Zox found him a position as secretary of the Victorian Royal Commission on Charities that James held from 1890 to '92. The commission was to enquire into allegations regularly appearing in the press concerning abuses and scandals in the hospitals and charitable institutions. As is the way with so many royal commissions, the

enquiry proved pointless. James, whose health had started to fail, returned to filing copy for the *Age* and the *Leader*, mostly helping to compile illustrated supplements on country towns. Half-blind and suffering heart disease and asthma, he was writing copy just before he went to bed at his lodgings in Princes Street, Fitzroy, on the night of September 3, 1896. His body was discovered the next morning. James may have died penniless and alone, but he was held in great affection by the people he championed. According to Cannon:

> [Two days after his death] Princes Street was jammed with vehicles and people anxious to join his funeral cortege. Among the hundreds of wreaths was one from the Neglected Children's Aid Society "with deep regret from the little ones in the home," and another from Lady Janet Clarke as a "last tribute of respect to one whose able pen has helped to make many lives more cheerful."[45]

James was buried in the Melbourne General Cemetery, the site marked by a carved tombstone erected by public subscription throughout Australia. It simply says, "To Julian Thomas—the Vagabond."

Conclusion

There is no doubt that John Stanley James was a colorful character whose own life was at least as interesting as those he wrote about. Yet, he was also, as Irvin states, a prolific and important writer whose work is closely bound with the social and political history of Australia and the Pacific.[46] James's eyewitness reports are justifiably valued by historians for the unique, detailed, and accurate picture they paint of life in colonial Australia. His writing spoke to both the intellect and emotions of his readers, influencing policy makers and encouraging social change in the Melbourne of which he wrote. If literary journalism can be defined by its stylistic use of the techniques of long-form storytelling while portraying real life—and, as Hartsock asserts, by its author's empathy with its subjects—then James deserves to be recognized as one of the earliest exponents of the genre as it has been practiced in Australia.

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Notes

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2. Hartsock, *History of American Literary Journalism*; Sims, *Literary Journalists*.

3. Mordue is one of three guests on a segment hosted on "Literary Journalism," *The Media Report*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation Radio National transcript, June 23, 2005, http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/mediareport-1999/literary-journalism/3452274.

4. *Bruce Elder, "In Lawson's Tracks," Griffith Review 19 (Autumn 2008): 113.*

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6. John Stanley James, preface to *The Vagabond Papers,* vol. 1 (Melbourne, AU: George Robertson, 1877), n.p.

7. Michael Cannon, ed., *The Vagabond Papers* (Melbourne, AU: Hyland House, 1969).

8. Cannon, introduction to *Vagabond Papers,* 1–15.

9. Stanley James, "Sydney Common Lodging-Houses," in *The Vagabond Papers*, vol. 5, quoted in Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 2.

10. Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 2.

11. Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–1871* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

12. Hugh Anderson, "Vagabond Journalist," *Walkabout* (February 1968): 16.

13. Anderson, "Vagabond Journalist," 16.

14. Cannon gives no date but states that James was thirty years old at the time, while "About 1872" is the date given in James's biographical entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*: John Barnes, "James, John Stanley (1843–1896)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University), http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/james-john-stanley-3848/text6113.

15. Hugh George, *Lone Hand* 1, no. 4 (August 1, 1907), quoted in Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 6.

16. Jean K. Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1998).

17. Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 26.

18. James Greenwood, "A Night in a Workhouse," *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 12–13, 1866.

19. Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism,* 144.

20. Ibid, 157.

21. Koven, *Slumming,* 26.

22. Michael Ignatieff, "The Stories We Tell: Television and Humanitarian Aid," in *Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention,* ed. Jonathan Moore (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998) 293.

23. Alan Trachtenberg, "Experiments in Another Country: Stephen Crane's City Sketches," *Southern Review* 10 (April 1974); 271–272, quoted in Hartsock, *History of American Literary Journalism*, 134.

24. Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 43.

25. Hartsock, *History of American Literary Journalism*, 151.

26. Ibid, 142.

27. Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 237.

28. Ibid, 239.

29. Ibid, 59.

30. Ibid, 7.

31. Preface to the third volume of *The Vagabond Papers,* 1877–78, quoted in Cannon, 7.

32. See, for example:

Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 1–15.

J.B. (John Butler) Cooper: "Who Was the Vagabond?" *Life*, January 1, 1912, 30–37.

Jill Roe, review of *The Vagabond Papers,* by Michael Cannon, *Labour History,* no. 19 (November 1970): 66, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27507996.

33. Frank Cates, *Gags, A Miscellany in Prose and Verse* (Melbourne, AU: Centennial, 1889).

34. J.B. Cooper, "Who Was the Vagabond?"

35. Eric Irvin, "'The Vagabond' as Playwright," *Southerly* 41, no. 1 (March 1981): 106–120.

36. Ibid., 107.

37. Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 101–2.

38. Ibid., 8.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Barnes, "James, John Stanley (1843–1896)," n.p., http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/james-john-stanley-3848/text6113.

42. Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 13.
43. Anderson, "Vagabond Journalist," 19.
44. Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 14; Anderson, "Vagabond Journalist," 19.
45. Cannon, *Vagabond Papers*, 14.
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John Stanley James Writes as "A Vagabond" in 1877

Selected by Willa McDonald

A Month in Pentridge

by a Vagabond

I have been spending four weeks in Pentridge prison. A short sentence, most people will say, and entirely too mild a one for my deserts. I am afraid some will be disappointed when they learn that *this time* (for who can tell what the future may bring?) I have not been in gaol as a prisoner. No! I am getting on in the world. From the lunatic asylums to the Alfred Hospital was a step in the social scale of service, but the hall-porter was quite an humble individual compared to the warder-dispenser at Pentridge. For a month I have occupied that exalted position, and have been pushing pills, slinging draughts, pulling out teeth, and bullying patients as if to the manner born. I consider myself such a success in this line of business that I have thought of abandoning my vagabond career and becoming respectable. Two courses are open to me—to start a chemist's shop and realise a rapid fortune by selling "pick-me-ups" on Sundays, and "ladies' restoratives" during the week (I daresay there are people in Australia who have spent eighteen pence at the French chemist's in Bond-street); or I may become a fashionable dentist; a polite style, plenty of "cheek," and spotless linen would disguise my ignorance, and in a very short time I might drive fast horses. But I am afraid I am too honest ever to become wealthy and respectable—by such methods.

I was amiss about Christmas time. I don't know whether it was the cricket match, the pantomime, or the English fare of the season (a horror in this

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Published in the Melbourne Argus*, February 24, 1877, page 4. First of an eight-part series, "A Visit to Pentridge." Courtesy National Library of Australia.*

climate!) which affected me. I felt that I wanted change of air. A gentleman who kindly interests himself in my movements agreed with me, but added a rider, "You also want work; you're getting lazy." I admitted the latter fact, but denied the former. "Work in general is a curse, and I hate it," said I. "It's real original sin. In particular, I am sure Providence never meant white men to work in this climate; they should only look on, and cuss the niggers. Indeed I am not sure that white men were ever intended to work anywhere? For myself, I know that I am a natural-born boss. A month by the seaside, with unlimited expenses, seems about all I am fit for now. My shattered health wants recuperating." "Sir," was the stern reply, "this is flippancy; what you want is work and change of scene, but, above all, work." I said I didn't, but it was no use. Having rashly admitted a knowledge of medicine, I was recommended to the Chief Secretary as a fit and proper person to fill the vacant post of dispenser at Pentridge prison hospital, and the pipes being laid, I made a formal application for the place. On the 13th of January I received an order to wait on the inspector-general, and 11 o'clock of that day found me in the dismal building which serves as the office of the Penal and Industrial Schools department. My letter gained me admission to Mr. Duncan, who looks a good man of the Scotch farm bailiff type. In tones of authority, he questioned me, and then handed me over to the chief clerk, Mr. Snelling, who took my signature to an agreement by which I bound myself under sundry pains and penalties to faithfully serve the Victorian Government as hospital warder, dispenser, and assistant. Then I received a letter of appointment to the Superintendent, and was told to be at Pentridge by 10 o'clock on the following Monday. Behold me then a vagabond no longer, but an embryo civil servant, serving the country for the magnificent salary of 6s. 6d. a day, with quarters, 1s. per diem being deducted for such. The dispenser I found was the only officer required to sleep on the premises, and therefore had to pay for his quarters, other warders commencing with 7s. 6d. a day. I found out afterwards what a sell this was on the poor dispenser.

It is a miserable ride along the Sydney-road to Coburg. The cabs, I suppose, are no worse than cabs on other routes, but under any circumstances, they are wretched conveyances. The road itself is a bad one, and the country dreary. This, which should be one of the finest boulevards around Melbourne, is spoilt through the difficulty of getting in and out of town. The road all the way to Brunswick and Coburg should be lined with pleasant cottages, but these will never be built until better means of communication are provided. Dwellers between Coburg and Brunswick and Melbourne labour under exactly the same disadvantages as inhabitants on the St. Kilda-road. Cabs generally will not start into town until they are full, and those who live

en route have to often wait or walk. Going out, too, the delay in starting is most wearisome and annoying. The one thing needed to make Brunswick and Coburg pleasant places of residence is a street railroad, or, as you would say here, a tramway. The road is wide enough for the track to be laid without there being a chance of inconvenience to other traffic. Clean, pleasant cars, regular periods of starting, and fixed fares would insure the success of such an undertaking, and not only would the present inhabitants of the German-named villages be benefited, but the property-holders en route would find that their "eligible building sites" would rapidly be disposed of. I write feelingly on this subject, as several times during the past month I have been greatly annoyed by the delay, having had to wait long at each end through there being no regular hour of starting. Coburg is getting quite a place. It was, I presume, first called into existence by the "Stockade," although it has now repudiated its family name, Still, in spite of its shire-hall, orderly-room, Episcopal, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Wesleyan Churches which satisfy the wants of the village and surrounding neighbourhood, Coburg is as yet a mere appanage of Pentridge. The prison forms the whole topic of conversation, and its officials rule the place.

"You may change, you may alter the name as you will,
But the taint of the Stockade is over it still."

When the swindler Gottheimer changed his name to Albert Grant, an old chum said to him, "My friend, yon may change your name, but you can't change a very prominent feature." So with Coburg; it is no longer Pentridge, so to speak it ostensibly repudiates any connexion with a penal depôt, but it cannot get rid of those massive blue-stone buildings and high walls which form the most prominent feature in the surrounding landscape. In the village side trees have been planted and churches built, and a very endeavour made to hide the obnoxious thing, but walk a little to the north or the east and it stands out clearly defined on the slope of the hill, and one sees how large Pentridge is, and how small Coburg, as yet. However, the village has all the elements of a live place, and if they will only get a tramway, I think I will go and live there.

The outside of Pentridge is not very dreary-looking. The trees on the roadside, and the strip of greensward which has been left along the front, and enclosed by iron railings, relieve the monotony of the bare walls. The entrance is by an archway in the building used as offices and stores. This is guarded by double gates—the outer one of strong oak, the inner of iron bars. Doors in both of these admit those who have duties or business in the prison. Alighting from my cab, and knocking at the door, I was challenged through a little barred grating. On expressing my wish to see the superintendent I was

allowed to cross the first barrier, and found myself "between the gates," as the archway is termed in the prison. Seeing that my "swag" excited attention, I stated that I was coming to be dispenser. "So you're our new chemist," said the warder who admitted me "Well, you'd better go and see the super., then; he's in his office." Admitted through the second barrier, I was directed to the first door in the buildings on my left, and entering the office I was brought before the dread presence of the superintendent, Mr. Robert Gardiner. I found him a man looking younger than his years, with coarse features, a sharp eye, and a flexible nose like Lord Brougham's. He read my credentials, and called for the chief warder Warrick, ordering him to take me to the doctor, and see that I was properly inducted into my duties. I was accordingly conducted to the doctor's house, which, adjoined by the assistant-superintendent's, is situated on the left of the first yard entered. Dr. Reed was at home, and called me into his study to question me. I satisfied him that I was a most competent chemist, and that I should prove a valuable assistant, and then I was again turned over to Warrick. The chief warder of the guard is a quiet spoken individual, with a smooth manner, which has procured him from some the *sobriquet* of "Oily Gammon." His kind heart will not allow him to censure any one, so he will speak him mildly and kindly, leaving a little report in the book to be dealt with by the superintendent, who is another sort of a man. In justice to Warrick, however, I must state that I believe he often overlooks or condones slight sins of omission and commission, and, considering his position, is very fairly spoken of by the men. I have no fault to find with him; he always treated me well, although I believe he was instrumental in "patting" a few games on the new dispenser. Warrick led me out of the front gates, round the walls, and through a door into the portion of the reserve occupied by the Jika reformatory schools and inspector-general's and superintendent's quarters. These are all enclosed by one high wall, but outside Pentridge Gaol, which is walled in, a prison within a prison. Here, at what is known as the lower guardroom, I subscribed my name to a manuscript declaration, entailing on me more pains and penalties. I found now that, although a dispenser, and having full charge of the hospital, I only ranked as a junior warder. If I had been a chemist, I have no doubt this would have hurt my feelings; but of this more anon.

Escorted back by Warrick, I was handed over to the doctor, my immediate superior, and by him taken to the hospital, which is in a second yard, divided from the first by an iron fence. Here I found a sharp-looking warder, in appearance and manner remarkably like a terrier, who was temporarily in charge of the establishment, and who was to remain with me for a day to coach me in the duties of locking and unlocking. Dr. Reed took me round the building, and pointed out to me the prisoners who occupied positions as

"billets." I found that I had seven of these under my control, the dispenser being the only official in the hospital. First there was the clerk, who assisted in keeping the hospital books, made out daily returns, and delivered medicine to the out-patients in two of the divisions. There were two wardsmen and a nurse (male) engaged to attend on a special case. These were all employed upstairs. Below I had the surgery and hall porter, whose special duty it was to attend to my immediate wants, a washerman and storekeeper, and last, but not least, the cook. These hospital billets, although some of the men worked hard and fairly earned more than their board, are the most coveted positions at Pentridge, owing to the amount of freedom and necessary communication with other prisoners. Disciplinarians consider that the hospital is the weak point in the administration. It is supposed to be the breeding ground of all discontent and defiance of authority, and to be the headquarters of "traffic" in tobacco, which is the sin without forgiveness in the superintendent's eyes. With only one official, who has often to be absent from his post in other parts of the prison, and who cannot be mixing draughts and at the same time keep a strict watch in the wards, the discipline here cannot be so severe as in other divisions. Privileged prisoners employed in "billets" in the office or stores can, and do, march in and out on pretence of business, and have plenty of time to chat and "traffic" with their mates whilst the dispenser is engaged in the surgery below. But outside that little mischief can be done, as when patients are discharged from the hospital strict discipline in their own divisions should counterbalance the slight relaxation of authority which they had enjoyed whilst sick. Prisoners in the hospital are treated primarily as patients the one object being to cure them; secondly, they are treated as prisoners, but the rules and regulations they are subject to are scarcely more stringent than those in force at the Melbourne and Alfred Hospitals. Of one thing I am satisfied—sick men at Pentridge are far better treated than those at the Benevolent Asylum; and with the exception of the associations and situation, their lot is equal to that of the inmates of many hospitals in Australia and Great Britain. They need not be afraid of surgical experiments with corkscrews and pocket knives. People may cry out at prisoners receiving so much attention and comfort, but they would be wrong. To Dr. Reed a sick prisoner becomes only "a case," and his sole desire appears to be, by the best possible available treatment, to turn him out cured and fit for work. To the physician, the guilt of a prisoner is sunk in the pain of the patient, and he cares nothing for his crime or antecedents, except so far as they may throw light on the man's condition, or give a hint as to "malingering." That Dr. Reed is fully equal to the disagreeable and unthankful duties of a prison surgeon is proved by the very small percentage of cases in the hospital and of deaths and sickness.

In less than half an hour after I landed at Pentridge I had my first "case." It happened thusly. After being shown round the wards, and receiving instructions from Dr, Reed, we returned to the surgery. There the warder addressed the doctor, "I've just come up from A Division, and there's Ballyram wants a tooth out. Will you go down there, sir?" "You can pull out teeth, I suppose?" said the doctor, turning to me. I sort of hesitated. "Who was the man?" I asked. "The hangman Gately, but they call him Ballyram here," was the reply. I accepted the doctor's case of instruments with alacrity and expressed my readiness to pull out every tooth in "Ballyram's" head. I have never had any practice in dentistry, and this was my maiden effort in that line. With any other subject I certainly should have hesitated, as I dislike giving needless pain, but Gately I had little sympathy for. I had seen him but once—at the execution of Bondietto—a transaction which I give him credit for despatching with much neatness. But the man's brutal appearance corresponded with his vocation, and I could well believe that he enjoyed his work, and that he was guilty of the atrocities for which he is now undergoing punishment. So I did not mind giving him a little pain. If I proved a success in this line of business I would go on, but if not, I must renounce tooth-drawing under some pretence, and Gately alone would suffer by my inexperience. "Come along," said the warder. "I'll take you down to A Division." So locking up the surgery, which is secured by a heavy bolt, fastened with a Chubb's padlock, we sallied out. We marched into the entrance yard and down the pathway between the prison wall and the doctor's garden, and soon came to another wall, which is the boundary of the original prison for males. At the comer there is a tower, one of several which diversify the outer walls, and on a small and narrow platform on top of this, a sentry paces. The entrance is from outside by a small doorway and winding staircase inside the tower, so that the several sentries, armed with rifles and revolvers, are within their range masters of the position. A small iron door in the wall is opened by one of the prisoners who acts as gatekeeper here, another coveted and easy "billet." The sentry lets down the key in a little bag attached to a cord, and it is afterwards re- turned to him by the same means. My companion tells me that we are now in the A division, which amongst the prisoners is popularly known as "the model," being evidently christened such by some old London "prig" who had graduated at "the model," Pentonville Prison, in the Caledonian-road. This enclosure here is a large one, and is only occupied by the prison formerly devoted to women; and the cottages of the four chief warders, who, before they became civil servants, were called sergeants. But I must defer a thorough description, for "Balleyram" [sic] is waiting to have his tooth out. Entering the prison, passing the office, library, bath, and store-rooms, and through two gates of

strong iron bars, we find ourselves in "the model," which is unlike its sponsor at Pentonville in that it is only designed for three wings or corridors, two as yet being built, instead of four as in the London institution, and that it only contains two tiers of cells. Three or four warders, dressed in the simple uniform of the penal institutions are lounging about a table over which are a number of hooks holding keys, staves, handcuffs, and other outward and visible signs of authority. To them I am introduced as the new dispenser, and we exchange polite salutations and a little badinage, after the manner of our kind. "He's come to pull out Balleyram's tooth," said my introducer, and one of the warders escorts me to cell 93. The rattle of the key in the lock arouses the occupant, who springs to the position of "attention," as required by the regulations, and entering I find myself face to face with the last minister of Victorian law—Gately—convict and executioner.

A frightful animal—the immense head, powerful protruding jaw, narrow receding forehead and deficient brain space, seemed fitly joined to tremendous shoulders and long, strong arms, like those of a gorilla, which he resembles more than a man. All the evil passions appeared to have their home behind that repellant, revolting countenance. With an instinctive movement, which my companions would not understand, I placed my hand on my hip. As a brute and a hangman (I trust this is not a premonitory warning) the man was alike distasteful to me. But in a second I remembered that here he was but a prisoner, No. 93, and the power of authority was visible all around me. I recovered my part, "Now, then, old man, let's have a look at this tooth." He opened his foul jaws. Faugh! "Sit down." "Oh, doctor, don't hurt me," he cried, as with a professional air I opened the pocket case and spread the forceps on the little table. "Oh!" he cried as the first pull broke off a piece of the tooth, the forceps slipping. "Just hold his head, and if he stirs bang it against the wall," said I to one of the warders. There was a laugh, the new dispenser was "a queer sort," evidently. I took out the largest and strongest pair of forceps, which would pull a tooth out of a crocodile. One grip, a roar from Gately, a twist of the wrist, and out came the tusk. With the consciousness of talent, I wiped the instruments carefully, whilst the warders looked on admiringly. "I must get you to look at my teeth," said one of them. "Have it out now," said I. "If there's one thing I can do better than another, it's this—I'm—on teeth" The warder shuddered, and said he hadn't time just then. This little operation gave me much éclat, and by the mysterious underground railroad of the prison was circulated through all the divisions to such an extent, that for a time I had quite a business in extracting old stumps, which only fell off after I broke two forceps in a man's jaw. He wouldn't try a third attempt, when I meant to put the bulldog on him, and have out that stump or his

jaw-bone. I left the cell fully satisfied of my capacity to pass as a dentist; and now the thing was over, amused at my first case. Poor Gately. All the world is down on him, and when free he had not a place to lay his head. A natural brute, he is as God, or the devil, made him, for it is hard to believe that any spark of aught Divine can rest in such a frame. An "old hand," he has had experience of the prisons of Tasmania, New South Wales, and Victoria, passing his whole life in and out of gaol. He goes by the several names of Gately, Balleyram, and Fagin, and was an Irishman and a Roman Catholic. But his long experience of prison life has taught him that, owing to the practice of confession, it is hard to gammon the priest, and, casting around for some other creed, by professing which he might obtain somewhat, Balleyram became a convert to Judaism. I never met a converted Jew—I believe they cost half a million each, and the article is then very inferior—but I have heard of such. A converted Christian I never heard of, and Gately, Fagin, or Balleyram should be celebrated on this account. I am afraid, however, that the respectable members of the Jewish race, who add so much to the prosperity of the colonies by their industry and public spirit, will no more own Gately than they would the Thompsons. However, he says he's a Jew; his intentions are good, and be ought to know. I did not examine him as to the tenets, &c., of his faith. The peculiar fact in this conversion is the cause—a longing for passover cake. Gately found out that Jews were supplied with this at the proper season, and seeing that it was a luxury compared to prison fare, has been running on the Hebrew ticket ever since. But this strange caricature of humanity is not all evil. On one occasion he saved the life of an overseer. Some years back they were working in the quarry, and a plot was made to "muckle" the overseer, who was considered a hard taskmasker. The one who was to strike the first blow knocked the overseer from the bank into the quarry. His leg was broken, and a prisoner approached to finish him with an axe, when Balleyram intervened, and by his threats and enormous strength subdued the rioters. For this, I am told, he obtained a remissionof his sentence, and was afterwards appointed executioner. The effect of such an office on the individual may be learned from the evidence of warders who have known Gately for years. These all say that his conduct now is greatly worse than when he was an ordinary criminal. Let this be recorded to his credit—he *could* be degraded and made worse by the influences of his debasing office.

Leaving the A Division with my cicerone, at the door we met Mr. Begg, the chief warder there. He is the Beau Brummel of Pentridge. Faultlessly neat, his uniform seems unlike that of any other man. He wears immaculate linen and white cotton gloves. There is not a speck of dust nor a wrinkle about him, and in his get-up he is a credit to the establishment. Begg is as particular

about the neatness and order of his division as in his attire; dirt to him is real original sin, and the corridors, walls, doors, and locks are scrubbed, and rubbed, and polished to an extent unknown elsewhere. Begg welcomes me severely, his cold eye glancing over my costume, criticising my paper collar and shabby genteel coat. I am evidently not up to his standard of neatness and order. "When you come here to give medicine to prisoners," says he, "I hope you won't spill any on the stones. The other dispenser used to do so, and it leaves stains which we can't get out." After promising not to offend in this manner we return to the hospital. Sitting in the surgery, my companion more particularly instructs me in my duties. It seems that the dispenser has to sleep in a room upstairs, which during the day is occupied as an office, and is filled with shelves of books, instruments, a spirometer, microscope, &c. A few minutes before 6 in the morning I have to rise and get the keys from between the gates, and on the stroke of the hour, parade with the other warders. Then I come to the hospital, and unlock all the doors of the wards, kitchen, stores, &c. A prisoner is despatched to the divisions with medicine for the out-patients, to be administered before they go out to work. From 7 to 8 I am relieved for breakfast. On returning, I wait on the doctor, who makes a tour of inspection through the building, visits the wards, and examines the patients. He fills in a daily record as to their state, treatment, &c., "in the English language," according to the sensible regulations. Afterwards I have to see that the whole building is thoroughly cleaned, make up required medicines, and generally be all eyes and ears to prevent communication between outside prisoners and patients. At 10 o'clock, accompanied by a prisoner, I have to go to A division and give out the medicine there as ordered by the doctor. Soon after 11 the "muster" bell is rung, and I have to count all my patients. At half-past 11 the doctor again attends at the surgery, and out-patients and others complaining are brought thither by warders. Some are admitted, some ordered medicine to be given then in their cells. From half-past 12 to half-past 1 is my dinner hour. In the afternoon the superintendent will possibly be round, and I have to wait upon him. At 3 o'clock I again proceed to dose the solitary prisoners in "the model." At 5 o'clock there is evening muster, and a little before 6 I lock up all the wards and rooms in the presence of a man sent to assist me, who signs the night-book as a guarantee of the faithful performance of my duty. The night sentry, armed with cutlass and revolver, then arrives, and counts the prisoners in the different wards, seeing that he has the number on the list made out for him. At six o'clock the bell rings, and locking the outer door, leaving the sentry inside, I take the keys to the gate, and until ten o'clock am a free man. By that time I have to be again within the gates, and by one of the warders on duty there

am taken to the hospital, and locked in for the night. The amount of locking and unlocking is frightful. All the doors are secured by strong bars and heavy padlocks, those attached to the wards being also enclosed in a lock case. I think I had over 60 keys to contend with, and although in time I began to know these, still the process of locking up at night and unlocking in the morning was a tedious one, and in the event of a fire, before the keys could be obtained and all the patients released, I think some of them would stand a good chance of being burnt to death.

On this the first morning of my arrival in Pentridge I tried hard to master all those different details, determined, as far as my mission would allow, to faithfully fulfil the obligations I had entered into with the Government of Victoria. I carefully studied the regulation-book given me by Chief Warder Warrick. In this no such person as a dispenser is recognised, and special orders are made for his guidance by the medical officer, but my attention was drawn to the following rules, which would peculiarly affect me, although I suppose "His Excellency Viscount Canterbury and the Executive Council" had no such intention when they framed them:—

"4. In enforcing obedience by the convicts, they (the warders) will be firm but temperate, carefully avoiding the use of harsh or irritating language or gestures, and only resorting to force when absolutely necessary.

"7. They will on no account accept any fee or reward for the performance of any portion of their duties.

"8. They will not receive any present from, or traffic or hold familiar intercourse with, any prisoner, or with any friend or relation of a prisoner, or hold any communication with either, except so far as may be necessary for the proper discharge of their duties.

"9. When in presence or hearing of any convict, they are not to smoke, use improper language, or enter into discussions or altercations with each other, particularly on points of duty. They will always on such occasions be most guarded in their conversation and demeanour.

"10. They are not to write letters to newspapers on matters connected with the department, but if aggrieved must complain, through the proper channel, to the inspector."

The following acts I read are declared offences for which warders will be liable to punishment:—

"Talking, reading, or smoking when on duty. Wrangling, disputing, or quarrelling, whether on public or private matters. Introducing wine, beer, or any spirituous liquor into any part of the prison, unless ordered by the medical officer. Giving any article whatever to a prisoner, whether with or without a consideration. Entering into any correspondence or addressing any

communication whatever in his official capacity except through the proper channel. Removing any article or property from the prison without proper authority. Absenting himself from duty or from the prison without leave. Card-playing or gambling. Drunkenness."

The list is pretty comprehensive, and as regards the "talking, reading, and writing to newspapers," I am afraid I have rendered myself "liable to punishment." The medical officers' rules with respect to hospital management I carried out to the best of my ability, and I do not think Dr. Reed had anything to complain of in my conduct as a dispenser. I broke one regulation, however. "The dispenser is not allowed to prescribe or practise for any one outside the Stockade without permission from the medical officer." I did have one patient, a very interesting case, and I am happy to say I effected a complete cure.

But I admit that as I read the rules and regulations, temptation entered into my soul. I remembered recent criticisms of a friend of mine. "You're getting demoralised," said he. "These mornings in churches, trips down the bay, and flirtations with nuns, are all very well in their way, but they are ruining you for work. You want to do something big, something to startle and attract general attention and sustain your fame. The public demands it, and they must be satisfied. You were splendid at the Benevolent Asylum and at Kew, but at a church and in a nunnery you're only half a vagabond, and people will begin to think you're played out. You must satisfy the legitimate demands of the public. People who have read you are like tigers who have tasted blood—they crave for more." "Thank you," said I moodily; "but how is this thing to end? Must I go on sacrificing myself forever? And when will the public be satisfied? Must I keep on working up sensational truths till there is nothing left for me but to shoot a bookmaker, and give graphic and truthful accounts of the arrest, imprisonment, trial, verdict, condemned cell, last hours, and drop, finishing my last copy before I was turned off? That would be a big thing, and might satisfy the public. At present I must do what I can; but I promise you, if I live, that I will do bigger things than any I have yet written about. You shall be satisfied that the preaching of Mr. Pearce and the prayers of the Rev. Mother have not demoralised me. I wish I could get up a 'dog and-man fight;' but here you have no 'black country' in which to locate it, although I firmly believe that Mr. James Greenwood wrote the truth in his celebrated article. I have seen a Staffordshire collier walk off with a comrade's ear in his waistcoat pocket after a Sunday morning's quiet amusement. However, wait patiently, and trust me, I am still as big a vagabond as ever."

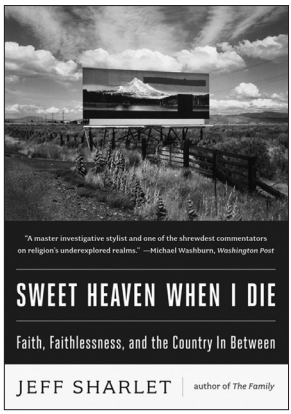
Now was my chance, a great one! I could make a grand *finale* to my Victorian career. There in the book I saw written prescriptions to be made up for the inspector general and his family. I could commence with poisoning them

all, follow up with the half-dozen warders who were taking physic, steal the keys, raise a riot amongst the prisoners, and let them loose on the country. Then Mr. Macpherson would be gibbeted by an indignant populace for his innocent share in the transaction. Anarchy would set in, whilst I, gaily sailing over the Pacific toward the Golden Gate, would concoct a pleasing tale for the 'Frisco *News Letter* of the last escapade of "The Vagabond" in Australia. But I forbore, after battling strongly with the temptation. I think I deserve credit for my forbearance, for Gil Blas himself never had such a grand chance of playing the mischief generally.

Book Review Essay
Jeff Sharlet and the Capacity to Reveal

Sweet Heaven When I Die: Faith, Faithlessness, and the Country in Between by Jeff Sharlet. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011. Paperback, 264 pp., $15.95

Reviewed by Rob Alexander, Brock University, Canada



Jeff Sharlet has earned a name for himself over the last decade or so working the faith-in-America beat. A contributing editor to *Rolling Stone* and *Harper's* and cofounder of the online magazine of religion, politics, and culture, killingthebuddha.com, Sharlet is the author of a number of books, including *The Family*, his bestselling 2008 account of a little-known cabal of Christian fundamentalist politicians and military men committed to influencing the course of American policy and history in the name of laissez-faire capitalism and a God who they believe has explicitly chosen them to fulfill that mission. He followed that book in 2010 with *C Street*, a remarkable look inside the Family's Washington, D.C., Fellowship residence through the high-profile indiscretions of three of its members.

It's a rich, weird beat, sometimes otherworldly yet always human-all-too-human, populated by the lowest, the least, and the lost, but also the elite, the powerful, and the influential, not to mention a full clip of kooks, demagogues, haters, charlatans, senators, and congressmen. "I'd seen some strange things," Sharlet recalled in *C Street*, describing his research for a cross-country report on religion in America he wrote with novelist Peter Manseau:

> a Pentecostal exorcism in North Carolina; a massive outdoor Pagan dance party in honor of "the Horned One" in rural Kansas; a "cowboy church" in Texas featuring a cross made of horseshoes and, in lieu of a picture of Jesus, a lovely portrait of a seriously horned Texas Longhorn steer. (7)

It would be easy for a writer to treat this stuff with a sneer, to see it is as a sort of mythopoeic freak show pitched somewhere on the dusky outskirts of the American imaginary. But in Sharlet's work, faith, along with its no-less-compelling sibling, faithlessness, are main-street phenomena exerting in their

various guises a mighty influence on the political, economic, and cultural life of America, both red and blue. An exacting reporter and a daring, talented writer, Sharlet approaches this material with the restlessly doubting sensibility of Ecclesiastes's Preacher, probing beyond the empirical facts of his subject's stories to sound the existential conditions to which their faith or faithlessness is a response. It is through this skeptical stance, combined with a scholar's knowledge of religions, an activist's passion for social justice, and a literary artist's appetite for the complex and the unresolved, along with what can only be described as a writer's faith that words *can* make a difference, that Sharlet's work earns its wings as literary journalism.

In his most recent book, *Sweet Heaven When I Die: Faith, Faithlessness, and the Country In Between*, Sharlet explores the question of faith through a variety of subjects, some more likely than others, and by way of a number of genres, including personal essays, profiles, and reports. There are thirteen pieces in all, most written, he notes in his acknowledgments, while he was working on *The Family* and *C Street*. Among these are some top-notch examples of long-form narrative journalism, any one of which would work well in a classroom. In "Quebrado," for example, Sharlet tells the story of American anarchist and indy media journalist Brad Will, who died in 2006 while covering a popular Mexican uprising ignored by the US media. "The Rapture" focuses on the dazzling ease with which New Age mysticism overcame any qualms about capitalism that might have lingered from the 1960s to embrace the neoliberal dawning of the age of avariciousness and the great yields it returned. Sharlet also offers a dispiriting report on the media giant Clear Channel, whose omnipresence in the American radio and entertainment industry is such that it "need not exercise its control in order to wield it" (228): with resonances both Orwellian and divine, Clear Channel's slogan, "Wherever you go, we're there" (220), says it all. A different sort of corrosive influence is evident in Sharlet's story about an evangelical church in Berlin where, in the chants of its young congregants to "Close the gate! Close the gate to Berlin!"—against sin, homosexuals, the faithless, and "esoteric religions" (158)—he hears an echo of calls for purification uncomfortably similar to those that rang through the same streets sixty years before. Such intolerance finds its American counterpart (and then some) in Sharlet's unsettling report on Ron Luce's BattleCry youth crusade. Through arena-style rock shows featuring heavy metal flailings and on-stage theatrics Alice Cooper would admire, Luce has introduced his brutally aggressive Christian message to millions of American adolescents. At a Cleveland show, Luce shouts, "I want an attacking church!" to a young crowd inspired by a message, the nuances of which, Sharlet shows, they never quite grasp. But whatever: through this campaign and his "Honor Academy,"

a sort of extreme evangelical finishing school with an annual enrollment of 800, Luce, Sharlet reports, is radicalizing a generation of Christian kids and "growing a new hard core for American fundamentalism" (163).

Less dismaying are the subjects of the various personal essays and profiles Sharlet includes in the volume. "Sweet Fuck All, Colorado" combines memoir, reportage, and travel narrative with reflections on geography, spirit, and our habit of projecting meaning onto the world, to tell the story of the transformation of his former girlfriend, Molly Knott Chilson, from the liberal idealist he knew in a Massachusetts college to the gun-friendly Christian Republican district attorney she would eventually become once returned to her native Colorado and a God as obdurate and unforgiving as her state's rugged terrain. In another essay, Sharlet recalls his uncle, the Vietnam veteran and activist, also Jeff Sharlet, who founded and edited *Vietnam GI*, an important antiwar newspaper produced and distributed to US troops until Sharlet's death at twenty-seven in 1969.

Two profiles in the volume are standouts. The subject of one, Chava Rosenfarb, was a Holocaust survivor and, at the time of Sharlet's writing, "the last living great Yiddish novelist" (125). (She died in January 2011.) Her three-volume novel *The Tree of Life*, based on her experiences in the Lodz Ghetto, "stands," Sharlet writes, "as perhaps the most completely detailed literary depiction of life in the Nazi ghettoes" (126).

It is, however, in Sharlet's profile of the American philosopher Cornel West that *Sweet Heaven When I Die* finds its own spiritual center. It is from West, for example, that Sharlet hears the phrase "the ability to contradict what is" (261) and in it a description of the quality that attracted him to many of the subjects of his book. Such contradiction to "what is," is evident, for example, in the resolve with which Chava Rosenfarb observed, remembered, and then recreated in fiction the world of the Lodz Ghetto. It's there too in Brad Will's earnest compulsion to video scenes of injustice and "screen them in squats and at anarchist infoshops" (95) in order "to show American activists how to join the fight wherever they could find it, or start it" (106). It's there in the antiwar newspaper Sharlet's uncle edited for soldiers, a publication described by J. Edgar Hoover as "seditious" but regarded by GIs as "the truth paper" (46). And it's there in the constant challenge Cornel West has posed in his life and career to the social, political, and academic status quo.

There's a sense in Sharlet's book, however, that "the powers that be" and the "what is" (262) his subjects confront and contradict is not always simply political. It's also existential, experienced in the questions and doubts that afflict us, the most dramatic provocation to which is to be found in death. West "begins with the dead, with darkness," his protégé, Princeton professor Eddie

Glaude Jr. tells Sharlet. "All too often people want to move quickly beyond that" (63). There's no end of incentive to do so, and Sharlet's sharpest criticism is reserved for those who use their power to encourage in others a simplistic disregard of the sheer complexity of human being. In *C Street*, for example, he lamented a news media that reduces the infinitely nuanced matters of human desire to the crude moral shorthand of gotcha headlines. The sort of existential relief such reductions offer is exemplified in *Sweet Heaven* in Lacey Mosely, a singer in Ron Luce's Battle Cry crusade, who tells Sharlet that the faith in which she has found refuge is one that promises "not answers but an end to questions" (185).

But as Graham Greene said, "When we are not sure, we are alive." What mental lockdowns like Mosely's obviate is the experience of those moments of intense uncertainty West calls "the death shudder" (54) and the unease we must face when we become aware of a world in which the meanings to which we are habituated can flip in an instant into nonmeaning. Under the spell of the Rocky Mountain sublime, Sharlet writes, "you could see as true everything we tell ourselves about 'nature' and 'beauty' and wilderness serene; blink, and it was white again, emptied of such stories" (20). Life is lived in the space of such a blink, and what is true of meaning here is no less so for matters of personal identity. We're all hybrids, Sharlet suggests, none clearly this or that, but always something in between. His book is filled with individuals occupying different, sometimes contradictory, worlds. The anarchist Brad Will, who "thought of himself as half warrior, half poet" (94), moved without awkwardness or a sense of disjunction between the bourgeois home of his "buttoned-down Republican" family (104) and the tear-gas clouds and barricades of his revolutionary life. Cornel West's work, Sharlet tells us, continues W.E.B Du Bois's investigation of "double consciousness," the African American experience of an identity caught between a sense of self and of that self as it is regarded by white eyes. No less divided is Chava Rosenfarb, whom Sharlet describes as living at once in the doomed world of the Lodz Ghetto and Auschwitz and in the postwar domestic space where she wrote about that terrible experience. (It was her ability, Sharlet notes, "to exist in two worlds that for decades allowed her to live at all" [141].) Then there's Bryan Dilworth, a Clear Channel "talent buyer" whose relationship with "the whale that swallowed rock, pop, and radio whole" (223) is never clear, at least, it seems, in his own mind. "At various times, Dilworth told me he worked for Clear Channel, or didn't work for Clear Channel, or Clear Channel simply didn't matter" (223), but in the end, this man who "looked like a joyous idiot savant of rock, a true-heart, whammy-bar metal monster" (223) slumps and tells Sharlet "It's all payola, dude" (225). And finally, there's Sharlet himself:

his mother "a hillbilly from Tennessee by way of Indiana" (80), his father "a Jew from Schenectady" (80), Sharlet was "split" between them when he was two and they divorced. "Thereafter," he writes, "I was a Jew on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and every other weekend, and my mother's the rest of the week" (80).

But in his book, such spaces between identities, between certainties, although deeply unsettling and conducive to doubt, have also the capacity to reveal. When the New Age healer Sondra Shaye tells Sharlet that he is not a "seeker" but a "doubter (212), Sharlet tells us she pretty much got it right. "Doubt, she said, is a calling. It is not unbelief, it is in between. . . . 'Doubt,' she said, 'is your revelation'" (212).

Deployed from a position of doubt, Sharlet's stories offer a powerful challenge to those true believers who would use a weaponized language not to reveal but to conceal. As Vera prays in her Berlin church for a cleansing from the impurities she perceives around her, Sharlet offers a powerful counter-prayer: "Forgive us, I prayed, for that language we do share. The language that whittles God down to a sharp point with which to spread a gospel . . . and uses the language swirling around them to hide their meanings" (160). Sharlet's words do something else. In beginning with death, proceeding by way of doubt, and in focusing on the spaces between apparent certainties, his essays attempt to unravel those certainties, offering in their place not answers so much as possibilities. In the acknowledgements to *C Street,* he writes, "I've always thought the line drawn between journalism and activism was fuzzy" (291), and he praises those with the ability to "cross back and forth" between the two "with ease" (291). It's no accident, then, that many of the subjects of his stories here—Chava Rosenfarb, Brad Will, Cornel West, Jeff Sharlet, the uncle—are writers and reporters with a commitment to social change and justice.

In his previous books *The Family* and *C Street*, Sharlet demonstrated a similar activist stance, showing that he could work his way through thickets of data and documents to tease out lines of power concealed for decades from the public eye. He's a great reporter, and his most recent book builds on those strengths. It also, however, confirms a truth about literary journalism, and that is that any beat, reported with honesty, imagination, an open, doubting, inquiring mind, and with soul, can lead beyond trite certainties and into the human heart.

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.

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