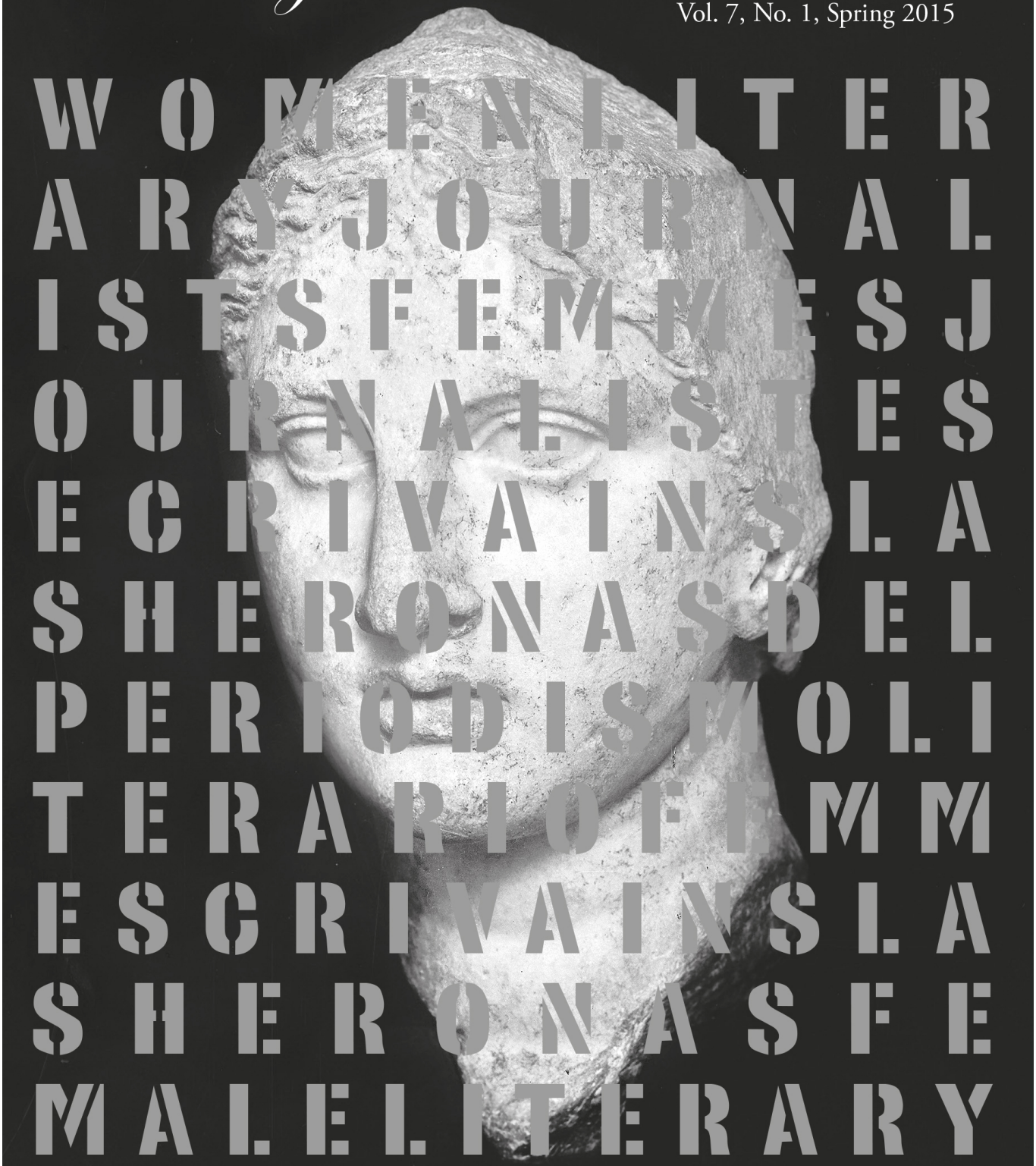
SPQ+A: William Dow interviews Barbara Ehrenreich

# Literary Journalism Studies

Vol. 7, No. 1, Spring 2015




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

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# *Literary Journalism Studies*



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# SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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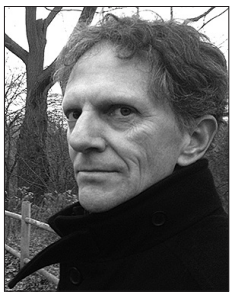
BOOK REVIEWS are invited. They should be 1,000–2,000 words and focus on the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editor based on merit. Reviewers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



Greetings and welcome to this special issue of *Literary Journalism Studies*, which focuses on the work of female literary journalists. For this occasion I have the pleasure of handing over the editorial reins to Leonora Flis of the University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia.

The genesis of this project dates back two years, to the eighth annual conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, which was held at the University of Tampere, Finland, May 16–18, 2013. I was president of IALJS at the time, and as such was charged with the honorable task of christening one among several worthy sessions the "President's Panel." As it turned out, the panel I settled on had been organized and was being moderated by Flis and was entitled, "Women's Reportage and Public Memory: From the late Nineteenth Century to the 1940s." The panel featured presentations from five female scholars from Belgium, Slovenia, and the U.S.A. (including Flis).

As I understand it, after the day's proceedings ended, Flis and Rob Alexander of Brock University, Canada, chair of the IALJS Program Committee, were walking back to the Scandic, our conference hotel. They struck up a conversation about how well the "Women's Reportage" panel had gone. Flis wondered aloud if something more could not be done to follow up—something more ambitious, something for the journal perhaps. Alexander suggested the possibility of putting together an issue's worth of articles dedicated to the subject of female literary journalism.

From that point onward, Flis and I toiled, on and off, to organize a special issue proposal. Eventually it was presented to then-editor John C. Hartsock as well as associate editors of the journal for feedback. The proposal was well received, and Flis proceeded from there. In these pages the reader will find the work of female literary journalists from countries such as Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, South Africa, and the United States analyzed, critiqued and, yes, applauded. I will leave it to Flis herself, in her guest editor's introduction, to say more about the issue and to introduce the individual articles.

I would like to thank all of the contributors, and attentive readers, for their diligence and hard work to make this issue a success. I hope *LJS* readers will appreciate and enjoy the breadth and variety on offer here.

Finally, I reserve my singular praise for last. I want to salute Lea Flis, who now has made so real her dream of an issue dedicated entirely to literary journalism from a female perspective.

*Bill Reynolds*

# Women and Literary Journalism: A Special Issue

Leonora Flis, guest editor
University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia

*Leonora Flis is an assistant professor at the University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia. She teaches courses in literature, film, and intercultural studies. She also works as a book and film critic and a translator. Flis is the author of* Factual Fiction: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel *(2010). Her forthcoming book is a collection of short stories,* Time Bend E 357 *(2015).*

# On Recognition of Quality Writing

by Leonora Flis

As Bill Reynolds has already mentioned, about two years ago a casual conversation after one of the panels during the IALJS conference in Tampere, Finland, touched upon the issue of women writers, female journalists, and more precisely, upon the question of how noticeable and laudable they are, or rather, are able to be. We never expressed doubts about the impact and quality of their work. The concern we raised was clearly a gender concern, a quota concern, even. He asked me if I thought the IALJS made enough room for women as writers and women talking about women writers. I paused for a second and could not give a straight answer right away. In my mind I added women as subjects of news stories to the list. More questions started popping up in my head. What I knew for sure was that our special IALJS panels dedicated to female writers were needed and perhaps beyond timely. For, yes, it did seem that we had, most likely unintentionally, put more focus on the male reporters in the past. And so, Bill, Robert Alexander, and I began conversing about how it was high time to create something tangible under the auspices of *LJS* that would highlight the literary journalism of women.

Did we set out to engage in a meticulous debate on whether or not there is such a thing as *écriture feminine,* specifically in the journalistic discourse? Did we have harsh gender clashes in mind? Was the question of sexism the one that primarily guided our endeavors? Interesting as these questions may be, they were not central to our discussion and, consequently, our decision. The concluding idea was to dedicate a special issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* to female writers who should have gotten more general exposure, and more detailed scholarly examination, earlier on. We set out to illuminate exceptional female writers, some of whom have been marginalized because they were, or are, women. In fact, some have been completely forgotten, erased from the journalistic world, and only a few have managed to enter the canon of the grand works of journalism.

Things have surely changed regarding the position of women in our society since the days of suffragettes marching in the streets. Still, it is difficult not to make this conversation at least in part a discussion of male dominance and centrality that, after almost fifty years of intense female activism, legal action, and social change, still characterize our culture. The persistent, ongo-

ing problem of gender discrimination has affected the careers of some of the female writers in this special issue, and so it is inevitable that some of the essays will expose various obstacles these writers have encountered. Moreover, their political orientation and social engagement was, and is, sometimes problematic (perhaps even more so because of the gender aspect), as some articles reveal. However, in essence, our central focus became exposing high quality long-form journalistic writing on issues that have stirred us throughout history. The only condition was that women should hold the pen. Clearly, there is scholarship on female (also literary) journalists out there. However, apart from the obvious names, such as Joan Didion, Martha Gellhorn, Jane Kramer, Susan Orlean, Gail Sheehy, and Gloria Steinem, female journalists who cultivate a more subjective and immersive kind of reporting have been left out of scholarly examination to a certain degree.

The truth is, female writers have often times been involved—voluntarily or involuntarily—in a struggle to evade or resolve a typical professional and gender-role conflict, yet the essays in this issue do not seek to overexpose that aspect of reality. Rather, they make gender an organic part of the analysis rather than a special mission or central characteristic. Having acquired some journalistic experience myself, I would have to agree with Barbara Ehrenreich, who in our Scholar-Practitioner Q&A for this issue says "the overwhelming problem for journalists right now is not sexism; it is the disappearance of our way of life." Indeed, there is no way anyone but a few "consecrated" journalists could survive as a freelancer today. It's not so much sexism or elitism that is killing the profession, but the rapidly devolving journalism business model over the past decade and a half has reduced the number of legitimate job opportunities drastically, and continues to do so. Traditional journalism is practically dead, and corporate news media, now in survival mode, have mutated radically. A crisis reporter from Slovenia, Boštjan Videmšek, recently expressed a similar concern. He was speaking of war journalism mainly, but his view can be stretched over other areas of journalism as well. Videmšek said young reporters are working for little or no money at this point. The media houses and their editors have used the financial crisis as an excuse to not pay more experienced journalists to cover stories in the field. Thus, older journalists with a substantial opus are losing the opportunity to work, while younger colleagues often times must work for free, not infrequently covering life-threatening events, risking their lives. Of course, the heightened development of communication technologies has reshaped the journalistic landscape as well. Now anyone can report and send out information from just about anywhere in the world in real time. This brute fact has affected the status, structure, and authority of journalism.

The essays collected in this issue view the status, structure, and authority of journalism produced by women across time, while also debating issues such as: the line between fact and fiction; the phenomenon of the immersion journalist; the relation between the danger of war reportage and feminine sensitivity; social and political activism as they merge with journalism; the questions of a writer's nationality and ethnicity, and the impact of those identities on the writing; the question of the (allowed) depths of empathy in reportage; the relation between objectivity and subjectivity in reporting; and many more. In *The White Album*, Didion noted that "we tell ourselves stories in order to live." I hope this collection of essays has the potential to expand our understanding of the world of journalism and its core subject, life, just a bit more and perhaps add up to our knowledge of how literary journalism in its various forms and shapes grasps hold of life and processes it.

We have tried to create national versatility in our selection of essays. Still, writers from the United States prevail, no doubt in part also because the American journalistic space is rich in its collection of noteworthy writers and has a long tradition of literary journalism. The three Americans appear in the company of one journalist each from Canada, France, Germany, Australia, and Argentina, plus a writer (originally from England) who spent years living in Rhodesia and other parts of southern Africa. The writing ranges over a reasonably large time frame, from the late nineteenth century to present times. Topicality, superior writing, and integrity in reporting—these are the strands and guiding principles that connect the pieces forming our special issue.

In the first essay, Roberta Maguire foregrounds the work of a writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston, particularly her stories describing the trial of Ruby McCollum for the murder of Dr. LeRoy Adams in Live Oak, Florida. Hurston's stories, written with a noticeable "literary flair," as Maguire notes, were published in African American newspaper the *Pittsburgh Courier*. The series, which began to appear in February 1953 and ran weekly for just over two months, echoes Hurston's 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. This observation led Maguire to investigate the relation between the novel and the McCollum series. Maguire explores the journalistic function of these echoes and discusses the importance of Hurston's stories within the context of the African American tradition in literary journalism. The interaction between journalism and literature is well known in literary journalism, but in Hurston's case we have a reversal of the more frequent route of a writer developing her fiction writing out of earlier journalistic work—an aspect that intrigues Maguire. Moreover, the essay searches for a truth revealed in Hurston's writing that goes beyond the official narrative of history. She points to gender

and racial expectations in the South at the time of the trial, and the inevitable schism between what was reported in the national mainstream press and the actual, complex realities of the court case. These realities never became part of the official narrative, but were captured in Hurston's accounts. Hurston set out to write about "the undertones, the overtones, and the implications" of the case, all of which become part of Maguire's close reading of Hurston's trial series. Maguire's essay provides the reader with an innovative insight into a fascinating series of stories, and moreover, into a captivating life story—that of McCollum and of Hurston. After Maguire's essay, we reprint two of Hurston's McCollum trial columns.

In the next essay, Nancy L. Roberts discusses the work of Dorothy Day and Meridel Le Sueur during the tumultuous times of the Great Depression. Both Day and Le Sueur wanted to highlight the lives of the poor and the oppressed, or, in the words of Roberts, "literary journalism gave these writers [Day, Le Sueur and other social activists-writers of the time] an effective platform for advocacy for the dignity and the fair treatment of workers and the impoverished." Further, Roberts talks of an exclusively feminine perspective on oppression and poverty, which brings in the question of a special, gender-marked sensitivity. Roberts describes Day and Le Sueur's writing as "literary journalism of advocacy" that not only exposes the poor and the tormented but also often puts its central focus on women—a rarity for those times. The essay also explains the particularities of Depression-era journalism and how those are reflected in Day and Le Sueur's writing, illustrated by examples from various texts. For instance, "inductive storytelling" happens when the writer focuses on a specific individual in order to inspire a more general conclusion. Day and Le Sueur, who were not only reporters but also active participants in the depicted situations (Roberts discusses the importance of the usage of "I" in this context), search for a larger truth, or truth of coherence, one that penetrates the deepest layers of the Depression era's harsh realities, as reflected in the lives of carefully selected individuals (women in particular). Day and Le Sueur both practiced immersion journalism in its best form, and Roberts gives us a lucid portrayal of how their private lives merged with their professional aspirations. During the repressive literary and political climate of the Cold War and McCarthyism, as Roberts writes, Day and Le Sueur had problems because of their social activism, but the more liberal climate of the 1960s helped them regain their position within the public sphere. Roberts, finally, appeals to the scholarly community to further investigate the work of Day and Le Sueur, their mutual areas of interest, and their outstanding journalism of advocacy.

Bruce Gillespie takes us across the border to Canada with his analysis of Edna Staebler's journalism. Gillespie describes Staebler—who always had aspirations to become a novelist rather than a journalist—as one of Canada's early literary journalists, but points to her magazine work being overshadowed by her later success as a cookbook writer (her books with Mennonite-inspired recipes continue to sell well today, as Gillespie tells us) and philanthropist. The essay brings to the fore Staebler's magazine profiles from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s (published in *Maclean's* and *Chatelaine*, two of Canada's leading magazines) that mostly portray the lives of ordinary Canadians who lived in isolated communities or belonged to marginalized cultural, ethic, and religious groups such as African American slave descendants in Nova Scotia, Hutterites of Alberta, or families of Italian immigrants in downtown Toronto. These profiles, which helped shape Canada's postwar multicultural identity, are solid examples of immersion reporting, complemented with prominent ethnographic traits. Gillespie examines different Staebler's profiles searching for the various qualities we have come to identify as aspects of immersion and participatory journalism. Staebler was a "storyteller at heart," writes Gillespie, so it was relatively easy for her to use, almost instinctively, the writing techniques associated with narrative journalism. Gillespie's essay invites us into Staebler's world, showing us how important it is to expand the usually discussed and accepted range of or canonized scope of literary journalism, not only in Canada but worldwide.

Isabelle Meuret's essay bridges continents and cultural identities, as she draws parallels between the work of three women who reported from the Spanish Civil War (while connecting the Spanish tragedy to transnational, global concerns) and were bound by a common political stance, determination, and approach to reporting: Martha Gellhorn, Gerda Taro, and Andrée Viollis. Meuret thus introduces a specific thematic field of journalism: war journalism, a proverbially male-dominated area of reporting. Meuret calls the work of the three reporters a case of "emotional journalism," alluding to some characteristics in the selected reports that may stem from the fact that it was women who channeled, selected, and eventually reported the horrors of the war. At the same time, Gellhorn's, Taro's, and Viollis's work is presented as highly informative, factual, and accurate. Meuret's essay at times reads as the most feminist-theory-marked piece in our selection, introducing the notions of the "Subaltern" and the "Other." As Meuret notes: "Emotional journalism was a strategy to alienate the reporters' inner selves and get closer to their subjects, which their own subaltern positions facilitated. Their femininity was used to serve their journalistic calling and access an almost exclusively male public sphere." Meuret, by examining the work of the three women report-

ers, explores the specificities of war journalism written by women; namely, she examines the unique textual (sometimes, especially in Gellhorn's writing, colored with visual and filmic features) and photographic (Taro) production of the three women, which, in the words of Meuret, "reflects the many circumstances that brought them on the battlefield including, but not limited to, their gender." Meuret's article draws the links between the select reporters by means of charting three focal points: the reasons why they came to Spain and the circumstances in which they wrote their work reportages; secondly, "the poetic qualities of their journalism," shown through specific examples of their work; and, lastly, their political engagement and activism.

With Sue Joseph's essay, we land on Australian shores. In this piece, which highlights the work of academic, award-winning (literary) journalist, author, and social commentator Margaret Simons, questions concerning the narrative-journalism-related terminology are raised as well, since there is no consensus in Australia yet as to what the most appropriate term describing this type of writing is or should be. This is naturally not just an Australian dilemma, but Joseph specifically points out that Simons doesn't want to label herself as a literary journalist but prefers to speak of "disinterested" and "dirty" journalism as her trademark (while still feeling relatively comfortable with the term "narrative journalism," as the article informs us). As Joseph notes, "Australian creative nonfiction writers as a rule do not identify themselves as such"; they prefer to simply call their work "writing." Joseph also explains that most substantial Australian creative nonfiction can be found in long-form literary or book-length journalism. The essay is mostly based on an interview Joseph conducted with Simons, but it also offers an analysis of one of her works that has "deep political and cultural impact and significance," as Joseph states: *The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair* (2003). Before Joseph introduces us to the life and work of Simons and gets into a detailed analysis of the book, showing that the work is a solid example of book-length literary journalism, she also talks about book-length journalism in Australia in general and female writers within that context. Through the analysis of Simons's book that unfolds complex relations between the indigenous people of Australia and non-Aboriginal Australians, Joseph's text poses pertinent questions that relate to objectivity and subjectivity in journalism. Moreover, she debates—together with Simons—what it means to be a journalist and what makes a good story.

Pablo Calvi's essay discusses the work of Argentinian literary journalist Leila Guerriero, a leading voice of *crónica*, the dominant form of Latin American literary journalism. Calvi focuses on Guerriero's journalistic narrator, while noticing a special constant in her texts, namely, an equal measure

of certainty and doubt (even self-doubt). Guerriero works this tension to reach a boiling point of journalistic truth. Calvi builds his analysis mostly on texts contained in the collection, *Frutos extraños* (2009). Guerriero is not driven primarily by factual precision, or as Calvi says, "in her stories, doubt exists not as something to be overcome, ignored, avoided or corrected, but rather as an essential element of truth itself." In fact, an integral aspect of her style is deliberate imprecision. This does not imply that she is not meticulous in conducing her research, Calvi says, but rather points to Guerriero's belief that absolutely objective reporting does not exist. In other words, there is no such thing as a completely reliable narrator who feeds the reader nothing but objective facts. Calvi shows that "intense reporting often renders the exact opposite effect to mathematical precision and quantifiable fact." The more a reporter becomes involved in a specific story, the more she becomes aware "of all the nuances. . . . the unknowable elements that are part of the sum total." Calvi introduces the notion of the "uncertain narrator" (also, splintered narrator) who is interested in the plurality of truths, in information coming from different, sometimes contradictory, sources. This is the sort of journalistic truth that Guerriero works towards. Calvi finds another telling example of such writing also in Guerriero's 2013 work, titled *Una historia sencilla* (*A simple story*), which talks about González Alcántara, a professional malambo dancer. Other examples of Guerriero's writing cited in the essay include Guerriero's book of profiles, *Plano Americano* (2013), which also clearly show how Guerriero prioritizes truth over fact. Calvi's essay shows how applying uncertainty in narratives can in fact contribute to the complexity of journalistic texts and enable the reader to become even more immersed in the story.

South African scholars Anthea Garman and Gillian Rennie co-wrote the final essay in our special issue. The center of their study is writer Alexandra Fuller, who was born in England and brought up in Southern Africa (mostly in the former Rhodesia). Fuller's work ranges from autobiographical narratives to magazine feature writing, and Garman and Rennie show how Fuller's geographical and national backgrounds (they describe her as "a nonfiction writer of Southern Africa") influenced her writing, as well as how she became a fixture on the mainstream American magazine scene (precisely by developing a distinctive literary voice born from her extended exposure to Africa). Once she moved to America in 2005, Fuller started publishing for magazines such as the *New Yorker, Harper's, National Geographic*, and *Vogue*. Her mixed identities and simultaneous closeness to and distance from Africa gave her an unusual point of view that was desirable to editors and benefited her writing career. These days, Garman and Rennie explain, Fuller's long-form journalism mostly revolves around two main thematic premises: she

is either addressing the political situation in Southern African countries or writing about the American West. In the past, it was mostly white men who wrote about Africa, contributing significantly to the Western world's idea of the African society, history, and culture. Fuller has had to face this male writers' legacy as well when venturing into journalism and, before that, autobiographical writing. The essay's authors list both negative and positive reviews of Fuller's work and her portrayals of the experiences of white people living in Africa. Fuller's fluid and unstable (or liminal, as Garman and Rennie describe it) identity—geographical, cultural, literary, and journalistic—is central to Garman's and Rennie's view of the writer and he work. Their project, in essence, is an exploration into mapping Fuller's work, and into grasping the meaning of liminality, in writing as well as in life as such.

As is the case with special issues, they attempt expose a specific aspect of a specific notion, phenomenon, situation, or event. What ideas, what "shifting phantasmagoria" of life, to use Didion's words again, we manage to successfully freeze onto the following pages depends on readers' states of mind, views on life, problems to deal with, and battles to fight. Whatever reaction the collected essays generate will surely be appreciated. My thoughts are not only with the female journalists who are out there reporting every day, bleeding life force faster than blood in order to make it in this precarious business, or even just to survive, either because that is the nature of their reporting, or because they are indeed involved in gender battles for equality and recognition. I also extend my hopes to all journalists whose work brings enlightenment, encouragement, and integrity into our lives, and who work twenty-four/seven for negligible paychecks. I hope the reader will forgive this preaching, but I find it of the utmost importance to stress the significance of the fight for decent lives for journalists, for a fair salary, and finally, for an improved reputation of the journalistic profession, which that has been besmirched in part by the demands and logic of corporate media and the system that feeds them.

As for concluding words, my first word of gratitude goes to Bill Reynolds, who was the leading force behind this project, offering advice and guidance, and my second goes to the IALJS editorial board for its initial input. I would like to thank William Dow specifically for his interview with Barbara Ehrenreich, which contributes significantly to the theme of this issue. Finally, to all the writers who contributed their scholarship, time, and patience to help make this project a reality, my heartfelt thanks.

Zora Neale Hurston, beating the hountar, or mama drum. New York World-Telegram & Sun Collection, Library of Congress.

# From Fiction to Fact: Zora Neale Hurston and the Ruby McCollum Trial

Roberta S. Maguire
University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, United States

**Abstract:** Beginning in October 1952 and continuing to May 1953, Zora Neale Hurston contributed sixteen stories to the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the African American paper then with the largest national circulation, related to a sensational murder trial in Live Oak, Florida: Ruby McCollum, a well-to-do, married African American mother of three, was accused of shooting and killing Dr. C. LeRoy Adams, a popular white physician—her doctor—who had just been elected to the state legislature. Six of the articles covered the actual trial; the remaining ten were devoted to telling Ruby's "life story" in an effort to correct the oversimplified narrative reported in the national mainstream press—that McCollum shot Adams over a disputed medical bill—and which became the "official" account. To tell the story, Hurston relied to a large degree on elements from her 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*—a reversal of the more commonly recognized trajectory of a writer drawing on earlier journalism to inform later fiction. This essay charts the echoes from the novel and argues they are in the service of greater truth-telling than the South of that era would permit: The echoes bring to the fore a complicated story shaped by gender expectations, challenging the "official" nonstory born of racial expectations.

In 1937, Zora Neale Hurston published *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* a novel that today is regarded as a crucial text in the African American literary tradition. It tells the story of Janie Crawford, who was born in the late nineteenth century and raised in Florida by her grandmother, a former slave, and it traces her life from her awakening sense of her own sexuality and related dreams for love through three marriages. The first, to Logan Killicks, a reasonably prosperous but middle-aged farmer, was forced upon her by her protective grandmother. Janie chose the second husband to escape the first.

Joe ("Jody") Starks was closer to her in age and also ambitious. He took her to the new all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, where he quickly became the mayor. The third marriage, to a blues-playing, gambling day laborer nicknamed Tea Cake, followed shortly after her second husband, who turned out to be domineering and abusive, died. This last marriage was the fulfillment of Janie's youthful dreams, yet it ended tragically in the Everglades when she was forced to shoot Tea Cake, who, out of his mind because of an untreated bite from a rabid dog, threatened to kill her. The novel ends with Janie returning to Eatonville, after having been jailed, then tried, for Tea Cake's murder and found innocent by an all-white male jury who declared the shooting "entirely accidental and justifiable" (188). Our closing image is of Janie, self-confident and alone, back in the house her second husband built, content to live on her happy memories of life with Tea Cake.

The novel is remarkable for several reasons. First, it is a joyous celebration of African American community and culture—from the vernacular language the characters speak to the verbal games they play to the folktales they share. These cultural dimensions reflect the fieldwork Hurston conducted in the late 1920s after studying anthropology at Columbia University under Franz Boas. Second, in the novel Hurston deftly uses the technique of "free indirect discourse," which at times melds her characters' voices with the omniscient third-person narrative voice. This allows her not only to celebrate the black community but also to critique it for its obeisance to patriarchal values, which the shifting alignment of the narrative voice underscores. And, third, the novel uses the specifics of black culture to tell a universally human story, a woman's story about the search for love and self-knowledge, which is one reason it regularly appears on reading lists today for a range of courses—women's literature, African American literature, the modern novel.

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* and the 1930s were a high point in Hurston's career as a fiction writer. In fact, after that decade during which three of her novels appeared, she published only one more, *Seraph on the Suwannee*, in 1948. Unable to convince a publisher to take on her book-length projects after that, Hurston was often strapped for cash and deeply in debt. That prompted a move in 1950 back to Florida, where she had spent the happiest years of her childhood as well as significant time writing earlier books. There she thought she could live more cheaply while continuing to write. She sustained herself by growing her own food, borrowing money from friends, and turning to journalism.[1] Hurston had contributed nonfiction—articles based on her anthropological research, personal essays, and book reviews—throughout her career to such publications as *American Mercury*, *Negro Digest*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the *New York Herald Tribune*, and by the

early 1950s, given her financial situation, she was anxious for a long-term journalistic assignment. In 1952 she was just about to begin writing a column for the *Weekly Review*, an African American newspaper published in Georgia, when the *Pittsburgh Courier*, at that time the African American newspaper having the largest black readership in the country,[2] approached her with a better offer: to cover a potentially explosive murder trial in Florida.[3] She readily accepted.

With 35,000 subscribers in Florida alone,[4] the *Courier* wanted to give its readers expansive coverage of the trial, which was about to take place in Live Oak, a small town in the north-central part of the state. The defendant was Ruby McCollum, a well-to-do, married African American mother of three, who was accused of shooting and killing Dr. C. LeRoy Adams, a popular white physician—her doctor—who had just been elected to the state legislature. The shooting took place in his Live Oak office on August 3, 1952. A black woman killing a prominent white man was reason enough to cause disquiet—after all, this was the segregated South pre-*Brown v. Board of Education*—and drew national attention. The *Courier* had sent two of its reporters to the town shortly after the story broke.[5] But when rumors started circulating that the two parties had been lovers for years, and that the doctor was likely the father of one of McCollum's three children, the paper's top editors thought it would be beneficial to have someone with literary flair cover the actual proceedings.[6] By then living in Eau Gallie, Florida, a few hours' drive from Live Oak, Hurston, whom the paper described as "[o]ne of America's most illustrious women novelists,"[7] was a logical choice.

Beginning in October 1952 and continuing to May 1953, Hurston contributed sixteen stories to the *Courier*, six of which chronicled McCollum's trial, which ended on December 20, 1952, with a guilty verdict and death sentence that her attorneys appealed to the state Supreme Court. In these stories Hurston's literary flair is evident—she turns her courtroom report into an actual dramatic scene, complete with stage directions and dialogue. The remaining ten, all appearing after the trial, carried the same headline: "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!" They functioned not only to fulfill the *Courier*'s pledge that Hurston's reporting would go beyond the court proceedings to "the undertones . . . the overtones . . . the implications" of the case,[8] but also as a corrective to the oversimplified story that was reported in the national mainstream press immediately after the shooting occurred—that McCollum shot Adams over a disputed medical bill—and which became the "official" story.[9] Hurston recalled for William Bradford Huie (who, prompted by Hurston, covered McCollum's retrial granted after her lawyers' appeal) how disappointed she initially was that such an oversimplification had been

propagated by the black and white residents of Live Oak and then embraced by the press:

> It was like a chant. The Doctor Bill; the Mad, Mean Nigger Woman. It was Dogma. It was a posture, but a posture posed in granite. There was no other circumstance in the case, let alone an extenuating one. This was the story; and the Community was sticking to it. The press was requested to take the Community's story, not to dig up any "confusing" material. And the press took it.[10]

Disappointment became "disillusionment" for Hurston when even the judge, prosecutors, and all-male jury refused to accept any challenge to the "Dogma." As she recounted, again for Huie:

> The trial was ended. A Negro woman had become infuriated over a doctor bill, and she had killed the good doctor . . . the friend of the poor . . . a man whose only rule had been the Golden Rule. . . . And now the poor men would have their justice: an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.
>
> The Community will had been done.[11]

"The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!" began appearing February 28, 1953, and ran weekly for just over two months. In the ten installments, Hurston wrote about Ruby's childhood, maturation to womanhood, marriage to Sam, and affair with LeRoy Adams, which, taken together, countered the official story that denied there *was* a story, a woman's story, filled with the complexity and ambiguity of human motivation. It was a challenge to gather the material, however, because the presiding judge, Hal W. Adams (no relation to the doctor), had denied all reporters any direct access to Ruby throughout the trial and while Ruby remained in jail awaiting the outcome of her lawyers' appeal. So to develop her stories, Hurston relied on the little she could get from the residents of Live Oak, who feared retribution if they said too much,[12] the recollections of a former teacher, and Ruby's family members, all of whom lived out of town—and fiction, Hurston's own 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Other scholars have acknowledged that there are echoes of *Their Eyes* in Hurston's Ruby McCollum series. Both Valerie Boyd, in her 2003 biography of Hurston, *Wrapped in Rainbows*, and Carla Kaplan, in her 2002 edited volume of Hurston's correspondence, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, note how she "recycled" language from the novel, applying Janie's youthful longings to Ruby.[13] Susan Edwards Meisenhelder, in *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick: Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston*, not only comments on how the language used to describe Janie and her desires in *Their Eyes* reappears in Hurston's portrayal of Ruby, but also finds that Hurston's representation of Ruby's husband, Sam McCollum, a successful farmer/store

owner/property manager with a side gambling business, recalls Janie's second domineering husband, Jody Starks: "Like Starks who feels Janie should be satisfied as Mrs. Mayor, Sam sees Ruby's role as wife as that of sexless, subservient appendage of her husband."[14] Building on these scholars' findings, this essay explores the journalistic function of the echoes, which a close reading indicates are even more extensive than previously acknowledged. Combined with the also-repeated technique of free indirect discourse, the echoes from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* provide a framework for Hurston's representation of Ruby that points up the inadequacy of the received explanation for Adams's murder—she was angry about his bill for medical services—and simultaneously offers a critique of patriarchal values similar to that offered in the novel. The interplay between journalism and literature is one that scholars of literary journalism readily acknowledge, but here we have a reversal of the more commonly recognized trajectory of a writer drawing on earlier journalism to inform later fiction[15] with Hurston drawing on an earlier literary creation to inform her reporting of an event that happened decades later—and doing so to facilitate greater truth-telling.

**Hurston and the African American Tradition in Literary Journalism**

An instance of a writer reaching back to her earlier fiction to inform her later literary journalism is reason enough to focus on Hurston's remarkable series, since a preoccupation with form and style, and especially the historical roots of national traditions and of work produced by individual practitioners, continues as a focus of current scholarship.[16] But in addition to that, this series is important for what it adds to our understanding of the African American tradition in literary journalism. While the parameters of that tradition are just beginning to come into focus, there are a few points that we do well to keep in mind: 1) defining what makes journalism literary in the African American tradition requires an awareness of the differing trajectories and purposes of the "conventional" journalism appearing in the mainstream US press versus African American venues—for example, the mid-twentieth-century insistence in mainstream publications on objectivity has never been so prized in the black press; and 2) once African Americans began contributing to mainstream papers and magazines, place of publication—mainstream- or black-owned—exerts an enormous influence on the form and content of literary journalism produced by African Americans, as it radically alters audience expectations and authorial goals. And, finally, because of the specific history of the US black community, periods of intense production of literary journalism in the African American tradition do not always coincide with that of the mainstream.[17]

The decade of the 1950s, which is typically seen as a relatively slow period for mainstream US literary journalism, was a period of remarkable productivity for black writers of literary journalism.[18] This was the decade that saw the end of legally sanctioned segregation with *Brown v. Board of Education*. There were also more venues for black writers to publish their work than ever before: black weekly newspapers still had significant circulations; John H. Johnson was building his black magazine empire; and mainstream publications—newspapers and magazines—were more willing to employ and publish black writers. And celebrated writers from the Harlem Renaissance were still active, while a new generation, emboldened by the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, was on the scene.

Hurston was a celebrated writer of the Harlem Renaissance. As such, she, along with Langston Hughes, was a member of the older generation of African American writers producing literary journalism in the 1950s. And hers was then and remains today a complex voice to come to terms with: While a writer of stories about black folk and the black community, she declined to include herself among the category of Race Men and Women, which she described as black intellectuals who saw themselves as "champions of 'Race Consciousness'" and for whom "no Negro exists as an individual."[19] As she noted in her 1950 essay, "What White Publishers Won't Print," that position grew from her sense that the nation's "welfare" depended upon its citizens "realiz[ing] that minorities do think, and think about something other than the race problem. That they are very human and internally, according to natural endowment, are just like everybody else"[20]—complicated, conflicted, capable of love and vulnerability, heroism, and stupidity. Her series on McCollum, appearing in a black-owned publication, is the sort of story she believed the mainstream press could not accept. Although race does not recede completely from the story, it is at most a complicating factor in a particular human drama, one that her fiction, including *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, regularly probed, and which Andrew Delbanco has described as "the destructive force of love, which renders a woman vulnerable to a man who cannot subdue his compulsive need for new conquests."[21] Appearing during the years that *Brown v. Board of Education* was working its way through the court system, the McCollum series functions as a challenge to all readers, including Race Men and Women, to see Ruby in her full complexity, a woman much like Janie Crawford in *Their Eyes*—black, to be sure, but with hopes and desires transcending race.

## How *Their Eyes Were Watching God* Shaped Ruby McCollum's Life Story

The surface similarities between Hurston's 1937 novel and the McCollum story are striking: They share a Florida setting; both Janie, the novel's

heroine, and Ruby had married a man who became exceptionally prosperous; both endure a trial dominated by white men for shooting and killing a lover. But despite those obvious and immediate similarities, the echoes of the novel, including the technique of free indirect discourse, do not clearly emerge until Hurston turns to reporting Ruby's story after the trial. It was then that, discouraged by testimony and a verdict that she described elsewhere as "mass delusion by unanimous agreement," Hurston began telling Ruby McCollum's life story in an effort to free it from the "smothering blanket of silence" she had found the trial to be.[22] Initially the echoes of the novel may seem ironic, for the trajectory of Ruby's life, as told by Hurston, moves in the opposite direction from Janie's, which, after marrying Tea Cake, was away from material wealth and deeper into the culture shared by ordinary black folk. Yet it is also those differences that, when combined with the echoes from *Their Eyes*, allow Hurston to lift Ruby out of stereotype while challenging the *Courier*'s readers to reconsider their own perceptions of gender roles in the black community.

Hurston begins her February 28, 1953, article, identified by the *Courier* as the "first . . . in a series" about Ruby McCollum's life, by recounting Judge Adams's words when he imposed the required death penalty over a month earlier, followed by the defendant's response to them: "Outwardly calm and self-possessed, Ruby McCollum returned to her seat at the counsel table." "Here was a woman," Hurston continues, "a Negro woman with the courage to dare every fate, to boldly attack every tradition of her surroundings and even the age-old laws of every land." And yet all who knew her, we are told, thought she "had nothing out of the ordinary in her"; she was "[a]lways quiet . . . and utterly absorbed in ordinary domestic affairs."[23] Hurston thereby sets up a contradiction between the courageous fighter and the meek homemaker, which is already a challenge to the "official" story of a woman who decided to kill her doctor simply because she thought his bill was too high. And in setting that up, Hurston also acknowledges the unknowability of Ruby McCollum—by others and herself: "The greatest human travail has been the attempt at self-revelation, but never, since the world began, has any one individual completely succeeded."[24] With that, the deep link to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is initiated: In the first chapter of the novel, when Janie has returned to Eatonville, where she had lived with her second husband, and is about to tell her best friend Pheoby her life story so that Pheoby can understand who Janie has become and why she has returned, the narrator explains how the two friends "sat there . . . close together. . . . Janie full of that oldest human longing—self revelation."[25] Ruby's story, like Janie's, is a complicated—and universal—human story.

We also learn in that first article that Ruby's parents, William and Gertrude Jackson, were extremely religious and strict; they forbade their seven children to dance, play cards, indulge in board games—any amusements they believed were "harboring the very works of the devil."[26] Exploring that home life more deeply in the March 7 installment, with her primary source apparently Ruby's older brother, Hurston describes Ruby as an "obedient" child who kept largely to herself, and who by ten years of age was becoming a bit of a dreamer, absorbed in reading "romantic love stories."[27] Janie, too, had a strict upbringing, few childhood friends, and early romantic longings. She also had a fierce independent streak, which led her to protect her inner self, especially while in her oppressive second marriage to Jody Starks: "She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. . . . She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how not to mix them."[28] That same impulse to shield her inner life Hurston bestows on Ruby, who, readers are told, early in life "made words with her mouth, [but] really said nothing about her inside feelings." Ruby, like Janie, was "extremely self-contained."[29]

In the third installment, the echoes of *Their Eyes* become more pronounced. There Hurston focuses on Ruby's late-blossoming womanhood, which seems to have occurred after she finished school at Fessenden Academy in Martin, Florida, at nineteen. The one named source in the article is a former teacher of Ruby's at Fessenden, L.F. Morse. The piece begins by establishing her as relatively lacking in self-awareness as a teen: she was "a pretty girl" while at school, Morse tells Hurston, "but seemed unaware of it," which Hurston amplifies by adding, "At that time" she "had never heard of the subconscious," so "[i]t never occurred to her that she might have wishes that had never emerged into the conscious."[30] Janie, too, is lacking in self-awareness and a broad context for understanding herself through much of her journey: "She didn't read books so she didn't know that she was the world and the heavens boiled down to a drop,"[31] and she is unaware of her beauty until her soon-to-be third husband, Tea Cake, encourages her to look at herself in the mirror.[32] Intertwined with that lack of awareness for both women is nonetheless a profound awakening to their sexual selves: Once out of school and with a year of teaching to her credit, Ruby "felt like a blossom on the bare limb of a pear tree in the spring . . . opening her gifts to the world, but where was the bee for her blossom?"[33]; Janie, at sixteen and living at home with her grandmother, feels, "Oh to be a pear tree—*any* tree in bloom! . . . She had glossy leaves and bursting buds. . . . Where were the singing bees for her?"[34] And further echoing *Their Eyes*, Hurston tells her readers that Ruby, finding her situation devoid of romance, "wanted beauty and poetry in her life, something to

make her everyday side-meat taste more like ham,"[35] much like Janie felt after marrying her first husband, about whom she complains to her grandmother: "He don't even never mention nothin' pretty. . . . Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think."[36]

While Hurston establishes disappointment as the fuel for both Janie's and Ruby's quest for a more expansive life, the seeds for Ruby's tragedy are planted in this third installment with one last ironic echo of *Their Eyes*: We learn that when Ruby was but seventeen years old, she had had a suitor who proposed marriage, and she turned him down. Here Hurston quotes Ruby explaining why she did so: "I could not see myself loving a man who could see ten things and not even understand one. I wanted a man who could see one thing and understand ten, a mate [who] could cope with life and give me protection."[37] The language is a combined echo of what Jody Starks says to Janie when he reasserts his authority over her after she challenges him in public—"When Ah sees one thing Ah understands ten. You see ten things and don't understand one"—and of what Janie's restrictive grandmother says she wants for her granddaughter when she forces Janie into her first loveless marriage with the middle-aged farmer: "'Tain't Logan Killicks Ah wants you to have, baby, it's protection."[38] Janie's task is to disavow what her grandmother wanted for her, because, she learns, with "protection," which her second husband also offered, comes the demand for subservience. But by attributing both Jody's and Janie's grandmother's language to Ruby, Hurston already suggests Ruby has too deeply embraced the community's sanctioned role for women to break free and redefine herself as Janie does in the novel. And doing this allows Hurston, now the literary journalist, to begin suggesting in dramatic language how Ruby's desire for protection from a powerful man laid the foundation for her actions that hot morning in August when she killed Dr. Adams.

The fourth installment affirms the differences between Janie and Ruby even as it contains the greatest number of echoes from *Their Eyes*. Hurston has Ruby back at her parents' home, twenty years old, standing at the front gate to the yard, "questioning fate. For some time now she had been living at her own front gate, ready for departure." And she is feeling expansive—"The horizon of the world was her hatband"—as "she saw no reason why her life must follow the pattern of her surroundings."[39] There we have an echo of Janie, who at sixteen "went on down to the front gate [of her grandmother's yard] and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. . . . Waiting for the world to be made." And Janie likewise begins her quest in search of the "horizon," which is why she eventually comes to hate her grandmother, who, in her desire for her granddaughter to have protection, had "pinched [the horizon] in to such a little bit of a thing that she could" choke Janie with

it.[40] But Janie at the gate is not yet contemplating any means for fulfilling her dreams, whereas Ruby has met Sam McCollum and at the gate is debating with herself whether he can offer what she is seeking: "At times she felt that Sam had in him that which would bring fulfillment of her dreams and then, again, she wondered."[41] This is, however, an echo of Janie later, who after meeting Jody Starks also wages an internal debate as she contemplates leaving her first husband for him: "Janie pulled back a long time because [Jody] did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees, but he spoke for far horizon. He spoke for change and chance."[42] Both women have expansive dreams, but whereas Janie is looking for "change and chance"—which ultimately leads her to a profound change in values—Ruby is focused on a man, Sam, as her "fulfillment," diminishing her opportunity for personal growth.

But nonetheless, Hurston has Ruby in this fourth article continuing to waver as she considers Sam's suitability: She was attracted to this man who "made a little summertime out of a seemingly nothing and they both lived off it for the hours they were together"; still she hesitated because although it appeared "Sam had what she wanted"—drive, wit, and the ability to protect—she was not yet certain "of his capacities. . . . Better wait and see."[43] In that sequence, Hurston reuses two aspects of *Their Eyes* that are associated with Janie's turn away from material wealth and toward the ordinary folk. The first is the repetition of Janie's words explaining to an acquaintance in the Everglades why she is so in love with Tea Cake: "He kin take most any lil thing and make summertime out of it when times is dull. Then we lives offa dat happiness he made till some mo' happiness come along."[44] The second is the literary technique of free indirect discourse ("Better wait and see"). That technique, which as a literary device in fiction blurs the voice of the narrator with that of a character, has been increasingly recognized as one that literary journalists have used to draw readers into the interior lives of their subjects.[45] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., moving beyond that technical function in Hurston's novel to its metaphoric function, has argued she employs free indirect discourse in association with Janie when Janie is making an important, positive transition on her quest for self-knowledge and happiness.[46] Beginning with this installment in the McCollum series, free indirect discourse also has both the technical function—drawing readers into Ruby's interior life—and the metaphoric function of signaling a moment of transition. But instead of indicating a step toward self-knowledge and happiness, it marks a moment preceding a decision that will eventually lead to Ruby's self-effacement and then the shooting of LeRoy Adams. Ruby does choose to marry Sam McCollum, but he does not completely fulfill Ruby's dreams because "Sam did not rule her enough."[47] Jody Starks also turns out to be less than Janie had hoped

for—but that was because he ruled too much; she tells Jody on his deathbed: "Mah own mind had tuh be squeezed and crowded out tuh make room for yours in me." [48]

Through the first four installments, Hurston is laying the groundwork for her readers to understand that Ruby's desire for protection and material things helped create the marital nightmare that led to Ruby's affair with and eventual killing of LeRoy Adams. The fifth installment, published on March 28, features snatches of gossip from the residents of Live Oak and the report from the sheriff who arrested Ruby on August 3 to further establish that. We learn that although Sam and Ruby had a partnership of sorts—Sam made the business contacts and ran the side gambling operation while Ruby controlled the cash, details apparently confirmed for Hurston by local residents—their personal relationship suffered. Believing he had fulfilled his duty to Ruby in setting her up in a large, comfortable home, Sam turned his attention to other and younger women. Hurston surmises, "It is easily possible that he had analyzed [Ruby] as caring more for material things than for him as a man." But that didn't keep him from bragging to others about his control over his wife: Hurston reports how she heard he "gloated over other men: 'I wouldn't even put up with the kind of wife you got. My wife is always at home no matter when I get there. She's home and acting like a wife ought to act." Ruby, Hurston tells her readers, "was hurt" by Sam's affairs, although "she never discussed it nor admitted it to her relatives or closest friends."[49]

All of this recapitulates the problems that emerged in Janie's marriage to Jody Starks, who thought he was doing right by Janie in providing her with a big house and fine things—but that was his dream, not hers. He too liked to brag about his wife's position: He tells the men at his store that his wife won't be doing any public speaking because "[s]he's uh woman and her place is in de home." And like Ruby, Janie initially keeps quiet about her unhappiness with the way her husband treats her, so quiet that the townsfolk think "she don't seem to mind": "Reckon dey understand one 'nother," they conclude.[50] Unlike Ruby, however, Janie eventually speaks up, not only to Jody, but also to her friend Pheoby, disavowing the kind of "protection" her husband provided. After Jody dies, she explains why she is attracted to Tea Cake rather than a prosperous suitor whom Pheoby approves of: "Dis ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now ah means tuh live mine." Unconvinced, and suggesting how against the grain Janie's thinking is, Pheoby speaks to how she longs for the life Janie is giving up: "It look lak heben tuh me from where Ah'm at."[51] But the novel shows how the willingness to give up "protection" is what allows Janie's growth in self-realization (something Pheoby too even-

tually comes to appreciate), whereas Hurston posits Ruby's inability to give that up as dooming her: "It is obvious that long years of 'protection' had blinded Ruby McCollum to the gravity of her situation on the morning of Aug. 3, 1952, when she shot Dr. C. LeRoy Adams, prominent white doctor, to death."[52]

Having established Ruby as strong but wedded to her community's definitions of proper womanhood, Hurston in the April 4 installment turns to a decisive moment in Ruby and Sam's marriage—an instance of physical abuse—that leads inexorably to the fateful affair. Her source for this is unnamed, but we surmise Ruby had a confidant of sorts who talked with Hurston, as she reports Ruby as having "once said" much that is reported. Against Ruby's wishes, Sam had brought home some of his gambling friends, who drank too much and behaved brutishly, even "callously vomit[ing] over her floor and furnishings." According to Hurston, when Ruby took Sam behind closed doors and demanded he have his friends leave, "Sam is said to have whipped her soundly and forced her to clean up the mess the guests had made." And then we get what Ruby "once said": "For that I never forgave Sam McCollum": she was pregnant and he "seemed not to care" that he might have injured the baby. Hurston reports Ruby as saying further that thereafter she "no longer felt [her]self to be the . . . mistress of his inner heart. It was a terrible shock."[53] The remainder of the article, describing how Sam introduced Ruby and Adams and then how the affair began, is based on testimony Ruby gave during the last days of her trial, but its presentation here relies heavily on fictional technique, as Hurston sets scenes and assumes the role of omniscient narrator, providing precise dialogue, character actions such as "peep[ing] from behind drapes" and "lift[ing] eyes,"[54] and the inner thoughts of the principal parties, sometimes through free indirect discourse.

Inaugurating this shift from reporting the past to narrating it is an important echo of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*: After Jody Starks slaps Janie for burning his dinner and then leaves the house, we learn "[s]he stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her."[55] Hurston follows Ruby's report of how she felt after Sam hit her with these words: "An image—something sacred and precious—had fallen off the shelf in Ruby's heart."[56] But whereas for Janie this moment leads to a profound epiphany—what fell "was her image of Jody," which she realizes then "never was the flesh and blood figure of her dreams"[57]—Ruby experiences no such epiphany about Sam. She recognizes the marriage is different, but "[a]fter a few days they carried on as usual."[58] Janie experiences a moment of self-knowledge; Ruby experiences rejection. So when Sam brings home his new friend, Dr. Adams, who immediately takes notice of Ruby, she is by Hurston's representation so effaced that this

man's attention buoys her. And after her baby is born and she again feels low, she summons the doctor to help her. She accepts the help he proposes, and the affair begins. The article ends with several lines of free indirect discourse ("She felt warm and grateful toward him. And this man was no trash out of the streets of Live Oak. This was an important, outstanding man, and—in addition—physically equipped to be desirable to many women"[59]), lines that once again signal Ruby's now ineluctable path of self-destruction.

The last major moments of free indirect discourse occur in the seventh and shortest article of the series, published on April 11. The technique dominates the installment, and its function is to chart Ruby's evolving confusion about her affair with Adams. After a "night of passion," Hurston has Ruby in bed alone, where she "thought things over. She saw the net closing around her. Did she want to escape? Well, yes, and then again, no." The free indirect discourse continues: "How had the former Ruby Jackson gotten into such a fix? My God, her mother and father, brothers and sisters would die of shame if they dreamed of it. And Sam, the community of Live Oak would explode like gasoline. Please God, help her! For, she didn't see how she could help herself."[60]

And then, when Ruby realizes she is pregnant by Adams, Hurston again marks the moment as transitional with free indirect discourse: "But alone, Ruby was worried. What would Sam say or do? What about her own family? What about the Negroes of Live Oak?"[61] It is a transition to total entrapment, a reversal of the most pronounced moment of free indirect discourse associated with Janie in *Their Eyes*. In that example, Janie makes a leap to freedom by moving from reassuring herself that she still has money—the kind of protection Joe Starks offered—despite that some of her money, along with Tea Cake, has gone missing ("She had ten dollars in her pocket and twelve hundred in the bank")—to being worried about Tea Cake ("But oh God, don't let Tea Cake be off somewhere hurt and Ah not know nothing about it")—to a willingness to throw in her lot with Tea Cake and his improvisatory lifestyle ("And God, please suh, don't let him love nobody else but me. Maybe Ah'm is uh fool, Lawd, . . . but . . . Ah been waitin', Jesus. Ah done waited uh long time").[62]

The last three articles of the McCollum series function as a denouement for Ruby's "life story." The eighth, appearing on April 18, contains the final clear echoes from *Their Eyes*, as it delineates the total collapse of Ruby's marriage to Sam and then moves back to the courtroom drama that had ended three months earlier. Hurston describes how Sam, upon learning that Ruby was carrying LeRoy Adams's baby, "quietly moved into a separate bedroom" in the family home "and, after a while, began to complain of pains about his

heart." With Ruby "lost to him," he continued to decline: "In quiet moments, the sides of his face looked limp and sagging, like wet-wash hung out to dry from his ears."[63] These details recall Jody Starks, who, after Janie publicly calls into question his manhood in response to his insults regarding her age and appearance, "moved his things and slept in a room downstairs." His physical deterioration thereafter also accelerates, as Janie observes "how baggy Joe was getting all over, like bags hanging from an ironing board. A little sack hung from the corners of his eyes and rested on his cheek-bones; a loose-filled bag of feathers hung from his ears and rested on his neck beneath his chin."[64] Janie is saddened by Joe's state, as she recognizes how his need to control had finally diminished him, turning a "man" into simply a "voice." And then she takes "careful stock of herself" and likes what she sees: "a handsome"—and independent—"woman," freed from Jody's protection.[65] Ruby, however, even after the shooting of Adams, Hurston suggests, cannot take stock of herself as a woman apart from a man: "'I picked from the very top,' [Ruby] would say. 'I was married to the top Negro of Suwanee County, and Dr. Adams was the top white man. When I tie up with a man, I have influence with him. Men love me when they get to know me.'"[66]

Hurston represents Ruby as never moving beyond wanting to derive her identity from a man, a social prescription Janie instinctively rebelled against. When Jody tells her *his* ambition "makes uh big woman outa [*her*]," the narrator reports, "[a] feeling of coldness and fear took hold of" Janie,[67] a fear of the very entrapment that defined—and derailed—Ruby's life.

The final two installments reinforce that Ruby was indeed trapped. In the April 25 story, Hurston tells her readers exactly that: "Ruby feels—and, perhaps, justly so—that she has been the victim of a trap." Readers might think the trap was one set by Dr. Adams, who "began to prescribe medicines for her that had a queer effect upon her." And he too began to feel possessive, wanting her apparently to move out to his farm and to submit to his sexual advances even on the morning of August 3. But the series as a whole suggests a larger trap—lack of self-knowledge born of a need for protection. As Hurston has Ruby, post-trial and in jail, say, "I do not grasp that it is myself at times. I seem to be walking in somebody else's dream."[68] And Hurston brings back in the final installment Ruby's words uttered at the end of her trial, reinforcing her continuing lack of self-knowledge: "I, I, I don't know whether I was right, or wrong . . . ," which support Hurston's conclusion: "[I]t is highly probabl[e] that Mrs. McCollum is a victim instead of the cold, ruthless killer that the state claims her to be."[69]

## Conclusion

That Ruby McCollum shot and killed Dr. C. LeRoy Adams was never in dispute. Instead, the trial was intended to uncover the motivation for the killing, which it never did. Knowing that, Hurston set for herself the task of trying to piece together and make sense of Ruby's story in order to dispel the fictional motivation—that Ruby McCollum killed her doctor because she didn't want to pay her bill—embraced by the national press, courtroom, and Live Oak community. It was a motivation required by the mid-twentieth-century Southern etiquette of race relations, which denied the possibility of complicated sexual relationships that crossed racial lines. The great irony, of course, is that such a denial insured that race would remain the dominant factor, suppressing motivations shaped by the gender roles the era endorsed. By using dimensions of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, her own novel delineating a woman's growth in self-understanding, Hurston brought gender to the fore in her series. Janie Crawford and Ruby McCollum shared much initially, but it was what they didn't share—call it nerve, or the imagination, to ignore social expectations regarding female independence—that changed Janie's successful quest for self-understanding into Ruby's cautionary tale of how "protection" can be perverted. In the South of the 1950s, it took imagination—and fiction—to tell that story.

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## Notes

1. Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 411–14.

2. Circulation of the paper was 280,000 in 1950, according to Patrick S. Washburn in *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 185.

3. Boyd, *Rainbows*, 414. As "the nation's top black newspaper" at mid-century (Washburn, *Voice of Freedom*, 4), the *Pittsburgh Courier* drew African American subscribers from across the nation, and especially from eastern states like Florida.

4. Washburn, *Voice of Freedom*, 4.

5. The paper sent Revella Clay and A.M. Rivera, Jr., who contributed between them three articles, the last appearing October 4, 1952, with the headline "State Fights Insanity Plea." See also the summary of the early *Courier* coverage in C. Arthur Ellis, Jr. and Leslie E. Ellis, *The Trial of Ruby McCollum: The True-Crime Story that Shook the Foundations of the Segregationist South!* (Bloomington, IN: 1st Books Library, 2003), 137.

6. The Ellises in *The Trial of Ruby McCollum* indicate Hurston was invited to take on the assignment because of her literary talent: "Sensing that the McCollum story had all the makings of a novel, and maybe even a movie, the *Courier* engaged Zora Neale Hurston, the famous writer of the Harlem Renaissance, to lead their team in Live Oak" (137). Reinforcing this conclusion is the biographical description the paper included with Hurston's first article: "One of America's most illustrious women novelists . . . will bring to *Courier* readers in her own poignant language . . . a moving, interpretive, descriptive analysis of the hearings . . . and the trial . . . of Mrs. Ruby McCollum. . . . With a searching pen . . . she will report the proceedings . . . the undertones . . . the overtones . . . the implications" (*Pittsburgh Courier*, October 11, 1952).

7. "Drama on the Suwanee," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 11, 1952.

8. Ibid.

9. See, for example, "Doctor Slain Over Bill," *New York Times*, August 3, 1952; "Negro Woman in Florida Kills White Doctor; Unrest Is Curbed," *New York Herald Tribune*, August 3, 1952; "Ruby McCollum Sane; Faces Trial For Murder," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 18, 1952; and "Set Nov. 18 for Trial of Fla. Woman," *Chicago Defender*, October 25, 1952.

10. William Bradford Huie, *Ruby McCollum: Woman in the Suwanee Jail* (New York: Dutton, 1956), 92. Hurston's quoted words are part of a recollection of the first trial that Hurston wrote for Huie and which he included in his book.

11. Ibid., 101.

12. A.M. Rivera, Jr., "Chill Anxiety Grips Race Where Matron Shot Medic in Florida," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 4, 1952.

13. Boyd, *Rainbows*, 416–17; Carla Kaplan, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 608.

14. Susan Edwards Meisenhelder, *Hitting a Straight Lick with a Crooked Stick:*

*Race and Gender in the Work of Zora Neale Hurston* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 179.

15. Familiar examples are Stephen Crane's reworking of "Stephen Crane's Own Story" in "The Open Boat" and Ernest Hemingway's inclusion of his Spanish Civil War reporting in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

16. See the articles collected in Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, eds., *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination*, vol. 2 (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), and in John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, eds., *Literary Journalism Across the Globe* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), for how these concerns remain at the center of the scholarly discourse.

17. I have fleshed out these ideas more fully in an essay, "African American Literary Journalism in the 1950s," which appeared in *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination,* vol. 2, eds. Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 75–93, and in my introduction to the special issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* devoted to African American literary journalism (*Literary Journalism Studies* 5, no. 2 [2013]: 8–14).

18. "African American Literary Journalism in the 1950s," 75–79.

19. Zora Neale Hurston, "Art and Such," in *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1995), 908.

20. Hurston, "What White Publishers Won't Print," in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 119.

21. Andrew Delbanco, "The Political Incorrectness of Zora Neale Hurston," in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 18 (Winter 1997–98): 103.

22. The quoted descriptions of the trial are in Huie, *Woman in the Suwanee Jail,* 89.

23. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, February 28, 1953.

24. Ibid.

25. Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 7.

26. Hurston, "Life Story," February 28, 1953.

27. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 7, 1953.

28. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 72.

29. Hurston, "Life Story," March 7, 1953.

30. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 14, 1953.

31. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 76.

32. Ibid., 104.

33. Hurston, "Life Story," March 14, 1953.

34. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 11.

35. Hurston, "Life Story," March 14, 1953.

36. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 24.

37. Hurston, "Life Story," March 14, 1953.
38. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 71, 15.
39. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 21, 1953.
40. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 11, 89.
41. Hurston, "Life Story," March 21, 1953.
42. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 29.
43. Hurston, "Life Story," March 21, 1953.
44. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 141.
45. See, for example, Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 13–52, and Nora Berning, *Narrative Means to Journalistic Ends: A Narratological Analysis of Selected Journalistic Reportages* (New York: Springer, 2010), 73.
46. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Zora Neale Hurston and the Speakerly Text," in his *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 170–216.
47. Hurston, "Life Story," March 21, 1953.
48. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 86.
49. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 28, 1953.
50. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 43, 50.
51. Ibid., 114.
52. Hurston, "Life Story," March 28, 1953.
53. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 4, 1953.
54. Ibid.
55. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 72.
56. Hurston, "Life Story," April 4, 1953.
57. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 72.
58. Hurston, "Life Story," April 4, 1953.
59. Ibid.
60. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 11, 1953.
61. Ibid.
62. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 120.
63. Hurston, "Life Story," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 25, 1953.
64. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 81.
65. Ibid., 87.
66. Hurston, "Life Story, April 18, 1953.
67. Hurston, *Their Eyes*, 46.
68. Hurston, "Life Story," Pittsburgh Courier, April 25, 1953.
69. Hurston, "The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 2, 1953.

Zora Neale Hurston, portrait by photographer Carl Van Vechten, 1880–1964, Library of Congress.

# The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!

By Zora Neale Hurston
Author, Lecturer, Writer and Novelist
March 14, 1953, p. 28, *Pittsburgh Courier*

**Editor's note:** This is the third installment of the life story of Mrs. Ruby Jackson McCollum of Live Oak, Florida, wealthy widow who has been sentenced to death for the recent slaying of her alleged white lover, Dr. C. LeRoy Adams. A heart attack claimed the life of Mrs. McCollum's husband, Sam, shortly after the slaying of the doctor.

The maternal instincts which swept over Ruby Jackson when she a child were to play the key role in her later life. Dean L.F. Morse of Fessenden Academy says that by the time Ruby passed puberty, "she was a very pretty girl, but seemed unaware of it."

Boys and even grown men began to give her looks, but she went on being quiet and reserved, a good student in school and busy about the home and church. She didn't seem to realize that she was possessed of a power that made itself felt upon the men and boys who saw her. How fatal it was to be, time alone was to tell, as the world now knows.

Ruby's mother allowed her to start receiving company when was eighteen, and she seemed satisfied to wait until then with utmost calm. While she was seventeen, a local youth made an open bid for her heart and hand and boldly made an earnest proposal of marriage . . . only to be turned down.

Her reasons: they were a sure indication of what was to come in her heart and what was in her mind: the young man just didn't attract her. He lacked the different strengths she admired in a man. Utterly female, she wanted to be conquered and have a great store of strength to lean upon.

He lacked the "get-up" that she hoped for, and, she felt, a lack of mental vigor, too. "I could not see myself loving a man who could see ten things and not even understand one. I wanted a man who could see one thing and understand ten, a mate [who] could cope with life and give me protection."

During this period she was seldom allowed to go to Ocala, the nearest sizable town, but she found activities around Martin where she lived. She became extremely active in church work and was a delegate to the Sunday school conventions and the district conferences.

Her close friends were the heart of all the activities in Martin. Ruby organized a singing-band made up of her brother, Clemon Sarah Davis, Tommie Lee Ward, Helen Smith, and herself. Ruby sang lead and the group became widely known in the area, singing for churches and other such gatherings.

Upon her graduation from Fessenden Academy, Ruby taught school for a year at New Chapel, a small community not too far from Ocala. She must not have cared much for this experience because there is no comment about it, nor is there any comment about why she did not continue after that one year. She just taught school for one year, period.

But it was about this time that new shape of things to come began to make itself felt within her. Internally she began to sense a lack. There was no one around whom she could drape her intense feelings, her great capacity for love.

She had made a tremendous discovery! She found that she had a singular power over men: It was no trouble at all to bend them to her will. She was one those females who appear now and then in human history. Something drew men to her and bound them.

Ruby had confidence in her powers, but it was a disappointment in a way. She moved men but so far no man had ever moved her! It was in this period around eighteen that she began to have recurrent dreams. There were four to the series. Of these, only one was clear so that she could remember the details upon awakening.

In this dream she found herself in a strange community and entering a large, beautifully furnished home. She was not only expected there, she was welcome. A muted, throbbing rhythm said over and over "Come to me. Come to me." Somehow it seemed to be her home. Love and satisfaction radiated the place.

This dream troubled Ruby. Walking around the little four-room house that was her home in Martin, she could not imagine why she would dream of so much comfort and luxury being hers. At that time Ruby Jackson had never heard of the sub-conscious. It never occurred to her that she might have wishes that had never emerged into the conscious.

She saw as a prophetic sign, though how such a thing was to come about, she had no idea. The years were to prove her right! Years later in Live Oak, she was to recognize the house the moment she saw it. It had been built by a

Negro bolita banker, whom her future husband—Sam McCollum—was to defeat and come into possession of the nine-room house!

At eighteen Ruby was full of internal conflict. As yet she had been attracted to no man. She been trained to despise and fight against physical pleasures and desires as sinful things inspired by the devil. She had had that background at home.

So, naturally, she was distressed to find that so many men leered at her. Young and old men of her own race could not seem to pass her unnoticed; white men winked their eyes at her and followed her, or secretly nodded at her to please follow them. The only part she liked was the secret knowledge that she had power over men.

Now, with her shapely and well-developed body blooming, she felt herself a woman. She had laughed and worked and suffered to a certain extent. There had been a hurt in her life which she had revealed to no one. Her tears had been in utter secrecy. Now she began to feel emptiness in her existence.

She felt like a blossom on the bare limb of a pear tree in the spring . . . opening her gifts to the world, but where was the bee for her blossom? Yes, numerous men had gazed on her with open desire, but so far their looks had raised no mingling-blood call in her.

She wanted beauty and poetry mingled in her life, something to make her everyday side-meat taste more like ham. Sometimes, deep, deep in the mood of her strange yearning she would picture herself reclining on soft grass in a beautiful rose-scented setting on a white moonlit night.

Ruby Jackson was now ready for life and love!

*Courtesy* Pittsburgh Courier *Archives*.

# The Life Story of Mrs. Ruby J. McCollum!

By Zora Neale Hurston
Author, Lecturer, Writer and Novelist
March 21, 1953, p. 198, *Pittsburgh Courier*

**Editor's note:** This is the fourth article in a series dealing with the life of Mrs. Ruby Jackson McCollum of Live Oak, Florida. Mrs. McCollum has been found guilty in the slaying of her alleged lover, white Dr. C. LeRoy Adams, and sentenced to death. The series so far has dealt with childhood days of Ruby Jackson. In the following article the meets and weds Sam McCollum.

The sun had gone home, leaving its footprints in the sky. The drifting mists gathered in the west to arm with thunders and march forth against the world. Lightning flashed against the horizon and the thunder rolled into crescendos. Ruby Jackson stood at the front gate of the Jackson home in Martin, Fla., seemingly unconscious of the approaching summer storm.

She stood there questioning fate. For some time now she had been living at her own front gate, ready for departure. Internally, she had outgrown the confines of Martin, Fla.

The horizon of the world was her hatband. Ruby longed for fulfillment of her natural desires and so she was restless beneath her always outward calm. Neither relatives nor friends suspected the intense fires that raged within her.

Ruby now was twenty years old, and yes, she wanted a mate. She was of a good respectable family in Martin, unsoiled by the lap and wash of slander. She was considered physically attractive, and what there was to choose from in her community she could have had.

But by nature, Ruby did not walk in footprints. Secretly she saw no reason why her life must follow the pattern of her surroundings. Her family and friends did not know the real Ruby and she was conscious of it. "Often," Ruby said, "you can make people follow you, but almost never can you make them understand."

Yes, like all girls of her age she had flirted briefly here and there. She found something dead about the young men she had known, so inside her she

drew way as mortals do from a corpse. She was looking for LIFE.

Now she had met Sam McCollum, a young man a little older than herself. The McCollums were prosperous farmers over at St. Peters, a small community near Ocala, Fla. That had been nearly a year ago and Ruby was still thinking Sam over.

She was attracted to him, but she debated whether or not he had what she wanted. She wanted many things that her life and surroundings so far had not afforded her. At times she felt that Sam had in him that which would bring fulfillment of her dreams and then, again, she wondered.

Was Sam McCollum masterful enough? That was what she debated within herself as she stood at her father's gate that day at sundown. Internally, she was ready to set out on her journey to the big horizon. Was Sam the vehicle to take her where she wanted to go?

Sam attracted and charmed her more than any man she had met so far. He had both mental and physical vigor. Secretly he stirred her tremendously. He was full of things. Sam made a little summertime out of a seemingly nothing and they both lived off it for the hours they were together.

Silently unsatisfied by her narrow surroundings, she had been fumbling around the door-knob of life and Sam McCollum had opened that door! If only she could be sure of his capacities, she would love him for it. But so strong were her desires that she felt that she was not yet ready to commit herself. Better wait and see.

She had met Sam McCollum at her church. He had come to attend a special program that Sunday afternoon nearly a year ago. Ruby had a leading part in the program in addition to her group singing. Sam saw her and he liked what he saw.

It took nearly two more years for Ruby to finally make up her mind to marry Sam McCollum. In that time she discovered Sam had what she wanted. He was witty and gay, and beneath his casual exterior Ruby found that he had drive and ambition in him. He had a way of commenting and saying things that were always entertaining. And his small community did not satisfy him, either.

Though the McCollums had a going farm, Sam took to picking oranges—quick and generous pay—and construction work. He often went away from home on jobs like that and came back with a pocket full of money and stories of what he had heard and seen in the larger and outer world where he had been.

Outside of her own requirements in her future husband, Ruby had another obstacle to overcome. The McCollums were something less than enthusiastic about her. After she began to go steady with Sam, his brother, Buck,

and his father came over to Martin frequently, but the rest of his family held aloof.

But even Buck warned Sam that Ruby was inclined to be too possessive and domineering. They accused her of seeking to cut him off from his family. She must be the "be-all" and ruler of his mind, and Buck saw his brother crumbling before the determined Ruby Jackson, for all her quiet ways.

"I told Sam years ago that woman was going to kill him," Buck raged when he heard of his brother's death. "He had got so under her influence that he wouldn't listen to me." Sam McCollum died of a heart attack after his wife killed Dr. Adams.

Ruby Jackson felt certain of two things when she became Mrs. Sam McCollum at a quiet home wedding at Martin in 1931: she was sure that she had a go-getter, a winner in economic ways and a vigorous mind, and she felt certain that the opposing McCollums could be no trouble to her with Sam.

Sam had a construction job in New York and he and his bride went North immediately. In the years to follow, they went many places together. In those years Ruby was almost completely happy. Her world had expanded marvelously and, by comparison, she handled plenty of money.

From the very beginning, Sam brought home his money and handed it over to Ruby and she managed things. There was only one tiny dissatisfaction in Ruby's love for her husband . . . Sam did not rule her enough.

The great tragedy that engulfed them in 1952 might have been avoided had Sam only understood Ruby better! From the beginning of their life together the tiny seed of despisement had already been planted.

Ruby proved a good and industrious wife. She was a wonderful cook, sewed well and kept a clean house. She was a very devoted mother. Without too much taste in clothes, she was neat and attractive in her clothes.

But there, perhaps, she was wiser than most people thought. When a female body is too gaudily dressed, it is possible for the male mind to lose the connection.

Ruby, brought up in a very religious home, knew even before she married Sam that, though he always worked, he gambled on the side and thus increased hi[s] income. Her femaleness is such that she accepted all parts of her man. She did not gamble herself, but she was with him in spirit.

If she cut him off to an extent from his own blood relatives, she also cut herself off from her own, in her loyalty to her man. Their families knew nothing of the relations between Sam and Ruby.

Her attitude was such that her even stern, religious parents came to look upon Sam McCollum as the perfect husband and son-in-law. The young cou-

ple led their own life as they moved about from job to job, now Florida, now North again and back.

What with his work and successful gambling, they were boarding up money without as yet making any flash. Both were proud and happy about their son, Sam Jr., who came to them more than a year after they were married. He was born into a loving, affectionate, charmed family circle.

*Courtesy* Pittsburgh Courier *Archives*.

**Above:** Meridel Le Sueur, c. 1940, used by permission of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN, USA.

**Right:** Dorothy Day c. 1930s, courtesy Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Marquette University Libraries.

# Meridel Le Sueur, Dorothy Day, and the Literary Journalism of Advocacy During the Great Depression

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Abstract: Literary journalism thrives in periods of crisis, when conventional ways of reporting seem inadequate to communicate the complexity of the world. One such period is the Great Depression in the United States, when many female social activists, such as Dorothy Day (1897–1980) and Meridel Le Sueur (1900–1996), turned to literary journalism as a way to tell the stories of the poor and oppressed. Literary journalism gave these writers an effective platform to advocate for the dignity and fair treatment of workers and the impoverished. These writers offered a distinctive feminine perspective on poverty. A key aspect of Day's and Le Sueur's literary journalism during the Depression years is the degree to which it is informed by participant, immersion research. Both authors' experience of living in community among the underprivileged inspired some of their best literary journalism. What these two writers of the Depression (and beyond) have in common is their commitment to remake society through their passionately felt literary journalism of advocacy.

Literary journalism thrives in periods of crisis, when conventional ways of reporting seem inadequate to communicate the complexity of the world. Indeed, Thomas B. Connery identifies at least three distinct such periods, which he characterizes as "times of massive change and reform . . . in which progressive ideas come to the front, wars are fought, big changes in media occur": 1890–1910, the 1930s–'40s, and the 1960s–'70s.[1] Of them all, the era of the Great Depression in the United States is particularly compelling because it was then that many female social activists, such as Dorothy Day, Meridel Le Sueur, and others, turned to literary journalism as a way to tell the stories of the poor and oppressed. Literary journalism gave these writers

an effective platform for advocacy for the dignity and the fair treatment of workers and the impoverished. And, these writers offered a distinctive feminine perspective on poverty (such as Le Sueur's sketch of "Women on the Breadlines").[2] In this essay, I will discuss the work of Day (1897–1980)[3] and Le Sueur (1900–96).[4] Both women often wrote about capitalism's ruinous effect on the unemployed and working people, and they sometimes focused on poverty's impact on women, thus fleshing out a reality that most other writers of the time ignored. Le Sueur also wrote about the Dust Bowl, rural poverty, Native American culture, and "the bourgeois separation of mind and body, the beauty of the landscape and its relation to fertility and birth, and the rewards of communal struggle" to achieve social good.[5]

Day and Le Sueur were among several female journalists who became influential in the 1930s, writing about social reform and labor and peace issues. Others included Mary Heaton Vorse, Josephine Herbst, Agnes Smedley, and Anna Louise Strong. In journalism they found their best opportunity to contribute in a meaningful public way to revolutionary movements such as communism, socialism, and the International Workers of the World (Wobblies), as these groups usually channeled women into behind-the-scenes support activities such as housekeeping and childcare. As Charlotte Nekola has observed, these Depression-era journalists practiced:

> varieties of documentary journalism often termed "reportage." The basic technique of documentary reportage during that decade was to describe an individual who was representative of a larger group, and thereby draw larger conclusions from the particular facts of the individual. It was the ideal form of writing for revolutionary and proletarian aesthetic; it was "true," without the distortions or excess of bourgeois individualistic fiction; it used the individual in the service of the mass; it raised political consciousness by linking one person with larger political movements; it replaced private despair with mass action.[6]

Examples of this genre include many pieces of literary reportage—or literary journalism—by Day and Le Sueur. Both writers often centered on individuals whose particular stories could inspire revelations about the larger group they represented. For instance, Day wrote many memorable portraits of the homeless and dispossessed who came to St. Joseph's, the Catholic Worker house of hospitality on New York City's Lower East Side. Throughout her life at the Catholic Worker, she also wrote obituaries for them that moved her readers to contemplate the societal conditions that contributed to such poverty. One especially evocative example began: "Fred Brown is no longer unemployed. He no longer goes to the union hall on Eleventh Avenue every day to see whether his number is called. Fred Brown, seaman, twenty-four

years old, shipped out on his last voyage a few weeks ago." She continued:

> It was a bitter shock; not just his death . . . but because the tragedy of his passing [from malaria] was made bitter by a theft in the house, the theft of his one suit of clothes.
>
> He had nothing, as most seamen have nothing, and just before his death, his one suit had been taken. (There are, of course, those among us of the lame, the halt and the blind, who commit these despicable acts driven by God knows what necessity, but who must be forgiven as we need to be forgiven our own mean sins.) Fred would have forgiven them; wryly, perhaps, and with a shrug, but far more readily than we did on this occasion.

Day ended with a meditation about poverty and this poignant observation:

> As we knelt about the open grave, the ground beneath our knees felt damp and springy. All around us was the death of winter, the life of tree, bush and vine imprisoned in the ground. But that good earth beneath my knees, that earth which was accepting Fred into her embrace, that very earth echoed the promise of the Resurrection and reminded us of the words of Job: "I firmly believe that my Redeemer liveth, and that I shall rise again from the earth on the last day and that in my own flesh I shall see my God."[7]

Le Sueur, too, was a master of this art of "inductive storytelling," frequently focusing on a specific individual to inspire a more general conclusion. Her literary journalism sparkles with deeply realized characters such as Anna, the impoverished woman who tries to support her whole family on the pittance she earns as a cook, in "Women Are Hungry" (*American Mercury*, March 1934). Day's and Le Sueur's liberal use of literary techniques in writing journalism—memorable characterizations, rich sensory description and scene-setting, dialogue, dramatization, use of figurative language, distinctive use of voice, and creative structures that transcend the traditional "inverted pyramid" construction of conventional news journalism—links them to many other literary journalists.

Another feature that unequivocally connects them to the realm of literary journalism is their participant-observer voice. This voice is passionately present in their and their colleagues' work, as indicated even by the titles of some of the book-length reportage of three writers of the era: Anna Louise Strong's *I Change Worlds (1935)*, Ruth Gruber's *I Went to the Soviet Arctic (1939)*, and Ella Winter's *I Saw the Russian People (1945)*, as Nekola has pointed out. "For women still emerging from a popular ideology of female selflessness and domestic virtue in America," she writes, "the possibility of using an 'I' as a reporter in the world was in itself intoxicating. . . . These women journalists seem to have taken a certain amount of pleasure in pointing out their pres-

ence in world events."[8] As does Le Sueur in "I Was Marching," which reports on the 1934 Minneapolis truckers' strike and her discovery of solidarity with the strikers and the poor.[9] In truth, she was exposed to these sentiments from childhood. Born in 1900 in Murray, Iowa, Le Sueur always called the Midwest home. She also lived in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Her mother, Marian Wharton, and stepfather, Arthur Le Sueur, were active socialists and reformers who exposed her to the Wobblies, the Populists, the Socialist Party, and the Farmer-Labor Party. Moreover, she got to meet Eugene Debs, Alexander Berkman, Helen Keller, John Reed, Mabel Dodge, Margaret Sanger, Theodore Dreiser, Carl Sandburg, Woody Guthrie, and Ella (Mother) Bloor. As a young woman, she lived briefly in a commune with Emma Goldman.

With such a pedigree, it is not surprising that, early in her life, Le Sueur embraced three-dimensional reporting and advocacy journalism that disavowed the "objectivity" of conventional journalism. "I Was Marching" and "Women on the Breadlines" are classic examples of Depression-era reportage. While adhering as much as possible to factual reality, Le Sueur communicates a larger truth about workers' lives and about her own merging with others in solidarity against oppression. "I Was Marching" richly evokes not only the drama and tension of the truckers' strike, but a middle-class intellectual's discovery of the joy that accompanies entry into the workers' movement. By the end of the piece she is much more than a participant observer, becoming truly one with her fellow marchers:

> We were moving spontaneously in a movement, natural, hardy, and miraculous. We passed through six blocks of tenements, through a sea of grim faces, and there was not a sound. There was the curious shuffle of thousands of feet, without drum or bugle, in ominous silence, a march not heavy as the military, but very light, exactly with the heartbeat. I was marching with a million hands, movements, faces. . . . As if an electric charge has passed through me, my hair stood on end. I was marching.[10]

"What distinguishes 'I Was Marching' from almost every other piece of reportage," notes critic and scholar Robert Shulman, "is the way Le Sueur integrates a narrative of personal conversion with a precise rendering of the strike and all this movement comes to stand for. Only Agee in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* handles the 'I' with anything like Le Sueur's depth." He adds, "If John Reed and James Agee are the Tolstoys of left reportage, Le Sueur is the Chekhov of the form."[11]

Le Sueur's "Women on the Breadlines" (*New Masses,* 1932) is one of her best pieces of literary journalism from the 1930s, as is "Women Are Hungry" (*American Mercury*, 1934). Because the public spectacle of a woman stand-

ing in a breadline was often considered shameful, and because there were few flop houses for women like the ones for men where a quarter bought a bed for the night, women suffered hunger and homelessness silently, in private, sometimes in the company of other women with whom they might share their meager resources. Or they might seek out men for lodging or other help. In writing about poor women's experience of the Depression, Le Sueur aimed to tell the story of those who, she said, "leave no record, no obituary, no remembrance"[12]; to transcend "statistics [that] make unemployment abstract and not too uncomfortable."[13] She explained: "The human being is different. To be hungry is different than to count the hungry. There is a whole generation of young girls who don't remember any boom days and don't believe in any Eldorado, or success, or prosperity. Their thin bones bear witness to a different thing. The women have learned something. Something is seeping into them that is going to make a difference for several generations."[14]

Writing in a matter-of-fact voice as participant observer, Le Sueur begins "Breadlines" with a simple statement: "I am sitting in the city free employment bureau. It's the women's section. We have been sitting here now for four hours. We sit here every day, waiting for a job. There are no jobs. Most of us have had no breakfast."[15] These simple declarative sentences serve to underscore their certainty of poverty. Then, through a series of detailed portraits, she limns the composite face of impoverished women during the Depression through several richly realized characterizations. There is Bernice, "a Polish woman of thirty-five"[16] from the Wisconsin countryside, a former kitchen worker with a "face brightly scrubbed."[17] Deprived of food, her "great flesh has begun to hang in folds"[18] from her once-robust frame, testimony to the malnutrition that is now her lot. Another is Mrs. Gray, whose body, at fifty, "is a great puckered scar."[19] She has toiled to clean streetcars and offices for some fifteen hours a day and is, Le Sueur asserts, "a living spokesman for the futility of labor . . . thin as a worn dime."[20]

One of Le Sueur's singular achievements in "Women on the Breadlines" is to bring to our attention characters who are usually not seen in literature, as Shulman has pointed out. "Fat, inarticulate characters like Bernice almost never receive the compassionate, perceptive attention Le Sueur gives her," he observes. But Le Sueur recognizes and values the humanity in Bernice and her other subjects.[21] The characters in "Women Are Hungry" are equally unforgettable. Anna supports her two small sons, her elderly mother, and her sister on her cook's salary of $45 a month. But there is little money to buy milk for the children, even though "everybody knows" that "you can't make bones with just bread."[22] Through dialogue, dramatization, and a straightforward, participant-observer voice, Le Sueur eloquently demonstrates the

Depression's impact on women and their families.

A key aspect of Le Sueur's literary journalism during the Depression years is the degree to which, like much of her reportage, it is informed by participant, immersion research. She lived often in community with others who shared her vision of society, as did Dorothy Day. For Day, this meant living for nearly fifty years in voluntary poverty among the homeless she served at the Catholic Worker house of hospitality and soup kitchen on New York City's Lower East Side (1933–80); for Le Sueur, this meant living in communal groups of workers and women consisting, during the Depression, of the extended family of her parents, two daughters, and other family members in Minneapolis. They pooled their resources to get by.[23] Le Sueur recounts these experiences in her book about her parents, *Crusaders*.[24] Le Sueur's embrace of communalism grew from her staunch commitment to Communist principles and also from her longing to "extend the love she felt for her children to all of humanity," according to Constance Coiner.[25]

For Day, there was little if any separation between her ideals, the way she lived, and her writing; all centered on the vision of the Catholic Worker movement and its newspaper of the same name that she cofounded in 1933 in New York City. This included living in communitarian, voluntary poverty and working to achieve social justice and peace within a framework of traditional Roman Catholic spirituality.[26] Robert Ellsberg, a *Catholic Worker* editor from 1976 to 1978, called her writing "extraordinary" because "there was absolutely no distinction between what she believed, what she wrote, and the manner in which she lived."[27] She gleaned her mismatched outfits from the common clothing bin and ate the soup kitchen's food du jour, right alongside the homeless. She even shared her room at times with what some derisively call "bag ladies"—the destitute, often homeless women who carry their possessions in shopping bags.

Thus, Day could so effectively reveal insights about the experience of poverty, one of her most common themes. An example is her piece "No Continuing City" from the November 1933 *Catholic Worker*. Written in the style of a play, with frequent dramatization and dialogue, it tells the story of Mary Blount, a working-class woman who visits a city clinic for prenatal care and endures cruelty from the nurses there. She is "a big comfortable woman . . . deep-chested and placid," who "worked hard with her husband." To economize, she plans to give birth in the hospital's public ward and this requires regular prenatal checkups. Her day starts happily; she enjoys "having a holiday from the house at such an unwonted time. . . . To be free and walking the streets when she was usually washing out tiled halls and collecting trash."

But at the clinic when Mary is directed to undress, she discovers that the

sheet she has been given scarcely covers her large frame. Cruelly, the nurses ignore her requests and even laugh at her:

"Please," [Mary] kept saying, her face red and contorted with shame. "Please, miss—please nurse!" The spirit of perversity among the nurses was contagious. The first two had refused to heed her and the other three did likewise. It seemed as though Mary would have to go out into the examination room with two other women with no other covering but the tiny child's sheet which by some miserable chance had been given her.

> "Please, nurse. Please, doctor. I can't come out like this," she begged, her eyes full of tears. She was in an agony of nervousness. Her hands were cold and clammy. She could feel perspiration running between her shoulder blades.
>
> "What's wrong with her, anyway?" one nurse complained.
>
> "What's that woman in there beefing about?"
>
> "It's another sheet she must have. She doesn't like the fit of that one."
>
> "Tell her to shop over on Fifth Avenue. Probably she'll get a better fit over there."

By the end of the piece, Mary "felt that happiness had gone out of life. All the pleasure she had felt in the new life that was in her had fled. The pride in her increasing girth seemed ridiculous now."[28]

Day gave further insights into women's experience of poverty in her column, "Day by Day," in the June 1934 *Catholic Worker*. Here she described the challenges of young women seeking shelter and work in the throes of the country's economic bleakness. "You see them in the waiting rooms of all the department stores," she began. "To all appearance they are waiting to meet their friends, to go on a shopping tour—to a matinee, or to a nicely served lunch in the store restaurant." She continued:

> But in reality they are looking for work (you can see the worn newspapers they leave behind with the help wanted page well thumbed), and they have no place to go, no place to rest but in these public places. . . . The stores are thronged with women buying dainty underwear which they could easily do without—compacts for a dollar, when the cosmetics in the five-and-ten are just as good—and mingling with these protected women and often indistinguishable from them, are these sad ones, these desolate ones, with no homes, no jobs, and never enough food in their stomachs.[29]

Day creates an affecting contrast when she characterizes the misery of impoverished women who work as walking "billboards," advertising glamor-

ous products. One is a:

> woman with bleached marcelled hair who advertises a beauty parlor, a poor wretch haggard with want and in herself a bitter satire directed against the comfortable women who preen and luxuriate in facials, manicures, unguents and ointments, powers and perfumes, while their poorer sisters tramp the streets, ill fed and weary.[30]

This same power is evident in Le Sueur's literary journalism about the Depression, especially in "Women on the Breadlines" and "Women Are Hungry." The authority given by her immersive participation in what she writes about is unmistakable. She lived what she wrote about and her participant-observer voice moves us in a way that the detached perspective of conventional journalism cannot.

Le Sueur wrote a considerable amount of literary journalism as well as short stories, poetry, and essays, and she was acclaimed as a writer in the 1930s. In 1940, when International Publishers brought out her book of fiction and journalism, *Salute to Spring*, Carl Sandburg, Sinclair Lewis, and Zona Gale were among those who wrote jacket blurbs. Then she seemed to disappear for the next twenty or so years. "What happened," Elaine Hedges writes in her introduction to the collection of Le Sueur's work that she edited, entitled *Ripening: Selected Work, 1927–1980*, "was of course what happened to many other radicals of the thirties in the aftermath of World War II. The repressive literary and political climate of the cold war and McCarthyism forced Le Sueur underground, cut off many of her publishing outlets, and often made it impossible for her to find work of any kind."[31] During the McCarthy period, the pacifism of Day and her Catholic Worker movement created challenges for her that included regular FBI visits to the Catholic Worker house in New York City. The word "Catholic" in the name of her movement and paper gave a "protective coloration" that softened public hostility.[32]

For Le Sueur, the repressive climate of blacklisting eventually eased, in the more open political atmosphere of the 1960s. The second wave of the women's movement, ascending in the late '60s, also helped Le Sueur regain public attention and positioned her to enjoy a revival of her work in her eighties. Perhaps this interruption of her publishing career is a reason why scholars have been late to claim at least some of her work as literary journalism.[33] As I have argued elsewhere, women's literary journalism is not always recognized as such, in part because canonical outlets such as the *New Yorker, Esquire*, et al., were sometimes closed to them. Instead, women had to find publications that were more welcoming of their work. As Amy Mattson Lauters has explained, these have included "women's magazines that have historically been devalued as media forms" (including *Woman's Day, Good Housekeeping,* and

*Ladies' Home Journal*), as well as *Cosmopolitan, Sunset,* the *San Francisco Bulletin*, and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, an African American newspaper. Another rich source of women's literary journalism that Lauters found was a group of farming women's magazines such as the *Farmer's Wife, Farm Wife News*, and *Country Woman*.[34] Writing in 1987, Nekola reviewed the scholarly literature and concluded: "To judge from the texts available, women journalists at present occupy a marginal position in the history of radical journalism, and radical journalists occupy a marginal position in the history of women journalists."[35]

I've included Le Sueur's writing in my literary journalism classes since at least 1985, after I first heard her read her work to an audience in Minneapolis. But only in 2014 has she actually made the cut in a collection of literary journalism edited by Jeff Sharlet. He anthologized her piece, "I Was Marching," calling it "one of the most interesting" experiments in documentary prose—reportage—that *New Masses* contributors such as Day, Ernest Hemingway, Richard Wright, and Langston Hughes produced during the 1930s.[36] One reason is her "attempt to retain the intimacy of subjectivity even while transcending what another radical writer of those years, Josephine Herbst, called the 'constricted I.'"[37] Herbst was referring here to the strangling emphasis on the first-person voice for its own sake, with the attendant blindness to understanding one's subjects on their own terms. Le Sueur adroitly avoids interpreting the workers' demonstration from the typical middle-class perspective as something strange and exotic; instead, she joins with the marchers and communicates *their* reality, which has now become hers. The result is a vibrant, deeply told, respectful account that bridges the gap between the typical observer and "the other"—that is, a separate self that may seem much different from one's own. Such participant observation frequently bears fruit in Le Sueur's work, as it does in Day's. This perspective, of course, informs literary journalism, particularly when it is written to advocate for a cause in which its author passionately believes.

Another essential quality that qualifies these works as literary journalism is both writers' emphasis on a larger truth or literary truth—or what Robert Penn Warren and Cleanth Brooks have famously called "truth of coherence."[38] In the simplest terms, this can be thought of as a more universal truth about human experience. As Lois Phillips Hudson has explained, the order that the fiction writer imposes on the chaotic "wild variety of human experience" yields a distinctive truth of coherence. "The writer of fiction explores that daily *unimaginable* reality we all live in, and tries, according to her/his vision of it, to make a work of art that simply renders some segment of it *imaginable*."[39] Penn Warren and Brooks also identified a "truth of correspondence," as in correspondence to factual (rather than imagined) reality.

But of the two types of truth, they reserved truth of coherence as the "peculiar province of fiction."[40]

As literary journalists, both Le Sueur and Day also seek to communicate a truth of coherence about their subjects that conventional journalism is usually unequipped to explore by the limitations of its very design. For Day, that truth of coherence is the vision of the Catholic Worker movement, with its emphasis on social justice and peace advocacy. In Le Sueur's case, a primary focus is criticism of bourgeois society's major flaw, what she calls "the rot of a maggoty individualism,"[41] which defines success as the possession of wealth and power. At the same time, as journalists, these writers seek factual verifiability (truth of correspondence). This is no easy task, but they accomplish it memorably. Their deeply felt literary journalism is a fact-based, nuanced exploration of one of the period's most complex and perplexing issues, the persistence of poverty. Day alludes to the compelling nature of this subject:

> Poverty is a strange and elusive thing. I have tried to write about it, its joys and its sorrows, for thirty years now; and I could probably write about it for another thirty years without conveying what I feel about it as well as I would like. I condemn poverty and I advocate it; poverty is simple and complex at once; it is a social phenomenon and a personal matter. Poverty is an elusive thing, and a paradoxical one.[42]

For both writers, literary journalism offers an opportunity to transcend the norms of conventional reporting in order to explore, in depth, this complex subject. Literary journalism is well suited to communicating its nuances. Consider, for example, Le Sueur's description in "Women on the Breadlines," of how unsettling the receipt of even small amounts of money can be to those unaccustomed to its possession. "If you've ever been without money, or food, something very strange happens when you get a bit of money, a kind of madness," Le Sueur writes. She continues:

> You don't care. You can't remember that you had no money before, that the money will be gone. You can remember nothing but that there is the money for which you have been suffering. Now here it is. A lust takes hold of you. You see food in the windows. In imagination you eat hugely; you taste a thousand meals. You look in windows. Colors are brighter; you buy something to dress up in. An excitement takes hold of you. You know it is suicide but you can't help it. You must have food, dainty, splendid food and a bright hat so once again you feel blithe, rid of that ratty gnawing shame.[43]

## Conclusion

I hope that this study inspires many ideas for subsequent research. For instance, research might examine the comparative dimension of these writers'—particularly Le Sueur's—fiction, which, while not strictly factually veri-

fiable, focuses on many of the same themes as their literary journalism. While Day's early autobiographical novel, *The Eleventh Virgin*,[44] is the sole relevant example, Le Sueur wrote considerable fiction. Her short story "Sequel to Love" (1934) is a work of advocacy that describes the draconian conditions of the 1930s "home for the feeble-minded." The first-person voice of the narrator, a young girl, is credibly vernacular in speech and style. She has just given birth to a baby who has been taken from her and given up for adoption and now, to escape permanent incarceration in an institution, she must undergo sterilization. Le Sueur here critiques capitalist society's denial of maternity to those it considers to be "unfit,"[45] a theme that is congruent with her critique of bourgeois society elsewhere. Further research could also investigate these writers' vision of journalism, particularly literary journalism (which they may have known as "reportage"). Day viewed journalism as a calling and as the social activist's prime tool,[46] while Le Sueur valued journalism's advocacy role. It would be instructive to consult Le Seuer's unpublished letters relative to this subject.

Finally, it would be doubtless be informative to explore the personal connections between these radical writers of the Great Depression. For example, when I asked Le Sueur in the mid-1980s whether she knew of Day and her work, she responded that of course she did: "We women writing about these things [Depression-era poverty and social justice issues] all knew each other. I admired Dorothy Day."[47]

And Day surely must have admired the work of Le Sueur, even though Day ultimately sought to combine the secular radicalism of her youth in the Old Left with the traditional Roman Catholic spirituality of her mature years. What these two writers of the Depression (and beyond) have in common is their commitment to remake society through their passionately felt literary journalism of advocacy.

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## Notes

1. Thomas B. Connery, "Research Review: Magazines and Literary Journalism, an Embarrassment of Riches," in *The American Magazine: Research Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. David Abrahamson (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 211. See also John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 167–69; Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 91.

2. Originally published in *New Masses*, January 1932, 5–7. Gavin Jones has noted Le Sueur's emphasis on poverty's negative effects on body and soul of both genders, in *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature, 1840–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 14. Day similarly underscores poverty's universal harmful impact.

3. See Nancy L. Roberts, "Dorothy Day," in Thomas B. Connery, ed., *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 179–85. Note: Day's papers are archived in the Dorothy Day-Catholic Worker Collection at Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

4. Helpful sources on Le Sueur include: Constance Coiner, *Better Red: The Writing and Resistance of Tillie Olsen and Meridel Le Sueur* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Nora Ruth Roberts, *Three Radical Women Writers: Class and Gender in Meridel Le Sueur, Tillie Olsen, and Josephine Herbst*, Gender and Genre in Literature 6 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996); Janet Galligani Casey, ed., *The Novel and the American Left: Critical Essays on Depression-Era Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004); and Neala Schleuning, *America: Song We Sang without Knowing* (Mankato, MN: Little Red Hen Press, 1983). Le Sueur's papers are archived at the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, MN.

5. Amy Gage, "The Insistent Voice," *Minnesota Monthly* 22, no. 3 (March 1988), 26.

6. Charlotte Nekola, "Worlds Unseen: Political Women Journalists and the 1930s," in *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930–1940*, ed. Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987), 194.

7. Dorothy Day, *House of Hospitality* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939), 233–35.

8. Nekola, *Writing Red*, 195.

9. Meridel Le Sueur, *New Masses*, September 18, 1934, 16–18; and *Ripening: Selected Work, 1927–1980* (New York: Feminist Press, 1982), 158–65.

10. Le Sueur, *Ripening,* 165.

11. Robert Shulman, *The Power of Political Art: The 1930s Literary Left Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 67.

12. Elaine Hedges quoting Meridel Le Sueur, introduction to *Ripening*, 10.

13. Hedges quoting Le Sueur, introduction to *Ripening*, 10; and Le Sueur, "Women Are Hungry," *Ripening*, 143.

14. Hedges, introduction to *Ripening*, 10; also Le Sueur, *Ripening*, 145.

15. Le Sueur, "Women on the Breadlines," *Ripening*, 137.

16. Ibid., 138.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 139.

19. Ibid., 142.

20. Le Sueur, *Ripening*, 137–39, 142.

21. Shulman, *Power of Political Art*, 48.

22. Le Sueur, *Ripening*, 147.

23. Coiner, *Better* Red, 80.

24. Le Sueur, *Crusaders: The Radical Legacy of Marian and Arthur Le Sueur* (New York: Blue Heron, 1955).

25. Coiner, *Better Red*, *80.*

26. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 76.

27. Robert Ellsberg, introduction to *By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), xv.

28. Day, "No Continuing City," *Catholic Worker*, November 1933, 5.

29. Ibid., 7.

30. Day, "Day by Day," *Catholic Worker*, October 1934, 5.

31. Hedges, introduction to *Ripening*, 1.

32. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker,* 140; and Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 209.

33. William Dow, "Writing Dark Times: Settings, Immersions in Agnes Smedley and Meridel Le Sueur" (paper presented to the second annual International Association for Literary Journalism Studies conference, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, May 2007). See also Dow, *Narrating Class in American Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

34. Roberts, "Firing the Cannon: The Historical Search for Literary Journalism's Missing Links," *Literary Journalism Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2012), 83; Amy Mattson Lauters, *The Rediscovered Writings of Rose Wilder Lane: Literary Journalist* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007); Lauters, *More Than a Farmer's Wife: Voices of American Farm Women 1910–1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

35. Nekola, "Writing Red," 190.

36. Jeff Sharlet, ed., *Radiant Truths: Essential Dispatches, Reports, Confessions, and Other Essays on American Belief* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 119.

37. Ibid.

38. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction, 2nd ed.* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), 27.

39. Lois Phillips Hudson, preface to the reprint edition, *Reapers of the Dust: A Prairie Chronicle* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1984), ix–xvi.

40. Brooks and Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction*, 27.

41. Le Sueur, "The Fetish of Being Outside," *New Masses*, February 26, 1935, 22.

42. Dorothy Day, *Loaves and Fishes: The Inspiring Story of the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Curtis Books, 1963), 67.

43. Le Sueur, *Ripening*, 140.

44. Day, *The Eleventh Virgin* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1924).

45. Le Sueur, "Sequel to Love," *Anvil*, January–February 1935.

46. Roberts, *Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker*, 67–68.

47. Nancy L. Roberts, in discussion with the author, Minneapolis, MN, circa 1985.

Edna Staebler c. 1950, courtesy Edna Staebler Collection, Archival and Special Collections, University of Guelph Library.

# The Works of Edna Staebler: Using Literary Journalism to Celebrate the Lives of Ordinary Canadians

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**Abstract:** Edna Staebler's legacy as one of Canada's early, mainstream literary journalists has been overshadowed by her later success as a cookbook writer and philanthropist. But her magazine profiles from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s deserve more recognition for their richly detailed narrative style and focus on ordinary Canadian families that lived in isolated communities or were members of marginalized cultural, ethic, and/or religious groups.

If Canadians know of Edna Staebler—and indeed, many do—it is probably not because of her journalism. Rather, it is for her series of cookbooks of Mennonite-inspired recipes, starting with *Food That Really Schmecks* in 1968.[1] Filled with short, unfussy recipes, including "Norm's Chicken-Potato Chip Casserole," "Grossmommy Martin's Kuddlefleck," and "Gwetcha Pie (Prune Custard Pie)," the collection was inspired by an article Staebler wrote for *Maclean's* magazine in 1954 called "Those Mouth-watering Mennonite Meals."[2] That cookbook, and the many others that followed, became a best-seller quickly and made Staebler a household name across the country. It continues to sell well today and was even made available recently as an iPad app.[3]

One of the unfortunate consequences of Staebler's success as a cookbook writer was how it overshadowed her earlier work as a journalist. Between 1948 and 1965, Staebler wrote long narrative articles focused, for the most part, on ordinary Canadians and their day-to-day lives for *Maclean's* and *Chatelaine*, two of the country's leading magazines. Her pieces were noteworthy not only because of their literary, narrative style but also because of their subjects. Instead of profiling politicians, business leaders, or celebrities, Staebler wrote

about ordinary Canadians. Whether it was a community of African American slave descendants in Nova Scotia, the Hutterites of Alberta, or a family of Italian immigrants in downtown Toronto, she showed a particular interest in learning about those living in isolated regions of the country and the many minority groups that comprise Canada's multicultural mosaic. As part of her research, Staebler would routinely spend a week or more living with her subjects, taking part in their usual activities while asking questions and recording notes. The articles that resulted from this immersive, almost ethnographic type of reporting were richly detailed narratives, full of scenes, anecdotes, and dialogue, which brought her subjects to life for readers. As popular as Staebler's articles were with readers—and despite the role they played in helping to shape the country's postwar multicultural identity—they have been mostly forgotten today in light of Staebler's fame as a cookbook writer and, later, philanthropist. As such, this essay will argue that Staebler's journalistic work deserves wider recognition, both in terms of expanding the canon of Canadian literary journalism and in highlighting the work of early female literary journalists whose contributions have often been overlooked.

## Becoming a Writer: Half a Life's Work

Staebler was born Edna Cress in 1906, in the small town of Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario.[4] Her father was a shopkeeper who provided his family with a comfortable, middle-class life.[5] After high school, Staebler earned a Bachelor of Arts and then her teaching certification at the University of Toronto. It was there she met and became engaged to her future husband, Keith. They were married in 1933 and returned to Kitchener.[6] After short stints working in her father's shop and then in the classroom, Staebler became primarily a society wife. It was a role she did not relish. In her published diaries, she wrote:

> This business of being married and doing nothing with a brain, which may or may not be any good is too, too awful. I must do something. I resent just being a housewife like all the dumb gals I went to school with and couldn't be bothered talking much 'cause they had nothing to say, no vision, and now we're married and they're all better housekeepers than I am, and I do nothing to prove to myself or anyone else that I have any brains at all.[7]

Staebler had long dreamed of becoming a novelist, but suffered from a lack of inspiration and self-confidence. She received little encouragement from either her mother or her husband, who insisted that writing was a waste of time for women and urged her to content herself with being a wife.[8] But that was an increasingly difficult challenge: by 1940, Staebler's marriage had soured. Her husband had turned out to be an emotionally abusive alcoholic

who was rarely home; in addition, he had engaged in multiple extramarital affairs.[9] Staebler considered divorcing him but could not conceive of a way to support herself as a single woman or survive the social stigma associated with divorce during that period.[10]

It was around this time that Staebler began to imagine—and take steps toward creating—a life that was more focused on her own needs and interests. Her first step was figuring out how to become a better writer and increase the likelihood of being able to write professionally. She had contributed to her university newspaper during school, which inspired her to begin a correspondence course in newspaper writing. She did not complete it because it did not feel like the right fit for her: "I am interested in developing a personal literary style," she wrote, "not straight newspaper reporting or sob stuff or that sort of thing."[11] Around this time, Staebler also became more interested in the world beyond Kitchener, partly because of the wayward soldiers, home from the war and down on their luck, that Keith would bring home and expect Staebler to clothe, feed, and mother.[12] It was not a responsibility that Staebler welcomed, but meeting these men and learning about their lives and experiences overseas inspired her to find out more about how other people lived. As Alyson King notes, Staebler had a wide-ranging curiosity and an openness to questioning and challenging her own beliefs, as well as prevailing social norms, that developed during her time at university. It was an environment in which she "struggled to find a sense of self and purpose and to reconcile the familiar traditions with new ideas about evolution, religion, and nation."[13] In this way, King says, she was typical of female university students at the time. Raised Presbyterian, Staebler embraced challenges to her faith and worldview. She was also influenced by the social gospel and the idea of becoming a missionary, both to do good and as a way to see the world.[14] As such, it was not unexpected that meeting the war veterans her husband brought home and hearing about their lives, which were so different from her own, would have awakened a long-held, dormant desire to see other parts of Canada and the world, as she had expressed in her diary at the age of nineteen: "If I'd be an old maid I'd want to travel all the time, only then I wouldn't have enough money and I'd really need an awful lot. My ambition has always been to travel and see everything. I must do it somehow."[15]

In 1943, Staebler travelled from Ontario to Nova Scotia by train to the city of Lunenburg, which she wanted to visit as it had been settled by German immigrants—much like her own hometown. Upon her return weeks later, Keith told her that the letters she had sent home describing her trip proved better reading than most books and that she should think about writing professionally.[16] Although this was the first time Keith had supported her efforts

as a writer, it was not the first time she had been praised for her letter writing, as she had many long-time correspondents around the world.

Staebler was taken with the landscape and people of the coastal towns of Nova Scotia. In August 1945, she set out to make an extended exploration of the province with a couple of her pen pals, leaving behind her troubled home life and failing marriage. Not long into the trip, one of her travelling companions made his amorous intentions clear to Staebler, who did not share his feelings and quickly tired of his advances. So much so that one day, she demanded he stop the car and leave her, along with her luggage, at the side of the road en route to her sister's home in Halifax.[17] As her biographer, Veronica Ross, writes: "She was thirty-nine years old, a slim woman wearing a pantsuit, and she was stranded in this tiny village of weather-beaten houses rising above the Atlantic on the northern tip of the Cabot Trail. No hotels, no phone even, only one small store, chickens scratching in the yards."[18]

Staebler had wound up in the tiny fishing village of Neil's Harbour in Cape Breton, home to just a few hundred people, mostly immigrants from Newfoundland who had distinct accents and traditions from those of most Nova Scotians.[19] She found the villagers warm and welcoming and altogether less stuffy and snobby than those in whose circles she moved at home in Kitchener. At a time when her own family life was difficult, she was moved by how quickly the locals embraced her as part of their community. As Ross notes, "She was not Mrs. Staebler but 'our Aidna' who had arrived like a gypsy and stayed to become almost one of them."[20] As such, her unplanned stay in Neil's Harbour stretched to three weeks. Staebler enjoyed learning more about the locals' way of life in such an isolated spot, where things seemed simpler and more peaceful than at home, harkening back to the prewar era. During her stay, she sent long letters home about the people of Neil's Harbour. She began taking notes, which soon numbered in the hundreds of pages. At long last, the would-be novelist who could never come up with a workable idea had stumbled upon some promising source material.

But even with so much inspiration and so many notes, writing did not come easily to Staebler after she returned home. Her correspondence course in newspaper writing was no help in figuring out how to write the novel she had in mind, so she floundered. Then, at a meeting of the Canadian Women's Club, Staebler happened to meet Dr. John Robins, a Governor General's Award–winning novelist and professor at the University of Toronto's Victoria College .[21] They became friends, and he became a writing mentor to her. Crucially, he introduced her to the genre creative nonfiction, to which she took an immediate liking. As she explained in her diary, "Robins gave expert, technical advice. It was all right to tell the story simply, he advised, but the

narrative could provide a way to convey profound reflection, a philosophy of life and man and nature."[22] She eventually completed a manuscript for a novel about a fictionalized Neil's Harbour, which drew heavily on her own experiences. Despite her diligent efforts to find a publishing house, it was not to be. Publishers told her that Canadian readers were not interested in such regional fare and said the book had no hope of selling enough copies to break even, let alone make a profit.[23]

Although Staebler found the rejections dispiriting, she continued to revise her manuscript, which had become a labor of love, and to seek out new publishers. Three years later, someone suggested to Staebler that instead of trying to have her novel published, she rework some of the material she collected in Neil's Harbour as a news article. Although she had never wanted to become a reporter or do any sort of journalistic writing—apart from her contributions to the University of Toronto's student newspaper—Staebler was determined to get her work published. She spent the next six weeks writing a twenty-four-page manuscript about a day she spent with sailors on a swordfish expedition. Then, in May 1948, unaware of the protocol for submitting an article for publication, she drove to Toronto to deliver her manuscript to the offices of *Maclean's* in person. She then returned home and gave it little more thought, continuing to revise her novel. One week later, a *Maclean's* editor called her with an offer to publish a slightly condensed version of her article for $150 in the magazine's July issue.[24] With that, at age forty, Staebler became a published writer for the first time.

That article, titled "Duelists of the Deep," after the fishermen who used spears to snare swordfish, was unlike most of the articles found in the magazine at the time, both for its literary style of writing and because it was a feature-length piece focused not on politicians, business leaders, or celebrities, but rather fishermen. The article began with a scene written in the first person:

> Far below us, silhouetted by a glittering sea, was a little boat with a figure swaying at the top of her sailless mast. I drove slowly to watch her idle motion. Suddenly a man ran on to the end of her bowsprit. For a moment he was suspended, then he lunged forward from the waist, poised with an arm extended, recovered, paused for an instant and dashed back to obscurity in the hull. A figure on the mast had dropped to the deck.
>
> I couldn't see the deck details clearly from where I was, but I knew the men on the boat had a swordfish. I felt it, and I was excited, and the winding road down to the village had never seemed so long. I was afraid I wouldn't get there in time to see them bring it in.[25]

The story followed Staebler to the wharf, where she, amid a crowd of local onlookers, saw her first swordfish:

> It was stupendous. The body was round; the skin, dark purple-grey, rough one way, smooth the other, like a cat's tongue; the horny black fins stood out like scimitars, the tail like the handle bars of a giant bicycle; but the strangest thing was the straight, flat, pointed, sharp-sided sword which was an extension of the head—an upper lip more than three feet long.[26]

Her sense of excitement and wonder comes across clearly in her writing, as carefully chosen details bring the scene to life. Staebler herself, as a character in the piece, is another important aspect of what makes the story so engaging, as a stand-in for the reader, as is evident in the following scene:

> A little boy knelt near the head of the dead fish; with a rusty hook he ripped open the glazed membrane of the huge round eye that was upper-most. Out of the cavity ran clear, slurpy liquid, reminiscent of the kind hairdressers use. With a shudder I watched the child put his hand into the socket and pull something out of it. He looked at me.
>
> "Want te heyeball?" he asked, stretching his hand toward me.
>
> He opened his hand and I saw a perfect sphere about an inch and a quarter in diameter, clear as glass, reflecting the colors of the sea, the hills and the setting sun like a soap bubble; it was beautiful.
>
> "Take it," he said.
>
> "You mean you're giving it to me?"
>
> "Yes." (Not yeah.)
>
> I couldn't spurn a gift; reluctantly I held out my hand. The boy placed the crystal gently on my palm. It felt cool and tender as a piece of very firm jelly or a gumdrop that has had the sugar licked off it.[27]

In her first published piece of writing, Staebler's writing is assured, polished, and engaging. Her curiosity and excitement at watching the swordfish cleaned and wanting to learn more about how it was caught was enough to convince one crew to take her on board for their next expedition, as the article goes on to detail. More than merely a postcard travelogue, Staebler's article showed *Maclean's* readers what it was like to go out on the ocean in search of swordfish in finely wrought detail, but also provided a clear sense of the challenges inherent in making a living as an East Coast fisherman.

It was an unusual article for *Maclean's* for a number of reasons. As noted, it focused on the lives of ordinary people—fishermen and their families—as

far from the country's economic and political centers as could be. Second, it was a feature-length article written by a woman—and a first-time writer at that. Although other women wrote for the magazine at the time, including noted author and social activist June Callwood, it was still far from the norm. Their pieces tended to be more conventionally newsy in tone and approach, and focused on issues of social justice.[28] Staebler's article, on the other hand, was unabashedly personal and narrative. For most *Maclean's* readers, it served as an introduction to what would now be referred to as literary journalism, a type of writing that resonated with many readers and set Staebler on a career path that she could never have imagined.

## The Reluctant (Literary) Journalist

To be sure, Staebler never considered herself a journalist. She felt her true calling was to become a novelist, and her magazine work was something she did when she was unable to publish her fiction. Her interest was not in breaking or relaying important news, but in sharing stories about Canadians from different walks of life and trying to understand people and her country better. Regardless, it is clear that she was, in fact, performing the role of a journalist and producing journalism, not only because her articles were published in two of Canada's leading magazines for a period of about twenty years, but also because they involved on-the-ground, independent research, reporting, and interviewing—they were not mere travelogues or columns.

Part of the reason why Staebler may not have seen herself as a journalist was because the type of journalism she created was so different than what most conventional news journalists were producing at the time. Her articles reflected her interest in learning about the day-to-day lives of ordinary people in far-flung parts of the country. She was a storyteller at heart. She had a keen eye for detail and a good ear for dialogue. She captured the rhythms of how people spoke, often recreating her subjects' dialects in her articles. Indeed, it was that difference in approach and style that appealed to her editors and readers. As Staebler recalled, her editor at *Maclean's,* Pierre Berton, told his junior editors that while they were allowed to work with Staebler to condense her drafts, they were not allowed to alter her phrasing for fear of altering her style.[29] Today, it is clear that while she may not have set out to create works of literary journalism, the fact that she ended up doing so is incontrovertible.

According to Norman Sims, the hallmarks of literary journalism as a genre include the use of immersion reporting; richly detailed, accurate reporting; symbolic representation; the inclusion of the writer's voice; a heightened literary style; and, often, the search for meaning in everyday events and people. All of these attributes are present in Staebler's magazine work, with

the exception of symbolic representation, as she preferred a more realistic, straightforward, descriptive style.[30] Indeed, most of these hallmarks were present from her first piece, "Duelists of the Deep," not because she was following any sort of checklist. Rather, she used those techniques because they allowed her to tell the story she wanted. In other words, it was natural. In many ways, the approach and techniques she used by instinct for that first story ended up forming a template of sorts for all of the articles that followed.

From the start, it was essential for Staebler to spend time with her subjects and immerse herself in their lives. Not only did it strike her as the best way to get to know the people she was writing about, but, as important, the method had worked out so well for her while reporting "Duelists of the Deep" that doing something different made no sense. Similarly, it was an approach whose results appealed to her editors, including Berton. He was so impressed with her first story that he was quick to assign another. This time, he asked her to write a feature article about Old Order Mennonites in the Kitchener area. He wanted the same narrative take she had used to report on the fishermen of Neil's Harbour. Staebler was not immediately interested—she did not consider herself a journalist and felt her time was probably better spent revising her novel.[31] But she eventually agreed, warning Berton that she knew little about the Mennonites apart from having noticed them around town in their horse-drawn buggies. Having had no journalistic training and being unsure of how to begin, Staebler decided to approach the assignment the same way she had done in Cape Breton. She dropped by the general store in St. Jacob's, a hub for Mennonites because of its farmers' market, and asked if anyone knew a friendly Mennonite family who might agree to let her live with and write about them.[32] Someone suggested the Kramer family, who lived on a nearby ancestral farm. It speaks highly of Staebler's charm, sincerity, and persistence that she was able to convince the Kramers (whom she called the Martins in her article and subsequent pieces about them, so as to protect their privacy) to let her live with them and write about their lives and traditions, given how private Old Order Mennonites tend to be. Staebler recalled that while they were initially apprehensive about receiving so much attention, they were won over by her goal of wanting to show Canadians what they were really like, beyond the rumors that circulated about them:

> "You don't want to make fun of us?" the Martins were anxious when I asked if I might live with them for a few days and to learn and write about them. Though humble and trustful the Martins were always alert.
>
> We used our Christian names. They were natural and pleasant, and answered my questions thoughtfully, trustfully, generously, and asked me

> many in return—only Grossdoddy [Grandfather], listening with a gentle smile, took no part.[33]

Staebler spent as much time as possible with the family as they went about their usual routines. She helped with cooking and farm chores, shared meals with the family, and accompanied them to church services. She employed a similar fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants strategy for another of her early *Maclean's* pieces, a 1952 story about a colony of Hutterites in Alberta.[34] In an out-of-print anthology of some of her favorite magazine work, Staebler explained that after accepting the assignment, she researched the Hutterites at the Kitchener library, "[t]hen I got on a train bound for Lethbridge [, Alberta]; from there I took a bus for Waterton Lakes to see mountains and to try to find a Hutterite colony."[35] While on the bus, she overheard a young woman speaking with the driver and discovered she was a teacher at the Old Elm colony. After Staebler explained what she was doing there, the woman offered her a cot in her room:

> [Y]ou're welcome to stay with me until Wednesday—that's when my husband is coming back from a Mormon mission on the east coast. I haven't seen him for more than a year and I want to be with him alone." She grinned. "But by that time you may have got acquainted with some of the people and talked them into letting you stay with them.[36]

Once again, Staebler's unusual approach proved successful. Within days of her arrival, she was invited to sleep on a cot in the bedroom of two sisters who shared three rooms in the colony with their parents and brother. She received a warm welcome from the Hutterites and was invited to visit several homes each evening.[37] Even though she had stumbled on to this type of immersion research after becoming stranded in Neil's Harbour, it was a successful method for Staebler and became one of her trademarks. Describing the importance of her approach, she later wrote:

> A journalist friend once said to me, "Edna, why do you spend so much time doing research on the people you write about? I simply make a long list of questions, get all the answers in an hour or two, then come home and write my piece."
>
> I didn't dispute her method but I couldn't work that way. For me it presupposed too much, merely got answers to something already half-known; there was no place for surprises and all those delightful things that happen when you become friends with people, and they are natural in your presence and you learn from them by living their lives with them until you feel you have assimilated enough to write an understanding piece about them.[38]

Another of Staebler's trademarks, evident in all of her articles, was her

eye for detail and how she was able to bring people and places alive for readers through her writing. In the 1950 *Maclean's* story, "Isles of Codfish and Champagne," she describes the French island of St. Pierre off the coast of Newfoundland in Atlantic Canada, a hub for American bootleggers during Prohibition:

> There are no bootlegging boats in the harbour now, the smell of cod is stronger than that of rum, empty liquor warehouses on 11th of November Street are used for prize fights and French movies. In the cafés fishermen drink champagne, on the waterfront straw-stuffed sabots clatter, and Chanel No. 5 is displayed in a hundred shop windows with leeks, Benedictine and gay things from Paris.[39]

She skillfully uses details to juxtapose the islanders' continental pretentions with their reality of living on a tiny, single-industry French outpost. On the one hand, they have easy access to:

> cartons of delicate wafers, boiled sweets, chocolate and pickles from France. Handmade French lace is twenty cents a yard. There are dainty kid gloves, Swiss watches for fifteen dollars, pipes, jewelry, cameras, for a song, and cosmetics, the very best, for fifty francs a box. Perfumes that are forty dollars in Montreal are four dollars in St. Pierre.[40]

On the other, Staebler describes the heart of the island's economy:

> Le Frigo, the great concrete fish-freezing plant . . . stands on the edge of the roadstead. Except for one room, used for storing food and bait, the decaying building, which cost seventeen million francs, has not been freezing fish for thirty years, yet it represents the colony's only industry: the shipping of fish caught off the shores of the islands and the transshipping of salt cod brought in by the trawlers.[41]

With these well-chosen details, Staebler shows readers, instead of telling them outright, the central irony about life on St. Pierre: that while the islanders may have easy and inexpensive access to high-end French goods and pretentions to living better than their Canadian neighbors, they are, in fact, no better off.

Staebler's voice is present in most of her magazine articles, often posing questions to her subjects in long excerpts of dialogue. For example, in her article about Old Order Mennonites in the Kitchener area, she explored how different they were from most Canadians. They used electricity and tractors, but would not buy cars or radios; they would not pose for photographs, but did not mind being captured in candid shots; they declined old age and family allowances, and refused to go to court or war. At the end of the story, she remarks on the peace that comes from their lifestyle:

> The last night of my stay in the fieldstone house I said, "I haven't heard a grumbling word since I came here. Don't you ever get mad? Don't your children ever quarrel? Are you never tired of working? Do you never break your rules?"
>
> They looked at each other and laughed. "We're all extra good just now because you're here," Levina said.
>
> "We're telling you what all we're supposed to do but we don't always do it," Hannah grinned.
>
> "You are so quiet," Salema said to me. "What are you thinking about?"
>
> "I was thinking how peaceful it is here. In the world I'm going back to we are always fighting for peace," I said.[42]

In some cases, Staebler's use of her own authorial voice expands until she becomes a full-fledged character in her story. Nowhere is she more present in an article than in a 1956 piece for *Maclean's* in which she sets out to learn about the residents of Nova Scotia's New Road Settlement, outside of Halifax, who were descendants of African American slaves.[43] Tellingly, it appears to be the only time that Staebler undertook an assignment to live with people and tell their story and did not receive a warm welcome. The secretary of the local school board wanted to know why she had come to New Road, why she was "picking on" them, and spent more than an hour trying to dissuade her from doing so.[44] Instead, Staebler decided to stay in a nearby village and spent a week visiting New Road during the day. Her results were mixed: while some people were happy to visit with her early on, others were suspicious of her questions about where they and their forebears had come from.

Toward the end of her trip, Staebler tried to take photographs of some of the children. She winds up watching a fight between two girls on the street, one of whom later warns her away from taking so many photographs:

> [W]e came to the road that ran down past the church. Sitting on the bank at the corner there must have been a dozen women and twice as many children. They all stared at me, the women with suspicious hostility in their black eyes. Ogerine looked uneasy. She muttered, "So long," and sat on the bank with the rest of them. I walked on alone. I heard someone mutter, "Git out o'here."
>
> Next day, no one spoke to me in New Road. Mothers called their children into the houses, slammed the doors and watched me through the windows as I passed. School children cried, "Run, here she comes." The girls hid behind the school and under its steps, the boys dodged into the paths through the bushes or formed a tight five-deep ring around me that gave me no

> freedom of action. Dodging my camera became a kind of game. They taunted me, said "Can't take my pitcher." When I sat in my car they peered at me through the windows, breathed on the glass, called me names.
>
> Stones were thrown into puddles as I passed between them on the road. Something hit my chin. Small angry black faces appeared and disappeared wherever I walked. The little children who had been so eager and friendly before, now looked frightened and ran when they saw me.[45]

This kind of open hostility was new for Staebler, and she wrote about it in detail, explaining how her presence had overtaken the story she had wanted to tell. Her frustrations are also clear about how, despite her best intentions, many of the New Road residents felt that she was interfering with their lives and had no business photographing or writing about them without their permission. Today, it seems obvious why the New Road residents would be suspicious of a privileged, white woman arriving with the goal of telling their story and taking photographs freely for a national magazine. Staebler concedes that their hostility toward her and suspicion about her motives may be connected to their experience of discrimination, but her frustration and hurt feelings are evident. This emotional interference makes her a central character in the article in a way that did not happen in other pieces.

There is no question that Staebler's writing has literary style. She was not given to the use of symbolism or especially complex narratives. She was partial to an essay style, and began her stories with history and cultural context, followed by a description of the setting, before introducing her characters. Her writing was not complicated: she preferred a style that was clear, forthright, and filled with detail. In her 1951 profile of Maggie Ingraham, a young woman leaving behind her life and family in Neil's Harbour for Toronto, Staebler describes the setting:

> Old men whittle in the sun by the grey shingle stages clustered around the shore. Young men sway on the masts of the swordfishing boats as they search for the previous prey. Codfisherman wearing rubber boots and trousers split their catch on the blood-encrusted jetties. Their speech has the rich gusty tang of the Newfoundlanders who crossed the Cabot Strait, cleared the shallow earth around the Harbor and established their holdings by squatters' rights eighty years ago.
>
> There is little movement in the village: the occasional flash of color as a woman crosses a yard, the slow roaming of cows and horses outside the fences, the playing of children at the docks and on the roads. And there is little sound: only the whisper of the water, the shouts and laughter of the people, the calling of the birds, the moaning of the bell buoy.[46]

In another profile of a miner's family in northern Ontario, Staebler provides the following description of the Gordon (Porky) Wheatley and his job:

> Porky, whose prickly crewcut hair accounts for his nickname, is quiet and calm, with a muscular, slim-hipped physique developed by weightlifting, boxing and work. He likes to play poker, go fishing and hunt moose, but each working day he dutifully leaves the security of his sunlight and sinks down into the darkness that is dripping and cold, the air thick with stone dust and blasting smoke. He wears a hard helmet with a light on the front, shatterproof glasses, rubber trousers and jacket, steel-toed boots and heavy gloves. He uses a grease-spattering rock drill that is gradually deafening him and dynamite that could blow him to bits if he's careless.[47]

Her writing is notable for its precision and clarity. It wasn't literary in the sense that it was overdone. Like a journalist, Staebler favored concision and precision.

As discussed, Staebler's magazine articles meet most of the crucial criteria for literary journalism, as set out by Sims. In many cases, the groups or cultures her subjects belong to are minorities, such as the country's small, isolated populations of Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites; east coast fishermen and their families; and northern Ontario miners.[48] Almost all of the stories focus on ordinary, everyday people, which suited Staebler. As she wrote in her diary: "[T]hey were good pieces, talking of the life of people in Canada who had no self-expression and were perhaps misunderstood by other Canadians."[49]

## The Call of Cookbooks

In 1954, Staebler wrote a second piece for *Maclean's* about the Kitchener-area Old Order Mennonites, this time focusing on their recipes and cooking traditions. It was something of a passion project for her, given that she had remained close with the Kramer family since first writing about them. It was also a respite from her increasingly strained marriage. In 1961, after spending time at a rehabilitation farm, her husband Keith asked Staebler for a divorce and she consented.[50] One year later, she moved to the couple's cottage on Sunfish Lake, where she would spend the rest of her life, and focused on her writing.[51] After her Mennonite cooking article was published, she fielded many offers from publishers to create a cookbook. While Staebler accepted one, it was not something she took seriously at first. She later admitted to feeling embarrassed about the concept, and worked on it only as a side project while researching and writing other articles.[52] Those feelings dissipated after the book was published and became an overnight bestseller. She saw how it resonated with readers, with its simple recipes, warm, folksy tone, and vivid anecdotes about the people who provided them. Its brisk sales also gave her

the leverage, at last, to succeed in having her novel published. Twenty-seven years after Staebler was dropped off at the side of the road in Neil's Harbour and started work on the manuscript, *Cape Breton Harbour* was published in 1972 when Staebler was sixty-six.[53] As she said repeatedly during the rest of her life, it was the proudest achievement of her career.

As previously noted, Staebler's *Food That Really Schmecks* marked a turning point in her career. As her recognition grew as a cookbook writer, she gave up most of her other writing, as she loved testing recipes and having friends over to Sunfish Lake to taste them. She was also inspired by the response she received from readers, in person and through letters, about how much the cookbook meant to them:

> I had this guilty feeling [about writing cookbooks] but as soon as I started autographing, I thought: What's wrong with that? Here I've written a book so many people have really enjoyed. A woman in England said whenever she felt homesick, she pulled out my cookbook. Before, I felt as though I were doing an inferior thing. I didn't think about writing a novel after that.[54]

Staebler died in 2006, in her 101st year, by which point she had published a series of successful cookbooks and become known as a generous philanthropist, endowing a $10,000 annual book award for creative nonfiction at Wilfrid Laurier University[55] and a writer-in-residence program at the Kitchener Public Library,[56] among many other contributions. She was, by all accounts, a remarkable woman, all the more reason it is unfortunate that her early magazine work has been overlooked. A collection of her favorite profiles was published in 1983, along with updates about some of the people and places she wrote about twenty years earlier.[57] A different publisher printed the volume in 1990 under a new title, but it, too, has since gone out of print.[58] The original versions of Staebler's articles are partially available in databases, microfiche, or in archives,[59] which makes them inaccessible for most readers. This may partly explain why Staebler's groundbreaking work as a female literary journalist has gone unnoticed.

But exposing these works to a larger audience of readers, students, and researchers is an important step in expanding the canon of literary journalism in Canada, as well as highlighting the work of female literary journalists around the world. For this reason, closer analysis of her articles is warranted, as is a consideration of her first cookbook itself, *Food That Really Schmecks,* as an example of literary journalism, with its many anecdotes and scenes about the recipes' contributors. For, as Nancy L. Roberts has suggested, it is important for scholars to look beyond the mainstream media, in heretofore unlikely places—women's magazines, letters, diaries, and perhaps even cookbooks—to discover and understand better women's literary journalism.[60]

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**Notes**

1. Edna Staebler, *Food That Really Schmecks: Mennonite Country Cooking as Prepared by My Mennonite Friend, Bevvy Martin, My Mother and Other Fine Cooks* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968).

2. Edna Staebler, "Those Mouth-watering Mennonite Meals," *Maclean's*, April 1, 1954, 20–21, 60–63.

3. "Food That Really Schmecks," Wilfrid Laurier University Press, http://www.wlu.ca/press/Catalog/staebler-food.shtml.

4. Christl Verduyn, ed., *Must Write: Edna Staebler's Diaries* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 17.

5. Veronica Ross, *To Experience Wonder: Edna Staebler: A Life* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2003), 50.

6. Ibid., 51–52.

7. Verduyn, 65.

8. Ross, 97.

9. Ibid., 191

10. Ibid., 104.

11. Ibid., 65.

12. Ibid., 82.

13. Alyson E. King, "Embracing the Modern: Edna Cress Staebler at the University of Toronto, 1926–1929," *Historical Studies in Education* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 69–88.

14. Ibid., 77–78.

15. Verduyn, 31.

16. Ibid., 84.

17. Ibid., 91.

18. Ross, 91.

19. Ibid., 92.

20. Ibid., 92.

21. One of the Governor General of Canada's responsibilities is to recognize annually the achievements of Canadians in arts and academia.

22. Ross, 101.
23. Ibid., 131.
24. Ibid., 116.
25. Edna Staebler, "Duelists of the Deep," *Maclean's*, July 15, 1948, 18.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
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43. Edna Staebler, "Would You Change the Lives of These People?" *Maclean's*, May 12, 1956.
44. Ibid., 56.
45. Ibid., 62.
46. Edna Staebler, "Maggie's Leaving Home," *Maclean's*, November 1, 1951, 23.
47. Edna Staebler, "Miner's Wife," *Chatelaine*, March 1962, 36.
48. Hard copies of all of Staebler's magazine work are available in the Edna Stabler Collection (XR1MSA700) at Archival and Special Collections, University of Guelph Library, Ontario, Canada.
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50. Ross, 188.
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Martha Gellhorn, seated on deck chair, aboard the SS Rexx, returning from Europe, January 12, 1940. Photo: Bettmann/Corbis.

Gerda Taro and Robert Capa, January 1, 1936, Paris. Photo: Fred Stein/dpa/Corbis.

Andrée Viollis on the occasion of the Prix de L'Europe Nouvelle, 1933.
Photo: Roger Viollis.

# Rebels with a Cause: Women Reporting the Spanish Civil War

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**Abstract:** This article evaluates the war journalism produced by Martha Gellhorn, Gerda Taro, and Andrée Viollis, three women whose work reflects the many circumstances that brought them on the battlefield, including their gender. All three used journalistic style and emotional substance to advance readers' understanding of the conflict and push their political agenda. Their meticulously crafted reportages focused on human suffering, but they also presented military action and interpellated politicians. They drew attention to burning issues in Spain but also connected the Spanish tragedy to transnational concerns. Their unabated fight against fascism was generated by a sense of responsibility, and in creating a discursive space to help others exist they embraced alterity. Running counter to any emotional freezing, the dual articulation of movement and agitation in their reporting consolidates the link between attachment and engagement. This journalism was deeply rooted in the lived experience of soldiers and civilians with whom they endured the fights on the frontlines and the shelling of cities. Emotional journalism was a strategy to alienate their inner selves and get closer to their subjects, which their own subaltern positions facilitated. Their femininity was used to serve their journalistic calling and access an almost exclusively male public sphere. The texts and images produced also foregrounded a common political stance and determination. They used aesthetic tools to ethical ends, and their emotional journalism was used to move us and make us move.

The death of the *Sunday Times* war correspondent Marie Colvin in Homs, Syria, on February 22, 2012, was declared as a terrible loss for journalism. She died in action, reporting from the heart of the conflict, concerned for the plight of a starved and bereft people relentlessly bombed by a cruel dictator. Colvin had borne witness to countless conflicts across the world and

was determined to give a voice to innocent victims mercilessly crushed by brutal regimes and evil forces. Moral responsibility and dedication to others defined her journalism. As Roy Greenslade wrote in her obituary, political strategy and weaponry were not her main concerns. Rather, Colvin's focus was the effect of war on civilians.[1] She was committed to accurately reporting and exposing the atrocities of war, hoping the international community would take action. "Why is the world not there?" she lamented from Syria, and repeatedly from other places prior to the conflict that killed her.[2] Among her personal effects on her last assignment was Martha Gellhorn's *The Face of War*.

## Journalism of Attachment

Colvin was one of the most respected war correspondents because her first-hand accounts were delivered with a just indignation, and because she was fearless in the face of adversity. She was not a literary journalist, but because she covered wars and conflicts, like the women discussed in this article—Gellhorn (1908–98), Gerda Taro (1910–37), and Andrée Viollis (1870–1950)—her impressive career is my cue to tackle the specificities of war journalism produced by women, in particular literary and photographic journalism. My hypothesis is that these women's dedication to the innocent casualties of war—their papers expected them to write human interest stories—resulted in the production of what might be called "emotional journalism," for want of a better term. This is not to say that I posit a journalistic *écriture feminine* that would reductively be conceived of as sob stories. I would even side with those who might question the necessity of creating a distinctive gender-based category of literary journalists. Yet my contention is that each one of the aforementioned reporters, both for microcosmic reasons (family background, education, personal and professional life paths sprinkled with exceptional encounters but also riddled with obstacles) and macrocosmic circumstances (the context of the Spanish Civil War, the media that commissioned their texts and photographs, their readership in various locations) produced original journalism not unrelated to their being *women* on the frontline. In other words, I am interested in examining their distinctive textual and photographic production, which reflects the many circumstances that brought them on the battlefield including, but not limited to, their gender.

Journalism with an emotional quality might be compared to the partisan and partial "journalism of attachment," coined by Martin Bell, who defines it as reporting that takes the human and emotional costs of war into consideration.[3] Journalism of attachment "is not only knowing, but also caring."[4]

Both Colvin's and Gellhorn's work have been labeled as journalism of attachment.[5] It is difficult to resist the conclusion that journalism of attachment and literary (photographic) journalism share similarities, particularly because of the sensitivity and humanity infused in such reportages. Those who champion journalism of attachment insist that it not about emotional dependence: it is journalism that holds authorities to account and aims to galvanize people into action. As O'Neill suggests, "[I]n emphasizing attachment over neutrality, and emotionalism over objectivity, the new breed of attached reporter became more like an activist, an international campaigner, rather than a dispassionate recorder of fact and truth."[6] Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis used both reportorial and aesthetic means to inform their readers, but because they did not limit themselves to warfare and military strategies, the conflict became everyone's concern and responsibility. As such, their "emotional" journalism prompted profound soul searching and invited essential questions.

Conversely, the detractors of journalism of attachment denounce its biased combatant spirit.[7] In this article, I hope to demonstrate that Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis, used journalistic style and emotional substance to advance their readers' understanding of the conflict and push their political agenda, not as personal crusades. Gayatri Spivak's views on activism help elucidate how these women were using their journalism for "ethical intervention" at a global level.[8] In so doing, they were not only drawing attention to the burning issues in Spain but were also connecting the Spanish tragedy to transnational concerns. Their unabated fight against fascism was generated not only by audacity but, most importantly, by a sense of responsibility, which Spivak understands as the ethical act of creating a discursive space to help others exist and, in so doing, embrace alterity. Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis made visible the plight of the oppressed by propelling their local reportages onto the international scene. They used aesthetic tools to ethical ends. Their epistemological performances constituted a violent critique of European democracies that opted for nonintervention. The reportages that resulted from their expeditions to and from the warring cities of Spain are evidence of their dedication to the job: They were constantly in motion to elicit their readers' emotions.

Interestingly enough, the etymology of the term emotion, from old French *émotion*, first meant "a (social) moving, stirring, agitation," and from Latin *e-movere*, "move out, remove, agitate,"[9] before it took on any reference to feelings. Running counter to any emotional freezing, this dual articulation of movement and agitation underpins the literary and photographic journalism of Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis, and consolidates the link between attachment and engagement. The call to action these women initiated, and the profoundly humanist compassion they showed, dovetailed to create a unique

form of journalism. It may be the case that this journalism tinged with emotions, arguably gender-specific and feminine in perspective, was deeply rooted in the lived experience of soldiers and civilians with whom these journalists endured the fights on the frontlines and the shelling of cities. Their literary and photographic journalism was triggered by a sense of urgency and fostered by their own position of subalterns—they were performing as minorities in their profession—representing other subaltern subjects. Spivak envisions "the imagination as an in-built instrument of othering ourselves."[10] Imagination should be envisaged here as journalistic imagination, a creative representation of reality. Spivak's words illuminate the rationale behind the trio's work: They resorted to emotional journalism as a strategy to alienate their inner selves and get closer to their subjects, which their own subaltern positions may have facilitated.

## Women Reporting the Spanish Civil War

Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis hailed from various geographical, social, and cultural locations. Albeit with different backgrounds, the threesome covered the Spanish conflict in which they unambiguously supported the Republican cause. In this sense, paradigmatic relations may be established between their coverage of the conflict and possible gender-defined proclivities. Collating their texts and images framed within the same cultural context points to some common features, despite their distinct roots and routes. They all traveled extensively, spoke several languages, worked across borders, trespassed boundaries in an effort to denounce and expose the suffering of others. Comparing their journalistic productions amounts to "suspending oneself and entering the text and the other,"[11] while accepting Spivak's warnings against "the false promise of a level playing field" when bringing texts together "to discover varieties of sameness."[12] Indeed, it is essential to acknowledge that the journalistic and photographic texts scrutinized here must be approached beyond the time-space limits of their context, according to the journalists' respective itineraries.

From its inception, the Spanish Civil War polarized not only the Spanish people, but also the world at large. While the Nationalists were helped and supported by the Italian and German military, the revolutionist Popular Front in Spain was not helped by French or British allies, who decided not to intervene in the conflict, lest it might spread to the rest of Europe. The confrontation between communism and fascism, revolution and dictatorship, and the absence of action from the Allies led a number of artists and intellectuals to embrace the Loyalist cause and produce an impressive artistic corpus about the war. The flood of texts, films, and reportages from American

and European authors was their response to the unbearable failure to take responsibility and the expression of strong partisanship. According to Martin Hurcombe, many intellectuals wrote about the Spanish Civil War because it was essentially about values, which made it a "nobler" fight than other conflicts that rested upon economic, political, or even imperialistic motives.[13] Hurcombe also highlights the tension foregrounded by some critics between the Spanish representations of the war and external (in particular, French) attempts at comprehending it, the latter being dismissed due to their alienation from the origins and stakes of the war, hence the propagandistic and stereotypical quality of some politically engaged artistic works.[14] However, he also believes that the internationalization of the debate neither revealed foreign appropriation nor downplayed the local specificities of the conflict, which foreshadowed a global war. Indeed, as George R. Esenwein shows, this domestic conflict unfolded also through the intervention of European powers, jeopardizing peace on the continent and threatening the world order, hence the necessity to get involved, at least discursively or creatively.[15]

Women on the frontlines were not a common occurrence in the 1930s, and yet outstanding female journalists played an instrumental role in documenting the Spanish Civil War. David Deacon presents some of the reasons why female reporters were enthusiastic about "going to Spain with the boys."[16] In spite of the patriarchal constraints of their professional environments, they benefited from the support of "male mentors" and their female perspective was valued, essentially for three reasons.[17] First, their gender was in itself a novel quality publicized by newspapers: creating high profiles of female reporters was a strategy to bank on a growing female readership. Second, the mass observation movement had prompted interest for ordinary people. Third, the conflict was a total war with air attacks that killed women and children and erased the frontiers between "frontline and home front."[18] While these elements are important to identify characteristics of female journalism, Deacon also joins McLaughlin[19] in warning against essentialist views that would imply that journalism produced by women is not concerned with military, political, or strategic aspects of warfare. As he astutely remarks, meticulous observations of the civilian populations were also essential in understanding the combat. Moreover, the journalism of Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis was also scrupulously informative, factual, and accurate. Indeed, statistics of casualties, descriptions of weaponry, and essential encounters with high officials and politicians, were reported in detail. Their dispatches and pictures constitute invaluable sources of documentation to understand how the conflict unfolded.

Gellhorn was twenty-eight years old, and the Spanish conflict led to her

first experience of war journalism. Taro, also in her twenties (and war photojournalist Robert Capa's girlfriend), was a newcomer to journalism. Her photographic reportages were published as major pictorials, and she died in a vehicle collision during the conflict. Andrée Viollis was a politically engaged and respected reporter, already sixty-seven years old at war's outbreak. All were present in Spain, albeit intermittently, in 1936 and '37. Gellhorn apparently never met Taro, even though they both stayed at the Hotel Florida in Madrid in spring 1937.[20] Gellhorn became one of Capa's best friends, whom she got to know just after Taro's accidental death. As for Viollis, there is no evidence that she met either of them, but her daughter, Simone Téry, also a journalist, had her work published in *Regards* and illustrated with pictures by Capa and Taro. Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis, despite their different backgrounds and trajectories, all advocated the Republican cause. Gellhorn became a supporter of the Loyalists as soon as she read the Nazi press referring to them as "Red-Swine-dogs." Taro and her family suffered from anti-Semitism, and some of her relatives were killed. Viollis had been a leftist all her life. As they converged in a war zone, along the same frontlines, I propose to compare their journalism along three different axes: the reasons that led to them to Spain and the circumstances in which they produced their reportages; the poetic qualities of their journalism; and their political commitment and possible activism.

## From Sidelines to Frontlines

Gellhorn traveled around the world and covered wars until a late age. Her journalistic production reflects her sense of observation, empathy, and dedication to the troubles of others. Her chronicles of and dispatches from conflict zones were published under the title *The Face of War* (1959), which reflects her unabated support and unflinching compassion for innocent civilians. Her first book, *The Trouble I've Seen* (1936), a novella based on her reportage of the Depression, received great critical acclaim and brought her laudatory comments, including a comparison to Hemingway.[21] Although she had no formal accreditation, she convinced Kyle Crichton at *Collier's* to write a letter stipulating she was a war correspondent.[22] Gellhorn doubted her capacity to provide a sound piece of reporting from a female perspective.[23] Nevertheless, her name on the masthead of *Collier's* confirmed her newly acquired status.[24] Hemingway played an instrumental role in her career shift—some interpreted their relationship as an opportunistic move for Gellhorn—by encouraging her to report the effects of the war on civilians, rather than its technical aspects,[25] and also because they cosigned some articles.[26] However, several critics also point to the negative, even harmful, influence

of Hemingway on Gellhorn, particularly in his attempts to prevent her from covering the Second World War.[27] Their fertile collaboration turned into fierce, fiery competition.

Gellhorn thus "[went] to Spain with the boys," motivated by Hemingway's presence and aware that she was in an unusual, privileged position to break through as a journalist. Being a young, elegant female reporter in such a violent context was rare, and her daredevil posture did not go unnoticed. *Collier's* published several dispatches that confirmed her status of war correspondent in Spain, including "Only the Shells Whine" (July 17, 1937), "Men without Medals," (January 18, 1938), and "City at War" (April 2, 1938). Kate McLoughlin explains that Gellhorn was not especially constrained by *Collier's* editors, which allowed her free rein to collect her own impressions of the war. Her articles were long—not front-page news—and appeared intermittently in the paper.[28] As a result, her journalism outshone Hemingway's thanks to its "intensity, focus, and unity" and because of its "lack of self-referentiality."[29] Gellhorn's legacy, Wilson insists, was to expand the sense of possibility for women reporters,[30] and presaged a new type of war journalism.[31]

Like Gellhorn, Taro's work must be examined in a diachronic and transnational perspective. Gerta Pohorylle, who later changed her name to Gerda Taro, was born on August 1, 1910, to a middle-class Jewish family in the then Austro-Hungarian Empire. She was a German Jew with a Polish passport and was imprisoned because of her participation in antifascist actions and her open criticism of Hitler.[32] Her exile to France brought her in contact with many intellectuals and artists, which influenced her choice to become a war photographer. Gellhorn's mother was a feminist, a suffragette, and a close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt. She grew up in a privileged environment that fostered free expression and self-assertiveness. Taro's life was different. She attended political meetings in Paris, but women in exile did not express themselves openly in that community. Their presence was welcome in those circles, but they were not expected to speak publicly, and did not. Mostly, they listened to men.[33] For these women refugees, self-realization was still unchartered territory. Taro would later go through a transformative process, teaming up with Robert Capa, taking up photography, shaping a new persona, and landing her own contracts. Her life was inseparable from Capa's, even though her name fell into oblivion while his came to prominence. At least, that was her trajectory until three boxes containing untouched negatives were found in Mexico and delivered to the International Center of Photography in New York in 2007. The so-called "Mexican suitcase," an astonishing trove of more than 4,500 thirty-five millimeter negatives, included work not only by Capa and the Polish photographer Chim (David Seymour), but also, most

importantly, work by Taro.[34] In fact, the Taro negatives contained in three boxes that had been sitting around since 1939 cover almost all of her work between February 1937 and her unfortunate death six months later.

As Irme Schaber explains, Taro's fate is a complex assemblage of personal and political trajectories. At that time Capa was still Endre Enró Friedmann, and Taro actively promoted his career as Robert Capa, a byline they shared. He benefited from her managerial skills, while she learned the craft from him. Their joint venture led them to Spain, where they both captured the emotions of their subjects on camera. Schaber notes that proximity and alterity were closely intertwined in their photojournalism. Their images were slices of the Spanish reality traversed by a universal call against fascism.[35] Several critics have commented on the difficulties of distinguishing between their respective pictures, as the pair worked together, focused on the same subjects, and published in the same papers. The similitude between the photographs was not limited to Taro and Capa—the identification of Chim's own pictures also required some meticulous expertise.[36] Therefore, a theory that would posit Taro's work as distinctively gender-specific would not hold given the circumstances. By way of illustration, the work in which she and Capa foregrounded militia women was not her exclusive preserve. Also, both photographers documented military action as much as the plight of victims and refugees. However, because Taro's pictures were not credited, competition and differences may have emerged between the two, hence her decision to work independently for French communist paper *Ce Soir*, where at long last her pictures were stamped "Photo Taro."[37]

Like Gellhorn, Taro opened new avenues for women reporters, this time through photojournalism. There exist many representations of her, from saint and martyr to femme fatale and whore, explains her main biographer.[38] Also like Gellhorn, she drew the attention of the soldiers because of her looks and her apparent fearlessness. As a young and charming photojournalist, she was a magnet for attention and used her special status to gain access to the front. She was both photographing and photographed, notably by Capa himself. Their occasional separations during the Spanish Civil War had a positive outcome for Taro, who for the first time landed her own commissions and earned solo credits in the French magazine *Regards* (April 15, 1937).[39] "Robert Capa," the joint signature that eclipsed her, had been a major bone of contention in their collaboration. At that point, Rogoyska argues, distancing from Capa was a prerequisite to Taro's attempts at self-definition as a photographer.[40] Sadly, she was also the first woman photojournalist to be killed in the field, crushed by a tank during the ferocious Battle of Brunete, which killed 25,000 Loyalist militiamen. Devastated, Capa purportedly lamented

her lack of judgment and miscalculation of risks, which led to a tragedy he could have prevented had he been there.[41] The reason why she responded so intensely to the Spanish Civil War is that the conflict crystallized all the antagonisms she had been fighting against up until that point in her life. The war in Spain was a harbinger of the impending doom and of the extermination of her family. Her unequivocal dedication to reporting from the front and to bear witness to the effects of the conflict was determined by her own personal tragedy.

Even though objectivity is the backbone of any reporting, balance can be easily tipped in conflicts where opponents stand at far political ends. According to Hurcombe, French intellectuals responded more bitterly than their British and American counterparts for two main reasons. First, Spain is a neighboring country, and second, both the far right and far left were active in France, too. Even though intellectuals and artists are known to have mostly supported the Loyalists, public opinion was more divided at the time. French representations of the conflict, be they pro-Nationalist or pro-Republican, were inextricably linked to the radical debates that were raging in France. Andrée Viollis was one of the major figures of French literary reportage in the twentieth century. She was probably the most famous female journalist of the interwar period, determined to expose social and racial injustices, and to uncover inconvenient truths. Still, her journalism is hardly known today, despite her impressive coverage of wars and conflicts, which spanned three decades. From the 1920s to the '40s Viollis covered the conflict in Ireland, the Bolshevik and Indian rebellions, civil war in Afghanistan, colonialism in Indochina, the Spanish Civil War, Nazi Germany, and racist tensions in South Africa. Her lack of visibility in literary journalism was regrettable until Anne Renoult and Alice-Anne Jeandel repaired that glaring omission with two monographs. These two French scholars have revived interest in Viollis's career, including her assignments in Spain.[42]

Viollis was married twice, first to a journalist (Gustave Téry), then to a writer (Jean Viollis), and had four daughters. She was educated at the Sorbonne in Paris and at Oxford University, and opted for a career in journalism, a predominantly masculine profession at the time. Her passion for traveling and her multilingualism helped her break through in the heyday of *grand reportage*. She was a devoted communist, socialist, freethinker, and soon worked for papers such as *La Raison, L'Action*, and *La Fronde*, and landed exceptional interviews with Lloyd George, Nadir Khan, and Gandhi. She was an ardent feminist who joined the Women's World Committee against War and Fascism in 1934. As Boucharenc notes, Viollis personified the "intellectual female reporter" and was the first woman to join the prestigious

Association française du grand reportage. Therefore, it can be claimed that *grand reportage* contributed to women's emancipation, Boucharenc insists.[43] Viollis worked as a special envoy during the Spanish Civil War for *Le Petit Parisien*, *Vendredi* (which she codirected), and *Ce Soir*, which also published Taro's photos. She went to Spain four times and met President Manuel Azaña, Dolores Ibárruri (La Pasionaria), and the charismatic socialist leader Largo Caballero, among many others. She traveled frequently across the country, to Barcelona, Valencia, Madrid, Alicante, La Sierra, and Cordoba.[44] Unlike Gellhorn and Taro, Viollis was already a full-fledged and highly respected reporter when she arrived in Spain.

## The Poetics of Literary Journalism

Gellhorn's writing is literary in that it contains rich descriptions, dialogue, historical reconstructions, and insightful comments. She was a keen observer of the victims of the war. Her poetic talent, along with a determination to expose the suffering of others, forms the backbone of her literary journalism. Being a novelist, she used characterization and other literary devices to personalize her reports. In spite of the intensive bombing, she went to the trenches and visited hospitals. Her literary journalism is suffused with heartrending descriptions and poignant dialogue, framed by realistic detail of the ongoing conflict. She zooms in and out of the warring zone, inviting the reader to the streets of Madrid. Her use of alliteration in "Only the Shells Whine"—whistle, whirl, whine; speed, spinning, scream—and the foregrounding of herself as a direct witness of events add sensitivity and humanity to her stories:

> At first the shells went over: you could hear the thud as they left the Fascists' guns, a sort of groaning cough, then you heard them fluttering toward you. . . . The shells whistled toward you—it was as if they whirled at you—faster than you could imagine speed, and spinning that way, they whined: the whine rose higher and quicker and was a close scream—and then they hit and it was like granite thunder. . . . I went downstairs into the lobby, practicing on the way how to breathe.[45]

In "City at War," Gellhorn uses similar melodic tools—"[s]treetcars, with people sticking like ivy on the steps and bumpers, burned muffled blue lights"—which make a lasting visual and acoustic impression on readers.[46] Other strategies to strengthen the aesthetic fabric of her reporting include literary and musical references, either to Byron and Shakespeare, or to Spanish opera and American jazz. Transcultural landmarks are constitutive of an aesthetics of impact that can thrill an audience and stir its soul.

Gellhorn introduces her readers to the victims and alternates between

everyday scenes in the Spanish cities with statistics and facts about the assaults. She was working as a "walking tape recorder with eyes," an oft-cited attempt at self-definition that both showed her dedication to truthfully representing reality, but also as a way to problematize it, since she repeatedly relinquished "this objectivity shit."[47] According to McLoughlin, Gellhorn's objectivity should be understood as "stylistic restraint," since being objective was not possible, either in Spain or Dachau.[48] This argument shows that her journalism, McLoughlin further notes, brings out emotions rather than expresses them.[49] These claims may be verified in "Men without Medals," where Gellhorn praises the courage of the young volunteers that joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to defend the Loyalists:

> Last spring and summer, more Americans came. They crossed the snow passes of the Pyrenees on foot, in little bands. They traveled in fishing boats down the Mediterranean coast to Barcelona. There were those two who drowned when the *Ciudad de Barcelona* was torpedoed. They knew what they were coming to, and they came anyhow: several thousand of them. Now they were trained troops, with a proud record in Spain. It was a strange thing, walking through that olive grove, bending your head against the dusty wind, and seeing the faces from Mississippi, and Ohio and New York and California, and hearing the voices that you'd heard at a baseball game, in the subway, on any campus, in any hamburger joint, anywhere in America.[50]

Her equation of Spain and America through almost bucolic landscapes and familiar faces strikes an emotional chord as it binds two alienated nations' destinies in their fight for democracy. Gellhorn informs her readers about the battalion's movements, military offensives, the shelling and bombing of Madrid. But the examples above also demonstrate that the literariness of her texts gives them particular substance and depth.

Taro's photographs tell a similar story. They should first be considered, says critic Jane Rogoyoska, as the work of a (photo)journalist, not an artist, because her main goal was "to bear witness."[51] Taro's pictures certainly document the violence of the war and reveal some hidden truths, such as the initial success of the Republicans at the Battle of Brunete, a fact that had been obliterated on the basis of written sources.[52] The photographs taken a few hours before her death—the poor quality of which is evidence of the pending tension and imminent catastrophe—disclose a complex, albeit fragmented, narrative:

> There is a strong sense of the immediacy of the action: the photographs do not follow a narrative sequence, but are random, disjointed, as if Taro is swinging her camera round to capture first one thing, then another, as it

> forces itself upon her attention. There is not time for composition or framing: the impulse is just to capture events now, as they are happening.[53]

The rolls of negatives show exhausted soldiers and ruined landscapes, but they also contain portraits of artists (Rafael Alberti reading Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*) as well as lyrical and poetic images of trees and horses.[54] Her pictures therefore exhibit aesthetic qualities that combine literary references and visual elements. Anthony L. Geist captures a spectral quality in Taro's last photos, not only due to their deterioration but also to the ghostly scenes that punctuate the negatives. Indeed, Geist argues, the smoke and haze, and the blaze that encircles the characters, combine to compose a particularly sinister partition. The looming disaster becomes legible in the collection of Taro's images more than from any individual negative.[55] While Gellhorn's texts present visual and filmic features, Taro's pictures contain textual elements once they are considered in their broader context. Her photographs are not static—the terror-stricken, wounded soldiers, and the debacle of the Battle of Brunete, speak volumes about the unfolding tragedy and the point of no return the war had reached. Taro's responsibility was to capture the events, while the viewer's was to elaborate on the unwritten script of the event and to work on the "composition" and "framing" needed to make sense of the story.

Viollis's first article from Spain, which landed on the front page of *Le Petit Parisien* on July 30, 1936, emphasized the proximity of the war, as she drew close parallels between the two countries to such an extent that the frontiers between France and Spain were blurred.[56] Like Gellhorn, Viollis creates parallels between countries to elicit emotional reactions and prompt political actions, the message being that fascism is a threat to all, and that the bravery of the Spanish people must be emulated. A comparison of Viollis's articles to her male colleagues' (mainly André Salmon and Louis Roubaud) published in *Le Petit Parisien* does not result in a strictly gender-defined categorization of writing techniques, and thus fails to single out stark contrasts in either form or content. Although male journalists tend to provide more data about military warfare and strategies, Viollis's reports devote many column inches to facts and figures—advances on both fronts, statements by prominent politicians, combats on the frontline. Albeit aged sixty-seven, and confessing she was no military expert, Viollis traveled with her male colleagues and crawled in the trenches with the soldiers.[57] Elizabeth Brunazzi argues that Viollis's reports from Madrid are instructive, because she developed a holistic approach to her subject, which she covered almost as if using a camera, cruising the streets of the capital city. Consequently, she provided "close-up images of the war through . . . eye-witness accounts of individuals she interview[ed], blending them with her own highly localized on-the-ground descriptions."[58]

She furnished visual images of the situation in Barcelona, Madrid, Toledo, with admittedly particular concern for women, children, and the elderly. At times she also includes literary—Cervantes's *Don Quixote*—and artistic references—Greco and Velazquez—to stir emotions and pander to a cultivated readership.

Viollis thus waxes lyrical about the Spanish people and shows literary talent in her descriptions of both leaders and common people. The magnanimity and greatness of the former is rendered in the most laudatory terms, while the elegance, the generosity of spirit and strength of character of the latter is expressed with equal force. Indeed, Viollis met Lluís Companys, president of Catalonia, and other prominent politicians, such as José Giral, Julio Alvarez del Vayo, and Francisco Largo Caballero. Most importantly, she interviewed Manuel Azaña, president of the Republic, on August 6, and again on October 7, 1936. She lionized him in an impressive portrait, highlighting his strong constitution and oratory skills, praising his deep voice and eloquence tinged with indignation. This deft characterization is on a par with the description of the magnificence of the palace and superb tapestries, which adds to the grandeur of the scene. Viollis emphasizes the solemnity of the moment and even creates complicity between the politician and the journalist: "In an elevated French language, to which the hoarse accent of Spain adds surprising vigor, the President expressed his disillusion. . . . Then, all of a sudden: 'All this cannot be published, he tells me, stretching out his arm. You understand I have a duty to preserve secrecy, above all at this moment. But I will make a brief statement.'"[59]

As for the common people who fell victim to the violence of combat, Viollis strikingly uses saintly and Christlike imagery, not for religious purposes, but to endow these unwitting heroes and innocent victims with a sacred dimension:

> [A] beautiful young girl looks asleep, her long eyelashes leaning on her dark cheek, her golden brown hair encircled with white carnations, a wreath of lilies in her arms. . . . In a corner, I see two tiny oblong and all white coffins, embellished with drawings and golden ornaments, irresistibly evoking large boxes of sugared almonds—two babies. . . . Then . . . I see something I will never forget: in one of these graceful caskets lined with white fabric, looking more like a cradle than a coffin, a child aged two or three is at rest, without apparent wounds, a smile on her lips, so adorable that she looks like the baby Jesus in the Christmas crèche. The quivering candlelight animates and blushes her face, a pink ribbon is tied in her blond and soft hair, around her white dress, and her doll's feet are in pink shoes.[60]

Another similar description of corpses at the morgue in Madrid in Feb-

ruary 1937 calls to mind the pictures taken by Taro in Valence earlier in May. Both reporters came face to face with death: "The first victims—among them forty mutilated children covered with blood, stiff—were lined on paving stones at the morgue. Arms, legs, and other unidentified body parts were piled in wooden white coffins."[61]

Viollis does not shy away from unbearable situations and goes to some lengths to create photographic images that depict the total war that is wreaking havoc in Spain. Her graphic reportages aim at triggering emotions and visceral reactions against the cowardice of the French authorities.

## The Politics of Literary Journalism

As discussed earlier, Gellhorn rejected the idea that one could be neutral when faced with atrocities of war: "the idea that you are so brain dead and stony hearted that you have no reaction to it strikes me as absolute nonsense."[62] Her concern and her sense of responsibility also show in her correspondence to Eleanor Roosevelt. In a letter dated June 1937 from New York, Gellhorn informed the president's wife about the homeless and orphaned Basque children waiting for sanctuary in America, and regretted the country's failure to assist them.[63] Gellhorn admitted that "[e]motional women are bad news. . . . It is hard nowadays not to get emotionally terribly involved in this whole business." She also confessed her outrage: "Anger against two men whom I firmly believe to be dangerous criminals, Hitler and Mussolini, and against the international diplomacy which humbly begs for the continued 'co-operation' of the Fascists, who at once destroy Spain and are appointed to keep that destruction from spreading. This is emotional, probably. But I don't know how else one can feel.[64]

Gellhorn then expressed perceptive opinions about the Spanish Civil War determining the future of the continent, and of America. She questioned the effectiveness of her writing about desperate situations that probably failed to really touch people, make them feel, and subsequently take action.[65] Because she was haunted by the suffering of the Spanish people, and "angry to the bone," Gellhorn later wrote again to Eleanor Roosevelt that "the only place at all is in the front lines, where you don't have to think, and can simply (and uselessly) put your body up against what you hate."[66] As her biographer indicates, "She had been haunted by what she had seen; now, she had to haunt others."[67] In view of this, she was a conduit between the victims of the Spanish tragedy and her American readers, whom she addresses with direct questions: "Who told you, does he know? What, what did you say? . . . Everybody wondered why the Fascists shelled last night and not some other night: does it mean anything? What do you think? . . . And what about all the rest, and all

the others? How can you explain that you feel safe at this war, knowing that the people around you are good people?"[68]

The many authorial postures she adopted in her journalism, both "in the field and in the text," as McLoughlin convincingly shows, echo Spivak's strategy of intervention. For Gellhorn "the idea was never just to see the show or get the story . . . journalism equaled truth, and that truth would inspire people . . . to protest, to intervene,"[69] albeit she eventually lost faith in the power of journalism.

There was no obstacle to Taro's exposing the atrocities of the war. Her reckless attitude at the frontline was the ultimate attempt at convincing noninterventionist forces of the forthcoming fascist destruction. Being the eye behind the camera but also an active rebel on the field foreshadowed Taro's tragic end. She was an embedded photojournalist who kept pressing the shutter while taking part in the attacks. As long as the Republicans were fighting, she was there to observe, and to participate. In the manner suggested by Spivak, Taro "othered herself" and became what author Vicente Salas-Viu called "an internationalist prototype."[70] Her death at a young age came as a shock in France, where she was buried with pomp and circumstance at the Père Lachaise cemetery. Her funeral was orchestrated by *Ce Soir*, which made her into a "poster girl" supporting the Republican cause and subsequently the agenda of the Communist party.[71] Taro's photographs then fell into obscurity, while Capa's fame grew. Renewed interest in her work today is mostly because of her main biographer, Irme Schaber; Richard Whelan; the Spanish Civil War archives being made available since Franco's death[72]; and the recent discovery of the Mexican suitcase. All documents and studies converge to claim that Taro in her short career built an impressive oeuvre, one consistent with her hardline personality and inextricably linked to her constant readjustment to adversity, her repositioning as a stranger in foreign lands, the reinvention of herself through different names and languages, and the spectre of her family's forthcoming doom. Creating a space to reinvent herself in the absence of Capa, she was offered solo commissions by *Regards* magazine in April 1937. As soon as she became visible as an author, she disappeared. Perhaps her newly gained autonomy lured her into believing she was invulnerable. Those who met her shortly before her death, namely German writer Alfred Kantorowicz and American journalist Jay Allen, claimed that she had become a sensation among the Loyalists. The former noted that "[s]he identified herself—more out of emotion than political awareness—. . . with us"; the latter confessed she had become a "reassuring talisman" to men on the front, thanks to her charms and innocence.[73] Through her identification with the Loyalists, Taro became the Other to such an extent that she transformed into a sacrificial

symbol of the war. The uprooting or othering process went too far at a time when facing her own identity and reality—fascism destroying her Jewish family—led to an escapism strategy in which she threw herself headlong and ultimately lost herself.

Viollis's partisanship was not welcomed by all, and she finally had to stop writing for *Le Petit Parisien* in December 1937.[74] In *Le Soir* and *Le Petit Parisien*, Viollis reported on a daily basis; in *Vendredi* she essentially published reportages in which her engagement is palpable.[75] She recontextualized the conflict in Europe and ferociously attacked the nonintervention policy that prevailed in France and other European nations. Viollis's legacy is immense, and thanks to the monographs of Renoult and Jeandel she now has a legitimate place in the history of literary journalism. Viollis's career also found an extension with her daughter, Simone Téry, who was equally devoted to the cause of the Spanish Republic. Téry joined the French Communist Party in the mid-1930s and worked as a correspondent for *L'Humanité*, *Vendredi* and *Regards*. Besides *Front de la liberté: Espagne 1937–1938*, dedicated to the French volunteers who died in the conflict (1938), she also penned *Où l'aube se lève* (1945), a novel inspired by the conflict. While Viollis's work for *Vendredi* had been illustrated with pictures by Chim, her texts were accompanied by Capa's and Taro's pictures in *Regards*. These multiple perspectives and fertile collaborations did not prevent atrocities from being committed, but they denounced the hypocrisy of nonintervention.

Gellhorn, Taro, and Viollis's destinies crossed during the Spanish Civil War. They converged on the same war zone without, apparently, ever meeting one another. They were female reporters using literary and photographic journalism, not as a springboard for self-aggrandizement, but as a powerful tool to raise consciousness. They were revolted by a profoundly unfair situation and could see the beginnings of the barbarity that would soon rage in Europe and beyond. They also sensed that it was essential to have women at the front cover conflicts from a different perspective without reductively limiting themselves to coverage of women and children. Their meticulous, courageously crafted reportages focused on human suffering, but they also presented military action and interpellated politicians. As for their femininity—the three were known for their charm and elegance—it was used to serve their journalistic calling and access an almost exclusively male public sphere. They were advised, helped, and respected by their male colleagues, yet at times they needed to distance themselves from their partners in order to create the space to invent themselves as intellectual forces in their own right. By sensitizing their readers to the pain of others, these literary and photojournalists triggered a movement that decentered them from themselves

and toward the Other; in that same movement, they invited their readers to distance themselves from their inner concerns and consider alterity as an essential component of our humanity. Despite profound differences in their itineraries, their engagement was total. The reports and images of the Spanish Civil War produced by these women—notwithstanding the fact that they reflected different cultural identities—also foregrounded a common political stance and determination. Their emotional journalism was used to move us and make us move.

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**Notes**

1. Roy Greenslade, "Marie Colvin Obituary," *Guardian,* February 22, 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/feb/22/marie-colvin.

2. Marie Brenner, "Marie Colvin's Private War," *Vanity Fair,* August 2012, http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/2012/08/marie-colvin-private-war.

3. Martin Bell, "The Journalism of Attachment," in *Media Ethics*, ed. Matthew Kieran (London: Routledge, 1998), 15–22.

4. _____, *In Harm's Way* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995), 128.

5. See, for instance Farwa Zahra, "Marie Colvin's Journalism of Attachment," *Express Tribune Blogs*, February 24, 2012, http://blogs.tribune.com.pk/story/10359/marie-colvins-journalism-of-attachment/. See also an extensive discussion of Gellhorn's journalism of attachment in Deborah Wilson, "An Unscathed Tourist of Wars: The Journalism of Martha Gellhorn," in *The Journalistic Imagination: Literary Journalists from Defoe to Capote and Carter*, eds. Richard Keeble and Sharon Wheeler (London: Routledge, 2007), 125–27.

6. Brendan O'Neill, "Dangers of the 'Journalism of Attachment,'" *Drum*, February 24, 2012, http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-02-24/oneill-dangers-of-the-journalism-of-attachment/3850566.

7. See Mick Hume's criticism of journalism of attachment in Herbert N. Foerstel, *From Watergate to Monicagate: Ten Controversies in Modern Journalism and*

*Media* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 106–7. The reference to Mick Hume is also made in Kate McLoughlin, *Martha Gellhorn: The War Writer in the Field and in the Text* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 44; as well as in Deborah Wilson, "Journalism of Martha Gellhorn," 126–27.

8. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).

9. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=emotion.

10. Jenny Sharpe and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Conversation with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Politics and the Imagination," *Signs* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2003), 622.

11. Ibid.

12. Chakravorty Spivak, "Rethinking Comparativism," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 611.

13. Martin Hurcombe, *France and the Spanish Civil War: Cultural Representations of the War Next Door, 1936–1945* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 3.

14. Ibid., 2–4.

15. George Richard Esenwein, *The Spanish Civil War: A Modern Tragedy* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

16. Martha Gellhorn, in a letter to Betty Barnes, the wife of foreign correspondent and editor Joseph Barnes, famously wrote, "Me, I am going to Spain with the boys. I don't know who the boys are, but I am going with them." See Caroline Moorhead, ed., *Selected Letters of Martha Gellhorn* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006), 49.

17. David Deacon, "'Going to Spain with the Boys': Women Correspondents and the Spanish Civil War," in *Narrating Media History*, ed. Michael Bailey, foreword by Elihu Katz (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2009), 74.

18. Ibid., 75.

19. Greg McLaughlin, *The War Correspondent* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 170.

20. Gerda Taro and Robert Capa stayed at the Hotel Florida in Madrid, with Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, and Herbert Matthews in April 1937, before leaving for Paris on April 22 or 23. See *Gerda Taro*, eds. Irme Schaber, Richard Whelan, and Kristen Lubben (New York: International Center of Photography, 2007), 163. Martha Gellhorn arrived in Madrid and stayed at Hotel Florida end of March 1937. Apparently, she never met Taro. This is confirmed by Irme Schaber, who writes that Gellhorn met Capa a few months after Taro's death. See Irme Schaber, *Gerda Taro. Une photographe révolutionnaire dans la guerre d'Espagne* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 2006), 261. Translated by Pierre Gallissaires from Irme Schaber, *Gerda Taro: Fotoreporterin im spanischen Bürgerkrieg* (Marburg, Germany: Jonas Verlag, 1994).

21. Lesley McDowell, *Between the Sheets: The Literary Liaisons of Nine 20th-Century Women* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2010), 232, 237.

22. Caroline Moorhead, *Martha Gellhorn: A Twentieth-Century Life* (New York:

Henry Holt, 2003), 107.

23. _____, *Selected Letters of Martha Gellhorn*, 49.

24. McLoughlin, *War Writer in the Field and in the Text*, 43.

25. McDowell, *Between the Sheets*, 253–54.

26. This "joint effort" was claimed by Leicester Hemingway. See Carl Rollyson, *Beautiful Exile: The Life of Martha Gellhorn* (London: Aurum Press, 2002), 77–78.

27. McDowell, *Between the Sheets*, 259.

28. McLoughlin, *War Writer in the Field and in the Text*, 8–9.

29. Rollyson, *Beautiful Exile*, 77, 103. Moorhead adds that Hemingway's Spanish dispatches were "contrived and self-centred." See Caroline Moorhead, *Martha Gellhorn: A Twentieth-Century Life*, 122.

30. Moorhead, *A Twentieth-Century Life*, 5.

31. Wilson, "Journalism of Martha Gellhorn,"127–28.

32. Gerta Pohorylle was taken to jail on March 19, 1933, and finally set free thanks to her Polish passport. See Irme Schaber, *Gerda Taro*, 74.

33. Ibid., 109.

34. Cynthia Young, ed., *The Mexican Suitcase: The Rediscovered Spanish Civil War Negatives of Capa, Chim and Taro* (New York: International Center of Photography; Göttingen, Germany: Steidl, 2010).

35. Schaber, *Gerda Taro*, 166.

36. Chim, a.k.a. David Seymour, was a photojournalist who cofounded the Magnum agency with Capa and Cartier-Bresson. The negatives of his work found in the "Mexican Suitcase" have expanded our knowledge of the Spanish Civil War considerably.

37. Schaber, *Gerda Taro*, 186.

38. Ibid., 9.

39. Jane Rogoyska, *Gerda Taro: Inventing Robert Capa* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2013), 136, 140.

40. Ibid., 140, 142.

41. Ibid., 212.

42. See Alice-Anne Jeandel, *Andrée Viollis: Une femme grand reporter. Une écriture de l'événement, 1927–1939* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), and Anne Renoult, *Andrée Viollis; Une femme journaliste* (Angers, France: Presses de l'université d'Angers, coll. Prix Mnémosyne 2004). All factual data about Viollis in this article have been collected from these two comprehensive books.

43. Myriam Boucharenc, *L'écrivain-reporter au cœur des années trente* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2004), 107–08.

44. Jeandel, *Une femme grand reporter*, 84.

45. Gellhorn, "Only the Shells Whine," *Collier's*, July 17, 1937, 12.

46. _____, "City at War," *Collier's*, April 2, 1938, 19.

47. This short soundbite is repeatedly quoted, in Moorhead, Wilson, and McLoughlin.

48. McLoughlin, *War Writer in the Field and in the Text*, 65.

49. Ibid., 72.

50. Gellhorn, "Men without Medals," *Collier's*, January 15, 1938, 9–10.

51. Rogoyska, *Inventing Robert Capa*, 15.

52. "Taro. La Bataille de Brunete. Mi-juillet 1937," in Cynthia Young, ed. *La Valise Mexicaine. Les negatives retrouvés de la guerre civile espagnole.* Volume 2: les films. Trans. Daniel De Bruycker (Arles: Actes Sud, 2012; New York: International Center of Photography; Göttingen: Steidl, 2010), 258–70.

53. Jane Rogoyska, *Inventing Robert* Capa, 213.

54. Ibid.

55. Anthony L. Geist, "Le Fantôme de Gerda Taro," in Cynthia Young, ed., *La Valise Mexicaine: Les negatifs retrouvés de la guerre civile espagnole,* trans. Daniel De Bruycker, vol. 2 (Arles, France: Actes Sud, 2012; New York: International Center of Photography; Göttingnen, Germany: Steidl, 2010), 277–78.

56. This example is also in Jeandel, 84.

57. Renoult, *Une femme journaliste*, 151.

58. Elizabeth Brunazzi, "Andrée Viollis: A 'Grand Reporter' in the Intellectual Resistance, 1942–1944," *French Cultural Studies* 22, no. 3 (August 2011): 231.

59. Andrée Viollis, "Nouvelles déclarations du président Azaña à notre envoyée spéciale," *Le Petit Parisien,* October 8, 1936, 1. See also Viollis's previous encounter with the president: "Un entretien à Madrid avec le président Azaña," *Le Petit Parisien,* August 6, 1936, 3. Translation mine.

60. _____, "Les Petits enfants sous les bombes," *Ce Soir*, November 5, 1938, 8. Translation mine.

61. _____, "Madrid encore," *Vendredi,* March 26, 1937, 1. Translation mine.

62. Martha Gellhorn interviewed by Jenni Murray for BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour* in 1993, qtd. in Deborah Wilson, "Journalism of Martha Gellhorn," 126.

63. *Selected Letters of Martha Gellhorn*, 52.

64. Ibid., 54.

65. Ibid., 54–55.

66. Ibid., 58.

67. Moorhead, *A Twentieth-Century Life*, 87.

68. Gellhorn, "City at War," *Collier's*, April 2, 1938, 18, 19, 60.

69. Susie Linfield, "Martha Gellhorn, Journalist," *Nation*, April 13, 1998, 10.

70. Schaber, *Gerda Taro*, 219.

71. Rogoyska, *Inventing Robert Capa*, 7, 224.

72. Ibid., 13.

73. Ibid., 177, 203.

74. Renoult, *Une femme journaliste*, 153; Jeandel, *Une femme grand reporter*, 85.

75. Jeandel, *Une femme grand reporter*, 83, 86.

Margaret Simons. Photo: Hans Bool.

# Preferring "Dirty" to "Literary" Journalism: In Australia, Margaret Simons Challenges the Jargon While Producing the Texts

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**Abstract:** Australian literary journalism has neither a discrete nor recognizable community of authors as compared to the United States and the United Kingdom. Writers do not label themselves as such and most are surprised when it is suggested their work falls within the parameters of Northern Hemisphere specificities for the genre. Commensurate with contemporary international examination, more than fourteen years ago preliminary debate was initiated about the term "creative nonfiction" in an attempt to identify a national canon. In recent years, two other terms, "book-length journalism" and "long-form journalism," have been offered but none ever seem to settle. The determination to find a label has its genesis within the academy and, mostly, only those writers who work within the academy or have done so are privy to the debates. Academic, journalist, author, and social commentator Margaret Simons prefers to speak of "disinterested" and "dirty" journalism rather than "literary," yet ironically she has produced some of Australia's most highly regarded literary journalism. This paper examines Simons's multilayered perspective and her literary journalism, focusing especially on *The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair*.

There is no doubt Australians enjoy nonfiction reading and turn to books, through whatever technology, in order to access it. But identifying a community of Australian literary journalists—or, as they are more commonly known, creative nonfiction authors—equivalent to the vibrant communities of the Northern Hemisphere is problematic. Australian creative nonfiction writers do not identify themselves as such. Academic Nigel Krauth has written:

> At the conference in Albany I walked in the door of the huge central display room where more than a hundred publishers were showing their wares. I immediately got into discussion with a gentleman whose desk was covered with Creative Nonfiction Magazines. I picked up a couple of his publications and flicked through them.
>
> "We do this stuff in Australia," I said. "We don't call it Creative Nonfiction. We call it writing."[1]
>
> Apparently, Krauth's conversation partner was not impressed. Or as Krauth wrote at the time: "He looked at me archly."[2]

In the same special issue of *TEXT* dedicated to creative nonfiction in Australia, academic Donna Lee Brien wrote: "Creative nonfiction is currently a highly visible literary and publishing phenomenon in the United States. . . . Australians have been writing creative nonfiction in various guises for decades, but it has not been identified as such."[3]

That was fifteen years ago. Lee Brien wrote then of the need for a "meaningful way to group, discuss and publish"[4] diverse Australian nonfiction writing. The discussion has not happened in this country, or happened among only a small number of practitioner/academics in various universities but never granted cultural gravitas.[5]

## Book-Length Journalism in Australia

Since then, further research into technological impact throws up differing statistics. In 2010, the Books Alive program[6]—rebranded as Get Reading!—gathered data from the 2010 national online survey. Figures showed that thirteen percent of Australians who had read a book for pleasure downloaded an e-book from the Internet in the twelve months prior to the survey. Further, the survey reported that ten percent read on a mobile phone, personal digital assistant or laptop, and six percent used a reading device or e-book reader.[7] Clearly, publishers had to redefine what the term "book" meant. As Shona Martyn, publishing director of HarperCollins in Australia and New Zealand, said: "Australians have always been in the top three book consumers, along with New Zealand and the Netherlands. . . . [I]n terms of total numbers of books sold or downloaded, the number is actually up.[8]

The discussion of what now constitutes a book in this country is pertinent. In 2004, of the top 150 book titles sold in Australia, sixty-six, or forty-four percent, were nonfiction. Of these, twenty-eight, or nineteen percent of the total, could be classed as creative nonfiction.[9] In the latest figures released, 2008, fifty-nine percent of the books sold in this country were nonfiction, compared to twenty-five percent fiction.[10] Accordingly, academic Matthew Ricketson argues that long-form literary journalism, or what he also terms

book-length journalism, is "a vibrant part of the media industry" in Australia.[11] In fact, most substantial creative nonfiction can be found in long-form literary or book-length journalism.[12] Ricketson positions journalism on a scale of length, from hard news to features to book-length journalism. He also posits another range, where book-length journalism sits in the middle between daily journalism and novels.[13] I will discuss a new model of identification proposed by Ricketson below, but first I will provide a synoptic and current look at Australian female journalists within the newsroom environment, some of whom produce literary journalism.

## Book-Length Journalism in Australia and Female Writers

There is a strong history of women working within the Australian journalism industry.[14] Similar to the situation in other countries, most female writers traditionally were confined to the so-called women's pages, and like in most countries, "the great shift for Australian women in journalism, as in so many professions, came with the advent of the Second World War."[15] Another change occurred in the 1960s and '70s, as women refused to be marginalized by their gender and stepped into the journalism mainstream. Michelle Grattan became political correspondent for *The Age* newspaper in 1971 and by 1976 was the paper's chief political correspondent in Canberra. Anne Summers rose to prominence as a journalist with the *National Times* in Sydney from 1975, following the publication of her book *Damned Whores and God's Police*.[16] Currently, there are many female journalists spread throughout the country, across all media, but there are still major gender inequity issues. Like their male counterparts, Australian female journalists, if they do produce book-length literary journalism, do so while maintaining their daily/weekly journalism profiles. Any literary journalism produced is achieved in addition to daily work in newsrooms. That said, from the research below it is clear that newsroom hierarchy tends to adversely affect female journalists, which limits opportunities for the freedom and time to write at length.

Academic Louise North presented research in her text *The Gendered Newsroom: How Journalists Experience the Changing World of Media*[17] as a means to tease out themes she believed were embedded throughout the Australian print industry. She claimed these themes were lack of merit-based promotion and how this differs for male and female journalists; disparity in story allocations, with hard news still often seen as a male domain; and sexual harassment in the newsroom. Another key theme was the dominance of men in senior editorial positions.[18] North followed up this research with a more comprehensive study—a nationwide survey of 577 female journalists, across all media—finding that "there is still widespread gender discrimination in our

newsrooms."[19] She wrote, "It is widely acknowledged by media scholars, feminist media researchers and industry groups that newsrooms around the world are dominated numerically by men, and that men occupy the majority of senior editorial decision-making roles."[20] She continued, "Women journalists are typically located en masse in low-paid, low-status positions, struggling to attain real influence in editorial decision making roles across all media platforms."[21]

North found that as of August 2012 there was not one female editor heading any of Australia's twenty-one metropolitan newspapers, and only three editing a weekend newspaper. One of her most astonishing findings—compared to a study carried out sixteen years previous—was that there had been an increase in female Australian journalists experiencing sexual harassment, with 57.3 percent admitting having experienced "objectionable remarks or behaviour" from male colleagues in the newsroom compared to 51.6 percent in 1996. Journalist Candice Chung summed up these findings, writing, "As North points out, for an industry that 'shines light on gender inequity in other occupations,' the media has failed miserably at investigating their own gender issues."[22]

Despite these difficult issues, Australia has produced several notable women authors that might be classified as literary journalists, including Anne Summers, Estelle Blackburn, and Marian Wilkinson. And there are others. Chloe Hooper, for instance, produced a highly respected and multi-award-winning book-length piece of literary journalism, *The Tall Man: Death and Life on Palm Island*,[23] although she herself is not a journalist. Helen Garner is not a journalist either, but she is the author of several renowned books that have been categorized as literary journalism, including *The First Stone*[24] and *Joe Cinque's Consolation*.[25] Anna Goldsworthy, yet another nonjournalist, has produced two highly acclaimed memoirs as well as a critical and analytical long-form essay for the *Quarterly Essay* on the tenure of former prime minister Julia Gillard, "Unfinished Business: Sex, Freedom and Misogyny."[26] Goldsworthy also writes regular essays for *The Monthly*. But of the handful of contemporary Australian journalists who also produce literary journalism, the author, academic, and social commentator Margaret Simons is one of the best known and most highly respected. Simons seemingly defies North's research, possibly because she has removed herself from the newsroom environment. Her work straddles both the media industry as a commentator and the education sector as a journalism program director.

## A True-Story Teller

Although Simons is prominent within the journalism field in Australia, where she has produced some distinguished pieces of literary journalism, she

has little if no international profile. Both Hooper's and Garner's books have found audiences outside their home country, but Simons's work tends to stay in Australia and be specifically about Australia, although it is easily accessible to an international readership. She has written eleven books,[27] including recently *Self-Made Man*, the biography of media proprietor Kerry Stokes, and, with former prime minister Malcolm Fraser, *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs*.

Not all of Simons's books are works of literary journalism. Some are fiction, and some are straight journalism. In this paper I will focus on *The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair* as an exemplar of the sort of long-form contemporary writing occurring in Australia that has deep political and cultural impact and significance. This award-winning book[28] generated both heated debate and revelation throughout the country. Her investigation into the battle between local Aboriginal people living near Hindmarsh Island in South Australia, and developers wishing to build a bridge between the mainland and the island during the 1990s, is both comprehensively researched and starkly troubling. The story goes beyond its immediate telling to reflect the troubled divide between indigenous and white Australia—a metaphor, so to speak, of a simmering but still current disconnect.

Simons completed her cadetship, or training, at *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne, then worked as an arts reporter, a feature writer, a consumer affairs specialist, a Freedom of Information legislation authority, and an investigative journalist.[29] For three years, 1986–89, she worked as Brisbane correspondent for the paper during the time of the Fitzgerald Inquiry into police and political corruption.[30] Currently she is the media commentator for *Crikey*, an online, independent news outlet, and director of the Centre for Advancing Journalism and coordinator of the master of journalism program at University of Melbourne. She lives in Melbourne with her husband and two children.

Simons left *The Age* newsroom after nearly ten years in order to write her first novel, *The Ruthless Garden*.[31] She wrote her second, *The Truth Teller*, after moving from Melbourne, Victoria, to the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, where she started her family. She became a single mother in the late 1990s. She says:

> I don't write because of the money, but I have to earn money. I've got children and a mortgage like everybody else. I could earn more money doing virtually anything else or doing different kinds of writing. One very tough time in my life, when my relationship with my children's father was breaking up, I remember driving—there's that beautiful time of day when all the cliffs are really orange—and I remember looking at the escarpment and

> thinking, "What am I? What am I?" And the answer came back, "I'm a mother and I'm a writer." That is what I am and I don't think it's in my power to change it.[32]

Simons has a simple attitude to what she does:

> I tell true stories when I'm writing what you call nonfiction, and I use that term, too, because I have failed to come up with a better one. Narrative journalism is the one I feel most comfortable with, but that's only because it's got an absence of negatives about it. Call it what you like—it doesn't change the experience of writing it. It sounds so hackneyed but it is really all the search for a meaning. Writing is a deeply mysterious process. Every time I write a book, my husband will tell you that I go around saying, "I'm never going to write another book, I've lost it." This is a constant and boring refrain. I try to stop myself from doing it because I know it sounds ridiculous, but it feels real.[33]

As a freelance and a young mother, Simons continued to write weekly columns for *The Australian* newspaper. A compilation of her columns, *Wheelbarrows, Chooks & Children,* illustrated by Anna Warren, was published in 1999. That same year, *Fit to Print: Inside the Canberra Press Gallery* was published. Meanwhile, she began research for the Hindmarsh Island book. She wrote, "I came to realize the Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair was not an article or an essay, but a book full of largely untold stories. I also decided I should not write a word until I was ready."[34] Simons spent four years researching *The Meeting of the Waters*, which was published in 2003. She says:

> It's the most important thing I've done but it didn't sell brilliantly. It did all right, won an award—I'm not complaining, but it's certainly not a mass-market book. You have to trust books to find their readers—anything else drives you mad. I can't remember how much that book sold, but it wouldn't be more than 2,000 or 3,000 copies. A lot of those went into libraries and it seems to turn up in all sorts of places, so it found its readers and it had an influence beyond its immediate readership.[35]

As a writer, journalist, and academic, Simons presents a noteworthy blend of trade and scholarly approaches. The text swaps between the lyrical writing of a poet, the forensic detective skills of a committed investigative journalist, and the rigor of an academic. As part of earlier research,[36] out of ten Australian writers Simons was one of only two who knew about the term "creative nonfiction," and the debate on labelling this form of long-form journalism. Despite how masterfully she executes this type of writing, she does not care for the current terminology, finding discussion about objectivity far more interesting. She says:

> Kovach and Rosenstiel talk about journalism as being akin to a scientific method. You start with a hypothesis, but then you just go out and challenge your hypothesis and be prepared to have it disproved. In other words, be prepared to be wrong and to change your mind. The objectivity lies not in the journalist and not necessarily in the final result, but in the method. That definition of objectivity makes sense to me. But I prefer to use terms like journalism with integrity, or disinterested journalism, meaning you're not gunning for a particular result. This is one of the things we have to find a way of keeping, because most citizen journalism is interested journalism, in the sense of opposite of disinterested. It doesn't necessarily mean that there's anything wrong with that, but it is very important that the idea of disinterested journalism survives as well. We're in the middle of a profound paradigm shift and there are many more questions than answers about just about everything.[37]

Simons cites academic Jason Wilson and his version of the question: When is a person a journalist; and if what he or she produces is journalism. She says: "'When am I a journalist?' is a better question, and 'When am I not?' That is the question. When am I a journalist; what part of what I do is journalism? Most good journalistic stories lie in the gap between what's meant to happen and what actually happens."[38]

Further, in terms of labelling what she does, Simons finds the North American terminology troubling. She believes the term "dirty" is an integral notion of journalism:

> Part of my problem with the term "literary journalism" is the journalism bit. I would like to see a little bit more emphasis on the fact that the best of it is not just nice writing for the sake of nice writing, but *finding things out*. Journalism is still regarded by most people as a pretty lowly occupation. And to some degree there's a good reason for that. Journalism, finding things out, is actually very dirty work. Interviewing is very dirty work. When it's done well, it is always on the ethical edge, it almost always makes people seriously angry. So one of my other problems with literary journalism is that literary, in this country at least, implies something that's a bit stratospheric and up there and away from all the dirt and the push and the pull. Journalism, if it's to matter at all, has to stay dirty in the sense that I mean it.[39]

And the term creative nonfiction does not settle easily with her. She notes:

> Creative nonfiction, the other term used for this kind of journalism, I also don't find very satisfactory because it seems to concentrate mostly on what it isn't. Also, the word "creative" confuses people who are not journalists. When I've raised that in nonjournalistic circles, they think it means that you're going to make things up. And the minute we allow that impression to get about, I think we're all done for. So I'm not happy with that term

> either. I'm not sure that we're talking about anything special when we talk about literary journalism—I'm not sure that we're not just talking about stuff that's well written.[40]

Simons says that asking about creative nonfiction and its existence within the Australian literary community has more to do with literary criticism than with its execution. She says the categorization is "very much a literary critic comment—the sort of comment you make after it's written and you have to categorize it—a reader's comment, not a writer's comment. I mean, why do we have to worry about all that?[41]

For some time Simons has been involved in the limited Australian debate on this issue of labelling, but sees no need for it. She says, "It bears the same relationship to writing that drama criticism does to acting. It doesn't really matter to doing it."[42] She is far more interested in simply reporting and writing long-form journalism. The next section of this paper includes Simons's views on journalists' subjectivity. She posits the best remedy for this subjectivity is transparency—to flag to the reader that you are subjective. It also discusses *The Meeting of the Waters* within the context of a new model of identification framing book-length journalism, devised by Matthew Ricketson.

## Six Elements of Book-Length Journalism

Ricketson says there are six elements that make up Australian book-length literary journalism, and I hope to discuss them using Simons's Hindmarsh Island text. Ricketson formulated these elements "as a way of clarifying the nature and range of a field that straddles the print news media and book publishing."[43] Ricketson claims the six elements[44] are works that: deal with actual events, people, and issues of the day; involve extensive research; employ a narrative approach; comprise many authorial voices; explore the underlying meaning of an event or issue; and have long-term impact. He writes:

> [T]he value of book length journalism derives as much from the material disclosed as how it is written. . . . Value deriving from information disclosed sits well within well-established claims about the free flow of information in a democratic society; by that criterion alone, book length journalism carries weight. Housing this information in a well-constructed narrative magnifies the work's potential impact on readers.[45]

Simons is clear about the implicit subjectivity of journalists, but says the most important aspects are transparency and approaching the work as objectively as possible. She says, "It's quite possible for a journalist to approach a subject with a strong point of view. When you come to the sort of dedication and commitment of time that most book-length journalism pieces take, obviously the journalist is going to be writing about something that interests

them.[46] Indeed, some of Simons's language is loaded, but, as Pam O'Connor claims, "[I]t's almost impossible to be dispassionate about this subject."[47] O'Connor believes Simons is partisan, writing:

> When I began reading *The Meeting of the Waters* I was hoping that, at last, here would be an objective study of this very controversial issue. However, I rapidly discovered where Simons stands. Parts of her book are as polemical as the opinions of the people involved. *The Meeting of the Waters* is an unashamed apologia, for the proponent women and their claims that if the bridge was built it would have serious consequences for Ngarrindjeri women, because the island was special to them for reasons they could not reveal.[48]

But she does add:

> However there is also some good objective writing and the book represents four years of comprehensive research. . . . There is some validity in the author's claim that it's at the heart of how we perceive ourselves as a nation—and of what that perception means for the day-to-day experiences of Australians, black and white, and from many other cultures and races. The book forces us to look deeply at our political and racial attitudes.[49]

Although Simons admits she shifted her views during the course of her research, she maintains she attempts balance and transparency in her writing at all times. But as O'Connor writes of the Hindmarsh text:

> The writing is refreshing. It ranges from unashamedly romantic, through chatty journalese, to taut factual language. Simons' wry throwaway lines not only entertain, they usually enlighten. However, there is a noticeable variation in the way Simons handles her material. Her language becomes more or less pejorative depending on whether she is dealing with the proponent or dissident women.[50]

Pejorative or not, Simons has certain criteria that she claims make for "good journalism." She lists not just evidence, but a "respect for evidence and openness to evidence." She also includes hard work and "the commitment that it takes to find things out. People think that's easy but in fact it's not—finding things out is very hard work." Simons's other criterion is to have an open mind or "the willingness to find and be open to evidence which contradicts your predisposed point of view."[51] She explains, "With literary journalism you have a strong narrative voice, an intelligence who is finding things out and telling you about them, who's making connections that you might not make yourself. It's full of value judgements, and when it's at its best it's fairly transparent about that."[52]

Applying Ricketson's six essential elements to the work of Simons, focusing on *The Meeting of the Waters,* I hope to demonstrate how her text is an

exemplar of Australian long-form literary or book-length journalism.

## Hindmarsh Island Affair

The story of Hindmarsh is complex but synoptically it involves a comprehensive and political clash of cultures and gender—white and black; men and women. Stakeholders in this story include state and federal politicians, lawyers, anthropologists, bureaucrats, developers, and, of course, Aboriginal people from both sides of the issue. Attempting to compile any balanced version of events is labor intensive and arduous. My main contention is that Simons attempts, executes, and completes the task, and as such complies with Ricketson's framework conclusively. She is analytical while attempting to maintain balance.

But seemingly, at the end of the research, she has a position. As she writes:

> Aboriginal culture is periodically attacked for being nepotistic, secretive and not accountable. I believe the story of the Hindmarsh Island affair makes it clear that the similarities between cultures are often more interesting than the differences. We like to think of our culture as open. We value transparency as a democratic virtue. This was one of the reasons that the idea of secrets being used to stop development was so threatening and uncomfortable. But the story of the Hindmarsh Island bridge shows that, in both Aboriginal culture and in our own, information follows the lines of power, and secrets are the inevitable accompaniment to power. The white men who steered events behind the scenes in the Hindmarsh Island affair saw themselves as combating dangerous political correctness. I believe that in doing so they gave birth to a kind of anti-political correctness at least as silly, dangerous and ideologically blind to evidence as what it sought to replace.[53]

Hindmarsh Island is the largest of many small islands in the Lower Murray River, near Goolwa in South Australia, under sixty miles from Adelaide. It is situated in Lake Alexandrina and has fresh water on its northern side and salt water on its southern. The original people are the Ngarrindjeri. Early in the 1990s, there was a plan to build a bridge from the mainland in Goolwa to the island. Until then, access was via a public ferry. Local Ngarrindjeri women protested the building of the bridge, based on their secret women's business—cultural beliefs and rituals that could not be revealed to men, white or black. Much of their claim is that the island is imperative to fertility/abortion ritual, passed down from woman to woman for centuries. The women wrote to the federal government, stating their position and asking that the bridge not go forward. The appeal was successful, and the bridge building was halted. The secret women's business was written down and placed into two sealed envelopes, marked "Confidential: To be read by women only."[54]

Within a year, a separate group of Aboriginal women came forward and

stated that there was no secret women's business attached to the island and that the claim was a sham. A Royal Commission was convened and in December 1995 found that the secret women's business was pure fabrication. The bridge went ahead and was completed in 2001. That same year, Justice John von Doussa of the federal court heavily criticized the Hindmarsh Royal Commission's conclusion in a ruling. As Simons writes in her preface, "The finding . . . has echoed through Australian life since—in every controversy about Aboriginal land claims, and every discussion above the claims of pre-settlement history."[55]

Ricketson's first element—dealing with actual events, people, or issues of the day—is comprehensively fulfilled. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and well being are ongoing issues in modern-day Australia, as all matters relating to First Nations peoples must be in any colonizing nation. Discussing and taking action on questions pertaining to embedded belief systems and the culture of a minority First Nation people reflects international protocol, and how well a dominant nation achieves this is always subject to both domestic and international gazes, and political significance is attached to decision-making and policies.

Combining Ricketson's next three elements—extensive research, a narrative approach, and many authorial voices—again, it is clear Simons's work fits his paradigm. At 512 pages, Simons's book is thorough, extensive, and as transparent as she claims she could make it. At the back of her text, there are five pages entitled "List of Characters," fifty of whom Simons either interviewed or corresponded with. Qualitative inquiry with fifty people constitutes both "extensive research and many authorial voices." As Tonkinson writes: "A skilled writer whose prose flows effortlessly, Simons has synthesised a massive amount of material via research, interviewing, interpreting what was and was not said, unearthing fresh data, sorting message from meta-message, and engaging in much essential reading between the lines."[56]

Further, one of the integral Royal Commission "errors" Simons uncovers is an example of the "secret women's business" conveniently fabricated to stop the building of the bridge. Simons produces evidence that, indeed, this information was handed over to Rose Draper, a research assistant and the wife of Hindmarsh Island surveyor Neale Draper, well before the Royal Commission claimed. Simons asks why the person it was handed to was never called to give evidence.[57] She managed to track down Draper and interviewed her about this crucial information. She writes:

> Rose was only intermittently in touch with her Adelaide family. They did not know where she was living. Finally, a member of her family found an old envelope from the previous year's Christmas card among rubbish in a

> basement. On the back was a post office box number. I wrote to that address not expecting a result, but within days, Rose Draper rang me back.[58]

The Royal Commission had far greater financial resources than Simons, so her query about Draper's crucial testimony, told to her by Sarah Milera, custodian of Hindmarsh Island, is significant.

Simons's narrative approach is demonstrated through the extensive quoting of her sources as well as the lyrical way in which she writes. The opening lines of the text give some indication of the quality of her own narrative voice: "Some landscapes speak loud. Some seem mute. Where I live, in the Blue Mountains on the eastern coast of Australia, the landscape shouts at you."[59] Her narrative voice is both expressive and personable, but it has an edge, a sense that something is coming. There are also many lyrical moments in her text, juxtaposing the forensic and the academic. At one time she writes of the country causing deep consternation: "This country may be beautiful, but it is not pretty. There seemed today to be no flesh on the landscape, and nothing damp or comfortable. The Flinders Ranges were like bones. Everything else was flat. The waters of the gulf were still and warm, like blue oil."[60]

In her closing scene, Simons is the lone traveler. She writes:

> I went to look at the bridge in the months after it was opened. . . . Then I drove back to the mainland, and started the long journey to the place I call home. . . . It was a very long drive. It took me more than one day. At times in the dream-like world of highway hum, I imagined I could see my journey from above—a car crawling across the continent like an insect on skin. Eastwards. Towards the future. . . . Driving towards the sunrise, yet always borne to the past.[61]

Simons is at her most poetic when concluding her text. Ultimately, she simply honors the country's First Nation and acknowledges its history, its differences, and its place in time. She also perhaps honors her own sense of longing for greater understanding.

Ricketson's final two elements—exploration of the underlying meaning of an event or issue, and impact—are what give *The Meeting of the Waters* its genuine contribution to knowledge. This drama unfolded daily in South Australia—reverberating in Canberra, then all around the country, and then back to South Australia—for many years. Much was written about the affair in Australian media, yet its complexity and political skew made it almost incomprehensible. Simons's text brings the many threads together and attempts to give a multilayered, transparent reading of events, contextualized within the political discourse of the day. Still, Simons does not preach her own beliefs, leaving it to the reader to decide.

The Hindmarsh Island affair broke within four years of the landmark High Court of Australia *Mabo v. Queensland* case, which overturned prior laws of *terra nullius* (meaning that Australia was empty land and subject to no proprietary rights) and recognized native title or rights to the land. The ruling, handed down June 3, 1992, began ten years earlier as a test case that brought to the court by Eddie Mabo, David Passi, and James Rice, all Merriam people from the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait. The case, known as *Mabo*, had an extensive political, legal, and cultural effect. Prime Minister Paul Keating stated as much in December 1993, during the passage of the Native Title Bill in Canberra:

> [A]s a nation, we take a major step towards a new and better relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. We give the indigenous people of Australia, at last, the standing they are owed as the original occupants of this continent, the standing they are owed as seminal contributors to our national life and culture: as workers, soldiers, explorers, artists, sportsmen and women—as a defining element in the character of this nation—and the standing they are owed as victims of grave injustices, as people who have survived the loss of their land and the shattering of their culture.[62]

The legislation was a watershed moment in the history between white and black Australia. On the heels of *Mabo*—the Hindmarsh women's secret business success, the subsequent Royal Commission findings of fabrication of 1995, and finally Justice von Doussa's dismantling of those findings in 2001—were historically significant and polarized Australians both white and black. The initial findings of fabrication in 1995 can alternately read as an attempt to correct a shift in the political agenda, on the back of the *Mabo*'s impact. The timing and importance of Simons's text cannot be disputed. As Kerryn Goldsworthy writes in a 2003 review:

> What Simons . . . sketches into her text is the rapid shifting-around of money and power in the background: economic boom and slump; the collapse of the State Bank of South Australia in 1991 and the fall of the Bannon Labor Government the following year; the effect that the *Mabo* decision of 1993 had on Australia's white conservative landowners, businessmen and politicians; and the rapid growth and change in legislation throughout the 1980s and 1990s, at state and federal level, to do with Aboriginal issues and rights.[63]

Media discourse at the time of the Hindmarsh Royal Commission and subsequent findings was sometimes scathing, patronizing, and overtly racist. It was also sometimes rational and balanced, depending on the publication and the journalist. But what cannot be questioned is what Simons succinctly

writes at the end of her prelude: "[T]he story of Hindmarsh Island bridge is one of the most important that can be told about Australia at the end of the last century and the beginning of the next . . . it is one of those big, archetypal stories that tell us something about who we are."[64]

This is a significantly Australian story. There may be similarities with other First Nation conflicts around the world, stories steeped in politics, power, men and women, race, the law, and money. But the Hindmarsh Bridge story is idiosyncratically Australian and its impact must not be forgotten. Simons's text, and the polemical discourse it inspired throughout the media and in the homes of ordinary Australians, has helped to ensure that.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to discuss the work of academic, journalist, and author Margaret Simons, and position one of her texts as an archetype of the quality long-form literary or book-length journalism emanating from Australia. Contextualizing her work against current studies on women and the media in Australia, I hoped to establish that there were women among the mostly highly respected long-form writers in the country, despite these studies. Using Ricketson's research, I hoped to demonstrate that Simons's book, *The Meeting of the Waters: The Hindmarsh Island Affair*, fulfilled the six elements he defined as crucial to long-form or book-length journalism. Having done that, I hope to have held up her text as an exemplar of Australian long-form literary journalism. Of course, Simons's story is complex and, as O'Connor writes, "[D]espite Simons' conclusions, the critical reader will realise that there are still far more questions than there are answers."[65]

Simons does not claim to have all the answers, but she has done the "dirty" journalistic work to enable readers to draw their own conclusions—always the signature of accessible literary journalism.

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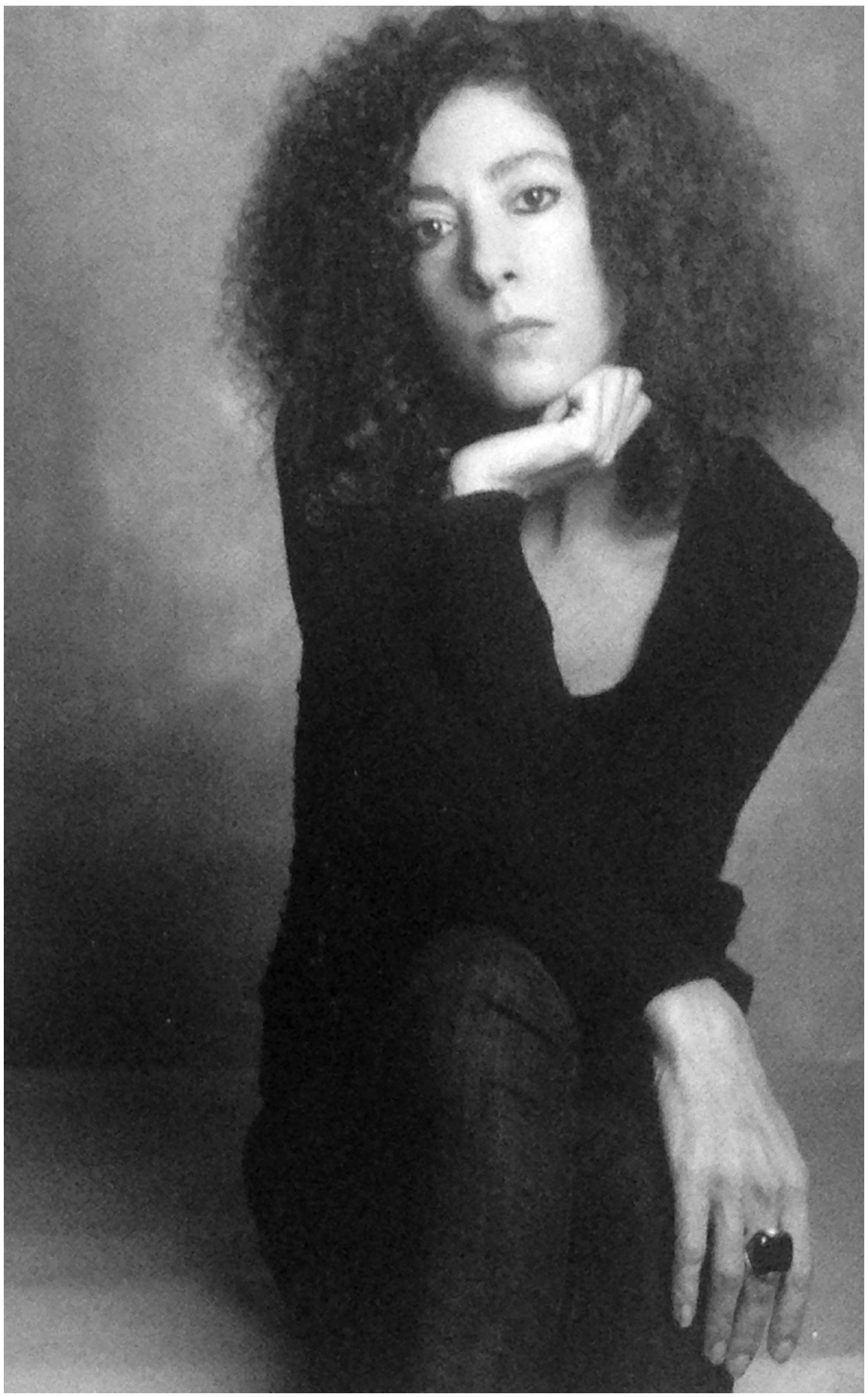

Leila Guerriero, courtesy Ediciones Universidad Diego Portales.

# Leila Guerriero and the Uncertain Narrator

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**Abstract**: In 2010, Leila Guerriero won the Premio Fundación Nuevo Periodismo, one of the most coveted literary journalism awards in Latin America, for her story "El rastro en los huesos" (Trace in the bones). This accolade consolidated her reputation as a master of the *crónica* (chronicle). Guerriero's first book, *Los Suicidas del fin del mundo* (The suicides of the end of the world), was published in 2005. Her second, *Una historia sencilla* (A *s*imple story), appeared eight years later. *Plano americano* (Three-quarter shot), a collection of Guerriero's profiles, was also published in 2013. Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa wrote that Guerriero produced "precious object[s], crafted and written with the persuasion, originality and elegance of a short story or a successfully realized poem." This paper analyzes some of these "objects," focusing on Guerriero's journalistic narrator.

## Introduction

The last piece of fiction that Argentinian Leila Guerriero (born in 1967) wrote was, paradoxically, the one that began her career in literary journalism.

> [The story was] "Kilómetro cero" or "Ruta cero," I don't remember. . . . It took place in a car. It was the story of a young man and woman who had a very intense relationship and were on the run after robbing a bank. . . . It was written in third person, in a very sparse tone, very much in the style that became my way of writing years later. It was the last piece of fiction I ever wrote, but it got me in the door at *Página/12*.[1]

In an autobiographical text from 2001, "Me gusta ser mujer . . . y odio a las histéricas," or "I like to be a woman . . . and I hate hysterical women,"[2] Guerriero wrote that she placed a copy of her story inside an envelope and dropped it off at the reception desk of Buenos Aires daily *Página/12*, addressed as per the doorman's suggestion to Jorge Lanata, the paper's director.[3]

Two weeks later her father woke her up, screaming from the other end of the telephone line. The story had been published on the back cover, where authors of the stature of "Juan Gelman and Osvaldo Soriano used to sign with their bylines. . . . Three or four months later, and without knowing who I was, the man [Lanata] offered me a job at *Página/30,* the monthly magazine of the newspaper."

In 2006, Guerriero revised these events in "Sobre algunas mentiras del periodismo" ("About a few lies in journalism").[4] The new version of her autobiographical narrative contains two factual differences from the first one: in the second version it was "four days later" that the short story was published in *Página/12*, as opposed to "two weeks later"; and Guerriero was offered the position at *Página/30* "six months later," as opposed to "three or four months later."

The discrepancies are minimal, and have no major impact on the journalist's personal story. They could easily be interpreted as mistakes or memory lapses. But since Guerriero has a reputation for inquisitive research, fact-checking skills, and precise writing, the fact that she has left these discrepancies intact in her collection *Frutos extraños*, where both stories coexist close to each other, invites a deeper level of insight.

As manifested by the laxity with which she has treated even her own autobiographical narratives, Guerriero strives to take her writing beyond the notion of factual precision. In her stories, doubt exists not as something to be overcome, ignored, avoided, or corrected, but rather as an essential element of truth itself, to be added to complete the whole of the experience.

## Mathematical Precision?

In a May 2013 column in Spanish newspaper *El País de Madrid*, Peruvian Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa's words had an immediate canonizing effect on the works of Guerriero. The article discussed her anthology of journalistic profiles, *Plano americano* (Universidad Diego Portales, 2013):

> In our world [Latin America], journalism is the realm of spontaneity and imprecision, but the [journalism] that Guerriero practices is on par with the one practiced by the best writers of the *New Yorker*, establishing an equivalent level of excellence: meaning rigorous work, exhaustive research, and a style of mathematical precision.[5]

What strikes one as bewildering about Vargas Llosa's description (other than the overgeneralizations) is that Guerriero, who was awarded the New Journalism prize awarded by the Gabriel García Márquez foundation in 2010, and in 2013 won the González-Ruano award for literary journalism, cultivates precisely the opposite effect: a deliberate imprecision is a central as-

pect of her style. While her investigative rigor is never in question, and clearly is part of her research process (she refers to this in several interviews—most recently in a Q&A with writer Ramón Lobo for online magazine *Jotdown*), it is not the meticulousness of her research that makes her work stand out, but her ability to keep this meticulousness from inoculating her works against doubt and uncertainty.[6] This openness to a story's vulnerability makes her achievement outstanding in a field focused obsessively on locking down the empirical and delivering the certain.

In fact, as Guerriero's work makes apparent, intense reporting often renders the exact opposite of mathematical precision and quantifiable fact: the more a reporter learns about a story, the more she becomes aware of all the nuances, dark areas, and, ultimately, the unknowable elements that are part of the whole. To applaud Guerriero for being a disciplined reporter is to deny the other, subversive half of her journalistic method: her inclusion of doubt, and her use of voice and opinion as connectors between facts. Guerriero deftly maneuvers this difficult balance of elements in order to create an immersive experience for her readers—an emulsion of facts and observation that slowly seeps into the readers' perception of the story, until *their* point of view reaches a protean point of truth.

There are three main mechanisms that Guerriero uses in her pieces, which play off of the presence of doubt and multiplicity: the *uncertain* narrator, who acknowledges that, the more she tries to get to the bottom of a story, to the bare-bone facts, the more questions appear; a series of *contradictory sources*, who go back and forth in their renditions of a certain event or story, or cancel each other out in a zero sum game of factuality; and a *negative storyline* that forms not by the accumulation of corroborating facts, but by the exposure of a system of contradictory ones. The purpose of these mechanisms is to construct a fragile, momentary microcosm of truth that grows from within the interstices, at the interplay between the most detailed factuality and an overwhelming doubt; a type of phenomenological reality as a form of *journalistic truth*. Just like Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "objects," defined at the intersection of multiple perceptual instances, Guerriero's journalism pivots between the confidence in the factuality of the present moment and the multiple openings that future instances of perception may present to the observer:

> I say that I perceive correctly when my body has a precise hold on the spectacle, but that does not mean that my hold is ever all-embracing; it would be so only if I had succeeded in reducing to a state of articulate perception all the inner and outer horizons of the object, which is in principle impossible. In experiencing a perceived truth, I assume that the concordance so far experienced would hold for a more detailed observation; I place my

> confidence in the world. Perceiving is pinning one's faith, at a stroke, in a whole future of experiences, and doing so in a present which never strictly guarantees the future; it is placing one's belief in a world. It is this opening upon a world which makes possible perceptual truth and the actual effecting of a *Wahr-Nehmung*, thus enabling us to "cross out" the previous illusion and regard it as null and void.[7]

## The Uncertain Narrator

Guerriero's profile of monumental Chilean poet Nicanor Parra opens with a series of similes that immediately shatter the myth, fragmenting the main character into a series of possibilities:

> He is a man, but it could be anything: a catastrophe, a roar, the wind . . .
>
> He is a man, but he could be a dragon, the rumbling of a volcano, the stiffness that precedes an earthquake. He stands up. Squeezes a woolen cap and says:
>
> —Go ahead, go ahead.
>
> Reaching the house where Nicanor Parra lives, on Lincoln Street in Las Cruces, a coastal town two hundred kilometers from Santiago de Chile, is easy. The hard part is reaching him . . .
>
> Nicanor. Nicanor Parra. Born in 1914, he is 97. There are people who think he is not among the living.[8]

All these "possible" Parras are not only introduced as an attempt to open up the multiplicity of the poet's personality before the reader. This broken image of Parra stems from the narrator's emotional response to the myth, and the myth's splintering effect on the reportorial voice.

Sarah Foster, the translator of Guerriero's profile of Parra into English for the *Paris Review*, decided to discard the similes in her version of the encounter. The English text that appears in the *Paris Review* starts with: "Reaching the house where Nicanor Parra lives, on Lincoln Street in Las Cruces," avoiding the comparisons that open the original in Spanish.[9]

Examples of this splintered, phenomenological narrator abound in Guerriero's journalism. But one of the most interesting ones appears in her latest long-form work, *Una historia sencilla (A simple story)*. The book follows dancer Rodolfo González Alcántara to a prestigious, but relatively unknown, folkloric dance competition that takes place every year in the small town of Laborde, in the province of Córdoba, Argentina. González Alcántara is a professional *malambo* dancer, and the first time Guerriero sees him, the man is onstage:

Then I hear, coming from the stage, the strumming of a guitar. There's something in that strum—something like an animal, tense and raring to pounce as it prowls near the ground—which grabs my attention. So I turn around and I run, bent low, to crouch behind the jury's table.

That is the first time I see Rodolfo González Alcántara.

And what I see leaves me speechless. . . .

There he was—Rodolfo González Alcántara, twenty-eight years old from La Pampa, man of towering stature—and there was I, sitting on the lawn, speechless. . . .

That Friday night, Rodolfo González Alcántara reached the center of the stage like an evil wind or a puma, like a deer, or a soul stealer, and stayed nailed to the ground for two or three beats, his furrowed brow staring at something nobody could see . . . . He was the countryside, the dry soil, he was the tense horizon of the Pampas, the smell of horses, he was the sounds of the summer sky, he was the buzzing of solitude, he was the fury, he was sickness and he was war, he was the opposite of peace. He was the knife and the gash. He was the cannibal. He was a curse. When he finished, he stomped on the wood with the strength of a monster, and stayed there, looking through layers of crumbly night air, covered in stars, all glint. And, smirking from the side—like a prince, or a pimp, or a devil—he touched the wing of his hat. And he left.

And that was that.

*I don't know* whether they cheered him or not. *I don't remember*. . . .

What I did later? *I know because I took down these notes*. I ran backstage but, although I tried to spot him in the crowd—a huge man, touched by a hat, with a red poncho tied to his waist: it wasn't hard—he wasn't there. Until, at the open door of one of the green rooms, I saw a very short man, no taller than four-foot nine, no jacket, no vest, no top hat. I recognized him because he was panting. He was alone. I got closer. I asked him where he was from. . . .

He was shaking—his hands were shaking and his legs were shaking, his fingers were shaking when he stroked the beard that barely covered his chin—and I asked his name. — Rodolfo González Alcántara.[10]

Guerriero—who has, admittedly, no expertise in or knowledge of the dance of *malambo*—is amazed by what she sees, and can only respond with an explosion of metaphors. She describes González Alcántara in much the style she used with Parra. This time, however, between the two versions of

her character (the man onstage and the man backstage), there's a clear lapse not just of time but of reliability, a perceptual void that forces the narrator back to her notes: "I don't know whether they cheered him or not. I don't remember. . . . What I did later? I know because I took down these notes." These notes, the *facts* that Guerriero hangs on to as a reporter, don't deliver what's important about her first encounter with González Alcántara. They simply keep the reporting in motion, and the emotions in check. Notes are just a connector.

"Our memory is a machine that helps us edit and choose between the information that is completely necessary and the information that is additional," Guerriero told me during an interview we had in November 2013. "Our memory is more useful to cherry-pick certain facts than to remember everything. Otherwise we would all be 'Funes the Memorious' [the main character of Borges's eponymous short story]."

## Contradictory Sources

Guerriero writes most of her profiles for *Plano americano* in the third person, but, rather than attaining the clinical assertiveness of the narrators of *New Yorker* narrative nonfiction, her reporting reaches points in which contradictions are the only possible conclusions. Some stories even begin from a point of instability. An example is the opening to Aurora Venturini's profile, a piece that Guerriero wrote for *Sábado* magazine (which was republished in *Gatopardo* magazine in 2012):

> Aurora Venturini's father was a member of the Radical Party, in the thirties, he was arrested for political reasons and transferred to Ushuaia prison, from which he never returned.
>
> Aurora Venturini's father was a radical militant who was sent by his own party to work at the prison in the city of Ushuaia, something he did successfully.
>
> Aurora Venturini's father was a radical militant who was sent by his own party to work at the prison in the city of Ushuaia, but after learning that his eldest daughter had joined the Peronist party, he returned to La Plata, where he was born, just to throw her out of his house and go back.
>
> The father of Aurora Venturini was fond of horse racing and, after gambling everything he had, he left the city of La Plata, where he was born, but when he learned that his eldest daughter had joined the Peronist party, he returned, only to throw her out of his house and leave, once again.
>
> Aurora Venturini's father disappeared from his home in the city of La Plata, where he was from, an undetermined day of an unspecified year, and never

returned.

Aurora Venturini's father was named John.

Aurora Venturini's father has no name.

Aurora Venturini has no father: she has *versions.*[11]

The profile of this Argentine octogenarian writer, unlikely winner in 2007 of the Premio Nueva Novela (New Novel Prize, an award for "young voices in literature"), opens with the same life developing simultaneously in the parallel universes of memory. The narrator, unsure about the facts, opens up this uncertainty before the reader. The effect imbues Venturini with a multifaceted, complex character.

"But don't we all have versions of our father [instead of *a* father]?" I asked Guerriero during our interview.

"Yes, but you can have versions that are more or less extreme," she answered. "You can have versions that your memory involuntarily mixes up: 'four' versus 'two weeks later'; or 'three months later' versus 'six months later' [the reference is to her own autobiographical narratives in *Frutos extraños*]. In these cases, the result is pretty much the same. [But] in the case of Aurora [Venturini], the changes are extreme, because she reinvents her own legend depending on . . . who knows what! . . . her need to recreate herself as a character, to distance herself from her literature or her past."

In the profile, Guerriero describes Venturini's unreliability—as a source and as autobiographer—as part of the novelist's persona. Since this instability will lie at the root of Venturini's narratives, the contradictory nature of the novelist's biography stays unquestioned by Guerriero and buttresses the profile. In a sense, by featuring Venturini's unassailability, voluntary displacements, concealments, and adjustments, Guerriero prioritizes *truth* over *fact*. What the narrative loses in reliability, it gains in credibility.

"There's a woman I admire, a journalist, Larissa MacFarquhar," Guerriero told me. "She writes for the *New Yorker*, and she reflected a lot on profiles. I always felt connected to what she said, because I feel the same. She says that she doesn't like to ask hostile questions . . . and that she is always more interested in the legend that the person decided to tell us about him/herself."

When the self-invented novelist outweighs the mere *facts* about Venturini's life, journalism stops. "My job ends there," Guerriero told me. "I'm not a biographer, or a historian." Her responsibility, she believes, remains with the truth that grows in between testimonies and facts, neither one, nor the other.

Although many of Guerriero's profiles and chronicles resort to conflicting sources, there are other interesting ways in which she applies uncertainty

to her texts, enhancing the complexity of her characters and challenging the reader to take a new approach to the theme and ideas that may have been canonized and stabilized by past narratives about them.

## The Slippery Story

The longest of the profiles in Guerriero's *Plano americano* is of Roberto Arlt, an Argentine novelist and playwright who died in 1942. Arlt's biographers all describe the man as elusive, but an episode surrounding a photo of Arlt's wake summarizes the problems Guerriero encountered. The following excerpt is long but necessary to understanding the journalist's dilemma.

> In 1991, Ricardo Piglia published in "Primer Plano" a pullout of newspaper *Página/12,* a text titled: "Arlt: a cadaver over the city," which would reappear as a prologue to Arlt's complete short stories, published by Seix Barral in 1996. In that text, Piglia wrote: "One afternoon Juan C. Martini Real showed me a series of photos of the wake of Roberto Arlt. The most impressive one was a shot of the coffin hanging from ropes in the air, suspended over the city. The coffin had been assembled in his [Arlt's] room, but they had to get him out through the window with gears and pulleys because Arlt was too big of a guy to pass through the corridor. That casket suspended over Buenos Aires is a good image of the place Arlt's literature has in Argentina. He died at forty-two, he will always be young and we will always be pulling his body out through the window. . . . Arlt is the most contemporary of our writers. His body still lingers over the city. The pulleys and ropes that hold him are a fraction of the machines and strange inventions that propel his fiction into the future." *It was never totally clear whether the story was a perfect metaphor or whether the photo really existed.*
>
> —What was all that about the photo of the coffin? [Guerriero asked Piglia]
>
> —Look, everybody tells me it wasn't like that, that the pulleys and the coffin thing never happened, but I will tell you how this came about [Piglia answered]. Martini Real worked by that time at Corregidor, a publishing house, and he was editing Onetti's *La muerte y la niña*. It happened there and he had photos, and among those photos he showed me one and said: "Look, a photo of Arlt's wake." And you could see the coffin lowered by pulleys. It would be great to find that photo he showed me.[12]

Although it wasn't clear for Guerriero whether the photo existed or not, or whether the episode had taken place, the photo [or its myth] was part of Arlt's persona as a writer. What Guerriero did with her profile was date the origins of the myth, and offer a few possible explanations for it.[13] Arlt's story also illuminates a totally different aspect of Guerriero's narrative. When she contacted Martini Real's daughter by e-mail, the woman revealed: ". . . I couldn't find that one. When my dad passed away, I spent a lot of time look-

ing through all his materials, to check what he had, and save the important things, but I don't remember having seen the photo you mention."[14]

Guerriero then quoted another interview, this time with poet and longtime Arlt friend, Conrado Nalé Roxlo, published in 1968 by writer Omar Borré: "Arlt wasn't a very tall man, but his voice, his way of standing, and perhaps his coffin, hanging from a crane because it couldn't be taken down through the spiral staircase, maybe all that gave the impression that he was very corpulent."[15]

Mirta Arlt, Roberto's daughter, was also consulted by Guerriero: "'I don't remember anybody telling me that they had to take him like that. But it may be true, because he was a massive man.' *The clues that were lost, which are being lost.*"[16]

The sources don't come to an agreement, and the factual aspect of Arlt's death is inconclusive. That would not be an option for a biographer, Guerriero told me, but it is perfect for a journalist. Guerriero uses memory, perception, and facts combined to create a much more nuanced image of the character. Was Arlt a huge man? Was his coffin hauled using a crane? Did the photo exist? These questions help to understand the dimension of the myth around Arlt, and offer the reader an image as uncertain and unassailable as Arlt's himself.

"There was a pattern in Arlt's life," Guerriero told me during our interview, "and that was his need to erase his tracks. That was his pattern, and I believe that a text is successful when you can unveil those patterns and work with them." In the "erasures," Guerriero finds what she calls "a symptom of truth"—that larger truth of Arlt as a writer, and the fact that he was already "working for his posterity since the first time he wrote something."

Is it easier to figure out someone living or someone dead, writer Alan Pauls asked Guerriero in a recent interview for *In* magazine:

> In principle, someone dead. Their life is over; the meaning of their story is closed. But all lives are equally enigmatic. Someone living can tell you whatever they want, they can lie to you, etc. That's why the book of profiles is called *Plano americano* (Three-quarter Shot). The best you can do is to approach people from the perspective of a three-quarter shot. You can never get a close-up shot of anyone, not even if you spent a year with them. How do you know they're not hiding letters from a love affair with a twelve-year-old? Maybe you'll find out later, after they die. It's not just a small detail: it's something that radically changes someone's story.[17]

The distance between perception, fact, and memory is malleable. But that substance is what fills the void, the remaining quarter of the three-quarter shot. These elusive elements appear in Guerriero's narrative in certain lines

of dialogue and are always geared toward multiplying the possibilities of the *real*, opening up new questions. It is the hidden quarter of the image—what remains outside its frame—that triggers and multiplies the appeal in Guerriero's characters. Like Roland Barthes's erotic photographers, Guerriero's narrators leave out of frame the most lurid aspects of the truth.

## Conclusion: Thick Subjectivity

Guerriero named her first anthology *Frutos extraños* (Strange fruit), like the song by Billie Holiday, a discarnate rendition of Lewis Alan's poem about the lynching of an African American man in the South of the United States. Alan's song, Holiday's version, and Guerriero's stories all work as encasings, preserving historical narratives like fossilized insects inside Baltic amber. These encasings, however, don't all work the same way. During our interview, Guerriero told me that the patterns she found in each story were precisely what inspired the structure, the substance, and the themes in her writing. Her reporting helped her find that structure. In that fashion, form and content were always entwined, interconnected. "Arlt's story was about erasures," said Guerriero, "so those erasures needed to be a component of the profile if I wanted to tell it right."

Riddled with uncertainty, Guerriero's stories find room for observation and voice in the interstices of doubt. Like mortar holding together the bricks of a building, Guerriero pours her voice and impressions in the gaps between the larger factual blocks of the story. And these observations not only hold together the structure like grout. They also give it its final shape. Guerriero's narrative voice doesn't feel imposed or external. It doesn't shine a light on facts, or offer itself in the ways that David Eason has called "ethnographic realism." The uncertain narrator doesn't reveal the story "out there." But it doesn't "construct reality" either. It isn't, in Eason's terms, a "cultural phenomenologist." This type of narrator is embedded in the stories, holding them together from within, showing their failure to adhere to a stabilized reality through an agglutination of observations and facts. This type of narrator surges from the depths of each story in the form of what I will call a *thick subjectivity*, borrowing the term from Clifford Geertz[18]: "What it means is that descriptions of Berber, Jewish, or French culture must be cast in terms of the constructions we imagine Berbers, Jews or Frenchmen to place upon what they live through, the formulae they use to define what happens to them."[19]

Arlt, Venturini, or González Alcántara, just like the other characters in Guerriero's chronicles and profiles, are cast in their own words, but as Guerriero "imagines" them. Like spider webs, held together by the tension, the pulling strings of contradictory forces, Guerriero's narratives catch truth in

the negative space of stories.

When I asked her whether she knew about Billie Holiday's song before naming her book *Frutos extraños*, Guerriero told me that, in fact, she didn't: her book had been named after a painting by Argentine artist Guillermo Kuitka, and she only learned about the song a few years after the book was published. Kuitka, who knew Holiday and the song, had appropriated the title, channeling the lynching through his painting. It would be hard to know how much of these images, much less how much of the original ideas in the song, has reemerged in Guerriero's stories. But *Frutos extraños*, *Plano americano,* and all of Guerriero's long-form work show glimmers of that horror that shines in the particular space between fact and testimony, that primitive form of truth that is told as it is witnessed, imagined, and reimagined, by our collective storytelling.

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## Notes

1. Alan Pauls, "The Curiosity Factor," *In*, October 2013, http://in-lan.com/en/personage/interviews-personage/the-curiosity-factor/.

2. All of the translations are mine.

3. Leila Guerriero, "Me gusta ser mujer . . . y odio a las histéricas," in *Frutos extraños* (Bogotá: Aguilar, 2009), 326.

4. Guerriero, "Sobre algunas mentiras del periodismo," in *Frutos* extraños, 348–49.

5. Mario Vargas Llosa, "Periodismo y creación: *Plano americano*," *El País* (Montevideo, Uruguay), May 19, 2013, http://elpais.com/elpais/2013/05/16/opinion/1368714188_384998.html.

6. Ramón Lobo, "Leila Guerriero: 'El periodismo objetivo es la gran men-

tira del universo, todo es subjetivo,'" *Jotdown*. http://www.jotdown.es/2013/11/lei%C2%ADla-gue%C2%ADrrie%C2%ADro-el-periodismo-objetivo-es-la-gran-mentira-del-universo-todo-es-subjetivo/.

7. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962), 346–47.

8. Guerriero, "Buscando a Nicanor," in *Plano americano* (Santiago, Chile: Universidad Diego Portales, 2013), 13. Italics mine.

9. Guerriero, *Una historia sencilla* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2013), 52–53. Italics mine.

10. Ibid.

11. Guerriero, "Quién le teme a Aurora Venturini," in *Plano americano*, 378–407.

12. Guerriero, "Roberto Arlt. La vida breve," in *Plano americano*, 374.

13. In *Between Parenthesis* (New York: New Directions, 2011), 23. Roberto Bolaño writes about the myth of Arlt's coffin: "In any case, it's Piglia who raises up Arlt in his own coffin soaring Buenos Aires, in a very Piglian or Arltian scene, though one that takes place only in Piglia's imagination, not in reality. It wasn't a crane that lowered Arlt's coffin. The stairs were wide enough for the job. The body in the box wasn't a heavyweight champion's."

14. Ibid.

15. Guerriero, "Roberto Arlt. La vida breve," in *Plano Americano*, 374–75.

16. Ibid., 375.

17. Pauls, "Curiosity Factor."

18. I am borrowing the term from Clifford Geertz's idea of "thick description," in "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973). For the difference between "ethnographic realism" and "cultural phenomenology," see David L. Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World: Two Modes of Organizing Experience," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1, no. 1 (1984): 51–65.

19. Geertz, 316.

Alexandra Fuller, courtesy Jonathan Ball Publishers.

# Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa: A White Woman Writer Goes West

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**Abstract:** In terms of nationality, Alexandra Fuller is difficult to pigeonhole. She was born in England but from age two was brought up in Southern Africa (mostly Rhodesia). She married an American working in Zambia and then moved to Wyoming to raise a family. She has written three books about her family, their peripatetic life, and the violence of decolonizing Africa. The success of these works has made her one of the few African female nonfiction writers to gain an international audience. Fuller's long-form journalism has been published in *Granta* and the *Guardian* in the United Kingdom, and in the *New Yorker, Harper's, National Geographic*, *Byliner*, and *Vogue* in the United States. This paper traces the arc of a writer transcending her continent to break into the competitive American magazine market, portraying the complex land from which she has come for a foreign audience.

The main title of this article, "Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa," is a reference to Fuller's book debut, *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*,[1] her 2001 memoir of childhood. A decade later, she returned to this emotional terrain in her fourth work, *Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness*.[2] In both memoirs Fuller presented her mother, Nicola, a pivotal subject in both accounts, as a woman who referred to herself as "Nicola Fuller of Central Africa."[3] This article attempts to situate Fuller as a nonfiction writer of Southern Africa, yet the confident tone of the title should be seen more as a query. Fuller left the continent in the mid-1990s and now lives in Wyoming. She professes to spend a month every year back in Africa, an arrangement that she hopes might help her to maintain the currency to write long-form reportage on the continent for international titles. Beyond this geographical dislocation for eleven months of the year, Fuller's authenticity as a writer of

Southern Africa has another handicap. Despite the fact that she sees herself and the family she was born into as African, the Fullers are actually of British descent. These issues may elicit questions as to what extent Fuller might be seen as a true representative "voice" of Africa. This article explores how Fuller occupies multiple sites of liminality—in geography, in identity, and in genre—and how her position at this nexus renders her voice attractive to editors of newspapers and magazines located in the West who seek to explain the intricacies of Africa to readers. Her unusual situation, this simultaneous closeness and distance, has offered her a level of authority that her American editors seek.

Fuller was born in 1969 in England when her British parents returned from Africa. The family did not linger there, as her mother, who had been born in Kenya, hankered to return to the continent. In 1971, the Fullers settled in white-ruled Rhodesia. Fuller has told various interviewers that she wrote eight, or nine, or ten, or thirteen novels about her childhood, all of which were rejected by publishers. Eventually, she decided to make her story personal and factual. This switch to nonfiction was provoked[4] by the fact that she had married an American, was raising children in Wyoming, and felt that they would not understand their mixed identities and heritage if they did not know about her African childhood and parentage.

Although she is explicit[5] about the early rejections of her writing (and her consequent firing by an agent), Fuller in interviews has never explained how she managed to get her first memoir published in 2002. However this happened, once in print the book initiated a trajectory for Fuller that made her a recognizable and sought-after writer from and about Africa. Almost every review (positive or negative) of the book speaks about her "honesty"[6] in shamelessly exposing her parents' attitudes and behavior in an African country where a white minority clung to power ruthlessly and violently. Some reviews speak also of the point of view of whiteness,[7] of the lack of significant black characters, and of the insularity of the white life Fuller portrays.[8] Nevertheless, its enthusiastic readers agree that *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight* is an honest reflection of such lives lived by children of white settlers in colonial and apartheid Africa.

The person who reacted most strongly to the book was Fuller's mother, who, imagining that her daughter was crafting another *Out of Africa* tale, was horrified to see herself depicted in print as a mad, depressed, violent drunk. Because Nicola took to calling *Dogs* "that awful book,"[9] Alexandra felt she needed to repair this portrayal with a further account ("another awful book"[10]), which told more fully the story of her mother's roots in Kenya, where she was born the child of British parents.[11] The second memoir,

*Cocktail Hour Under the Tree of Forgetfulness* (2011), is not written using the innocent voice of the observing child. Rather, the adult daughter converses with and questions her parents, who are now living on a bank of the Zambezi River in Zambia, accommodating themselves to life alongside the black Africans, whose permission they needed to settle and work the land.

In between the two memoirs, Fuller produced *Scribbling the Cat* (2004),[12] a book about a damaged white war veteran from the dirty wars of Rhodesia and Mozambique, known only as K in the text. Again, Fuller applied her trademark "honesty" to the encounters, the conversations, the travels with K, and the atrocities this man had seen and committed. But the book sits somewhat uncomfortably in terms of Fuller's position as the person facing the horrors. While in *Dogs* the narrator is a child and legitimately innocent and unknowing, the adult Fuller is obliged to take responsibility for what she sees and hears. Yet she avoids the narrative obligation to interrogate this, and does not take responsibility for her own implication in this history (explored more fully below).

After moving to Wyoming in 2005, Fuller started to produce journalism from Africa for *Vogue* magazine, with pieces on Nobel Peace Prize–winning environmentalist Wangari Maathai and primatologist Jane Goodall.[13] She also reported on the bushmeat trade in Zambia in September 2006 for *National Geographic*.[14] Owing to her location in Wyoming, close to the Yellowstone National Park, *NG* editors asked her to investigate the use of sensitive ecological areas for oil extraction. As she gathered material on the oil fields she came across the obituaries of several young men killed there. The family of Colton H. Bryant agreed to an interview, and once she had begun to understand how they felt about him and what kind of person he was, she realized she could say important political things about the oil extraction industry via a recounting of his life and through "letting him speak."[15] As she told Marcia Franklin of Idaho Public Television, she had attempted to tell the story through an actual person and thereby take the "inflammation" out of a sensitive political issue. The work got her into trouble with the oil companies anyway, and in the process Fuller became an activist for the recognition of "sacred lands."

Since *The Legend of Colton H. Bryant* (2008), Fuller's magazine journalism output has increased and involves two main focuses: writing on the political situation in Southern African countries (such as "Mandela's Children" for *National Geographic*[16] and "After Rhodesia: Robert Mugabe's Crisis of Stasis" for *Harper's*[17]); and writing about the American West (for instance, "Mustangs, Spirit of the Shrinking West" for *National Geographic*[18]). She also been invited to speak at literary festivals all over the world: the Sun Valley Writers'

Conference in the United States,[19] the Book Café in Zimbabwe,[20] and the Franschhoek Literary Festival in South Africa. She has also been interviewed for French television by journalist host François Busnel.[21] Most recently, she has returned to autobiography with a book about her divorce.[22]

## Writing Africa in the Postcolonial Moment

This short biography of a writing life illustrates that Fuller not only has currency as a writer of nonfiction and autobiography, but has made the successful transition to journalism. Her currency as a writer of honesty willing to investigate difficult and complex personal (and now political) issues makes her editorially attractive to editors based particularly in the United States. But her appeal as a writer who straddles genres is enhanced by the charge imputed by—and perhaps the dangerous position of being placed within—the furious debates that arise out of postcolonial critique. These debates stem from reactions to centuries of white representation of African lives, and strongly critique any contemporary sign of that colonizing and defining point of view.

When Fuller's first book was published in 2002, she assumed a place at the end of a long line of nonfiction writers attempting, to use a phrase from Hughes,[23] to "make sense of the world." Early Southern African examples of these include: William Burchell's *Travels in the Interior of South Africa* (1810–15), Thomas Pringle's *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834), William Cornwallis Harris's *Narrative of an Expedition in Southern Africa* (1838), R.M. Ballantyne's *Six Months at the Cape* (1879), and Lady Anne Barnard's *South Africa a Century Ago* (1910). Although these writers would be identified as colonial administrators, temporary settlers, curious travelers, or a combination of these—in other words, not Southern African by birth—they nevertheless have produced the early pages of Western knowledge about Southern African and, as Wade notes,[24] factual narratives written in English that have been associated with historical projects of dubious political ambition. The works cited above point repeatedly to the otherness of their subjects and thus to the otherness of a Southern African literary past. Fuller's contemporary nonfiction comrades-in-African-arms include Jonny Steinberg, Peter Godwin, and Tim Butcher—all white, none women, all speaking about this continent to an international English-speaking audience. Although exploring the male-dominated nature of this terrain is beyond the scope of this article, it is notable that women writers from Southern Africa working as nonfiction writers are greatly outnumbered by men.[25]

It is against this context—the weight of the history of white writers representing Africa to the world—that Fuller has to contend in both her literature and her journalism. To give some sense of the postcolonial critique that is put

forward to challenge Fuller's writing position and choices of subject matter, critic Deborah Seddon asks explicitly why Fuller has chosen a white soldier instead of a black one as the central character for *Scribbling the Cat*, a work that tries to unpack the often inexplicable violence and aggression embedded in Southern Africa's political processes (and Fuller's own implication in this as a white beneficiary of terribly unjust systems of oppression):

> The culpability she admits to feeling [in response to a particular memory of K's] is only half-believable. This is a writer who insists on her position as African, and on the special insight it grants her, but who also seeks to persuade the reader that this is a moment of unique and terrible revelation for her. Are we really meant to believe that she was thirty-five and in the middle of Mozambique with an ex-soldier and she had never encountered such a story about the Chimurenga [the Zimbawean liberation struggle]?[26]

There is also the nagging question as to why Fuller is attracted to and must understand the soldier who willingly undertook to destabilize legitimate political processes that brought about freedom for black Africans. As Seddon points out, in Mozambique Fuller meets a black man who also has war experience but doesn't pursue his experiences and ideas as a subject for her book or as another character. She repeats the focus on white characters, their damage and violence, but this time with less validity (and further ambivalence) than in *Dogs*.

## My Soul Has No Home

A similar critique, which probes beyond the text into the writer's identity and location, is also evident in Tony Simoes da Silva's critique of *Dogs*. Simoes da Silva makes even more explicit the discomfort of some critics in relation to Fuller's viewpoint for telling a story about an African childhood, and brings to the critique some of his own disaffection when he says: "As I struggled to reconcile the text's success and my own reaction to it, I came to think that my reaction was less a consequence of the fact that I could not empathise with Fuller's story, than of a feeling that I *should* not, given her whiteness and the African setting of the narrative."[27] He goes on: "In Fuller's work [too] the messy political and social situation in Zimbabwe is framed by a personal discourse of trauma, dispossession and exile in which the White person's story acquires a significance well beyond its place in contemporary Africa."[28]

While critics like Simoes da Silva fiercely critique the centrality of white lives in these types of accounts, other literary theorists like Njabulo Ndebele call for white African writers to come forward and represent themselves in equally honest depictions. Ndebele puts his point of view in a challenge:

"With a foreign passport in the back pocket of the trousers, now they belong—now they do not. When will they tell this story?"[29] The accounts of "this story," of course, have to place white Africans at the heart of the telling, and if they are honest, then they will show the terrible implication of white Africans in appalling political decisions and actions, but also reveal the humanity and struggles of these protagonists. Rosalia Baena, adopting the Ndebele position, goes further by describing this uncertain location for white Africans like Fuller: "[G]enerations of foreign-born British children [who] dwelt in an undefined place between the English and the native cultures; they were second-generation citizens who, though always considered English, had never known (or knew very little of) the mother country, and whose vital environment had only been colonial."[30]

Baena also believes that memoirs such as Fuller's are a necessary corrective to limited and narrow views about colonial experiences. She welcomes the more complex picture they give of white experiences, particularly those of whites born in Africa, during the colonial and apartheid eras. Baena finds that the affiliations that these writers expose in their accounts show the ambiguity of their positions and the contradictions they embody and she embraces such accounts as enriching. Early in her first book, Fuller pinned her identity conundrum to the page in this way:

> I say, "I'm African." But not black.
>
> And I say, "I was born in England," by mistake.
>
> But, "I have lived in Rhodesia (which is now Zimbabwe) and in Malawi (which used to be Nyasaland) and in Zambia (which used to be Northern Rhodesia)."
>
> And I add, "Now I live in America," through marriage.
>
> And (full disclosure), "But my parents were born of Scottish and English parents."
>
> What does that make me?[31]

Further on, she writes, "My soul has no home. I am neither African nor English nor am I of the sea."[32] Despite these declarations, Fuller's literary and journalistic output indicates that she has succeeded in locating an identity for herself in a psychic and literary space where it is tempting to assume there may be none.

The volatility of Fuller's literary, theoretical, and critical space affords her the license to bring an idiosyncratic approach to her subject matter, but it also imputes a charge to the resulting work precisely because it lies in this space of

interrogation and dispute. Fuller is not unaware of this cloud of contestation surrounding her identity, her geography, her subject matter, and her methods, and often addresses this predicament in her talks and her writings. Perhaps the most interesting of such commentaries is in a 2012 dialogue between Fuller and Zimbabwean writer Petina Gappah. When Fuller appeared at the Book Café in Harare for an extended discussion about her work, a member of the audience challenged her about her position as a white person speaking for Zimbabweans. Gappah as host stepped in to say all writers feel the obligation to "speak out" and that the job of a storyteller is to tell the stories of people who are voiceless. Nevertheless, Gappah said, no single person can be "the voice" of a country, people, or continent.[33]

In conversations like these at literary festivals and events, Fuller has also explored more deeply how geography and migration have given her a liminal identity. However, she insists that she continues to belong in Southern Africa because of its profound making of her "self." In the interviews with Gappah and French television's Busnel, Fuller is at pains to own her sense of being African. She told Gappah, "The soul of myself happened post-independence, but I was made by the Rhodesian regime."[34] Fuller also maintains that she is an African who is not just from white Rhodesia, where her formative childhood years were spent. Because of her knowledge of Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia, she considers herself to be more generally from Southern Africa. To Gappah, she has even spoken of the feeling of giving up these affiliations as akin to having her body parts severed.[35]

To those who challenge the legitimacy of her voice, Fuller says she is "doing what a writer is supposed to be doing, which is bearing witness and writing about it."[36] To do so for *Cocktail Hour*, she bore witness using a prism she has called "the chaos of our inheritance as white Africans."[37] In this endeavour, she is capitalizing on what Sidonie Smith[38] interprets as an autobiographical practice that becomes an occasion for the staging of identity and agency. As Fuller puts it, "It is time for all of us that can to reclaim our African voices."[39]

Baena refers to Fuller's memoir as "a constant exploration of vital issues of fitting in and belonging."[40] The writer later explains to one interviewer, "I was not one of the old, picnic-on-the-lawn empire builders but yet I was not a black African. I was an African born of a different culture and a different tongue, but an African nonetheless."[41] Her lifelong occupation of this indeterminate space, then, enhances her appeal to editors who seek a journalist with a distinctive literary voice coupled with a nuanced depth of knowledge, such that is borne only from prolonged exposure to a place.

## An African on African Terms

None of this makes her assignments any easier, however. In her journalism, Fuller repeatedly reiterates an awareness of her position of (white) privilege: "I drive back to Harare (setting myself conspicuously apart from the general population in my bubble of blue Mazda)."[42] And, like many white Africans, communication presents a continuing challenge to the unilingual writer who reports to *National Geographic*: "I asked him questions, with Jonathan's and Pelete's help since they speak several languages well, including Bemba (which is Sunday's mother tongue) and English (which is my only tongue)."[43] Yet Fuller persists with bearing witness and writing about it, and, arguably, succeeds: "There is, in all my writing, a real desire to take readers where very few of them would go on their own. One way to do that is to not allow them the luxury of a tour guide, . . . this is really what it feels like to be there. This is the shock of reality."[44]

Further demonstrating her clear reporting eye, she tells Weissman, "I am not sentimental about Africa as a place of memories—and I use the word 'Africa,' knowing that I speak of only a tiny fraction of the continent—so for me, I am not stirred up with old emotions when I go home."

She is, however, stirred into disturbance. She describes returning to her family after one visit to her parents in Zambia: "I was dislocated and depressed. It should not be physically possible to get from the banks of the Pepani River to Wyoming in less than two days, because mentally and emotionally it is impossible. The shock is too much, the contrast too raw. . . . I felt like a trespasser in my own home."[45]

So she returned to Southern Africa to write her second book. She tells one interviewer, "I can't speak for my perception of 'Africa' as a whole, since I only know such a tiny part of it, so I'll speak for the slither [sic] of it I *do* know."[46] The geography she refers to—Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, and South Africa—she had known first as a child and then as an adult writer reflecting on a childhood shaped by it. More recently, she has begun speaking of it as a journalist, which is an identity she readily owns. Reporting for the *Guardian*,[47] she writes, "I could not come into Zimbabwe as a journalist, so I applied for a tourist visa." Fuller embraces the community of journalists by subscribing to the familiar maxim of afflicting the comfortable—even if sometimes it's her own self she's talking to: "'That's an addiction for sure,' says Fuller. 'When you're not comfortable, you are unbelievably present. I hear that mountain climbers feel that. I tried mountain climbing once, and it was uncomfortable and scary and I was way out of my comfort zone. And yet you couldn't think about, 'Well god, I'm bored'."[48]

Assuming, as Simoes da Silva[49] does, that Fuller's reader—particularly

the reader of her journalism—is one "fed on an Africa created out of the semiotics of Eurocentric discourses," her representations of her reporting self can hardly be surprising. In addition to reporting that she has overcome malaria,[50] Fuller also, with encounters such as the following, demonstrates that she holds her own as an African on African terms:

> Mr Donald and I begin to talk farming: we exchange advice on how best to rid the soil of star grass, (what is needed is fertiliser, irrigation, a tractor and a plough whereas Mr Donald works with a team of oxen and has access to neither fertiliser nor irrigation). We discuss the most effective method of removing ticks from a cow and the difficulty of obtaining maize seed in Zimbabwe today. We discuss tobacco prices.[51]

Photographs accompanying her articles tend to depict her as the sole white-skinned person in a densely populated environment, wearing white cotton and khaki. Self-portraits with a similar aesthetic contribute to a picture of a writer with a demeanour convincingly like that of a swashbuckling African adventurer of Eurocentric discourses, displaying much of her mother's stoic bravado. She appears, in other words, to be Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa, even though her home address is in Wyoming.

## Reading (And Writing) Africa

While some critics deplore the popularity of accounts that white Africans have produced, the fact is that there is both an interest and a market. These reports pay attention to the lives and experiences of dislocation and identity readjustment, and there is no doubt that Fuller sits squarely in this niche as both a book writer and a journalist. But perhaps the most useful insights into what lies behind Fuller's productive writing life, the desire of readers for these kinds of stories and editors' interests in asking a writer of literature to undertake journalism, come from Antje Rauwerda and Deborah Seddon.

Rauwerda comments on Fuller's location and writing position with a view she comes to via a reading of *Scribbling*. She says Fuller is trying to envision "how one can manage the separation of African whiteness from its history while maintaining its Africanness."[52] This might be a particular preoccupation of whites born in Africa, but it is also a universal question of the twenty-first century about identity and geography, about nationalism, race, and human dignity. How fixed and how fluid these categories are, and how much an individual living in the present day should carry the burdens of the past, are underlying issues that permeate Fuller's writings and find purchase in a geographically diverse readership. As to the debate on legitimacy, Seddon reminds us that writing ability is broader than geographic origins and experi-

ence: "The crucial question . . . is not 'where are you from *originally*' but how well can you read? In other words, how well can a writer use both critical and emotional intelligence to interpret the situations, people, and conversations which are the raw material for their explanations?"[53]

This is a seminal question for current writing emanating from Africa, which represents and depicts the continent and its people to the world. It's a question that addresses not just the writing self, with its history and attachments, but the intelligence that lies behind the writing and how well it has managed to interpret complex situations. How well, then, does Fuller read Africa? Perhaps the best answer lies in her deliberate and conscious location of herself in that liminal space that is at once risky and affords a particular point of view. How she attempts to resolve this white African dilemma is crystallized in this characteristically practical, clear-eyed paragraph written for *National Geographic*:

> Because I am writing about Africa, but sitting at my desk with a view of snow-clad mountains in Wyoming, I have put my country around me. A map of the Republic of Zambia blocks my immediate impression of the Northern Hemisphere, and then, above that, there's a photograph of the "jelous is poison grocery," a picture of the tipsy traditional doctor, with his smiley-face badge, and an informal portrait of me with the former poachers and scouts taken the day after we had reached the Chifungwe camp. I have dogs at my feet and a pot of African tea stewing on my desk.[54]

For readers of *Dogs* and *Cocktail Hour* who are, like Fuller, prepared to disregard the snow-clad mountains, this paragraph rings with recognizable echoes of the writer's portraits of her mother, "Nicola Fuller of Central Africa," a woman who always has dogs tumbling around her feet, is on record as having shot a cobra in the pantry, and who drove around Rhodesia with an Uzi on her lap. But she is also a woman who has for the remaining years of her life settled in a country owned and governed by black Africans and with their permission to continue to be in Africa. This owning of the shameful past and the awkward present might not be a comfortable location for a writer to occupy, but it is the space Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa has forged for herself and her readers.

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*Gillian Rennie teaches writing and editing in the School of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University. Before that, she worked for a long time for a variety of print media. She edited* Cue *newspaper for several years and was a 2010 USC Annenberg/Getty Arts Journalism Fellow.*

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3. *Cocktail Hour*, 3.

4. "Conversations from the Sun Valley Writers' Conference: Alexandra Fuller," interview by Marcia Franklin, *Dialogue*, Idaho Public Television, October 5, 2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06Kg1R5tk6M.

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11. "Fuller's '*Cocktail Hour*': This Memoir's for Mom," August 16, 2011, http://www.npr.org/2011/08/16/139644620/fullers-cocktail-hour-this-memoirs-for-mom.

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13. For the Jane Goodall article, see Alexandra Fuller, "Living in the Moment," *Vogue*, August 2005, 204. For the Wangari Maathai article, see Alexandra Fuller, "The Giving Tree," *Vogue*, March 2005, 440.

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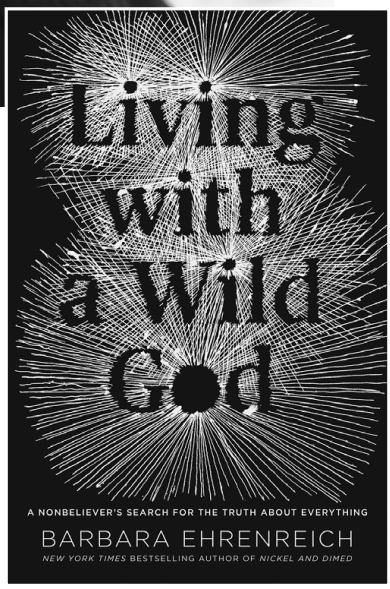
Barbara Ehrenreich. Photo: Peter Abzug.



# *Scholar-Practitioner Q & A . . .*

## An Interview with Barbara Ehrenreich

William Dow
American University of Paris

Leonora Flis
University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia

Barbara Ehrenreich, born 1941 in Butte, Montana, is an activist, feminist, and immersion journalist. She is one of America's leading investigative reporters, and perhaps best known for *Nickel and Dimed*, her 2001 book-length investigation into the life of the working poor—the literary fruit of working for three months at various minimum-wage jobs and trying to live off their meager incomes. Her famous *Harper's* magazine essay, "Welcome to Cancerland," spurred by her being diagnosed with breast cancer, excoriated what she called the "cult" of breast cancer, and won a 2002 U.S. National Magazine Award. Her parents were pro-union and anti-Republican, and as she grew up she herself became a social democrat. She has been both a teacher and a scholar, with her academic training in chemistry, physics, and biology (her PhD in the latter science achieved at Rockefeller University). She has worked for *Mother Jones* and *Ms.*, written columns for *Time* in the 1990s and the *New York Times* in the 2000s, and has supported causes from shutting down the Vietnam War to women's reproductive health rights.

The unstoppable Ehrenreich, at age seventy-three, shows no sign of easing up. The author or coauthor of twenty-one books, her most recent, an atheist's meditation on the nature of religious belief, is called *Living with a Wild God*.[1] As always, she casts a satirical eye on politics and culture at large, and her writing remains pugilistic, sharp, and funny. She writes with pride and affection about her working-class background, her fight to increase the minimum wage, and her creation of the Economic Hardship Reporting Project. This interview was conducted by telephone on February 20, 2015.

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**Leonora Flis:** Regarding the official history, or canon, of American journalism (and broader if we can open up the scope a bit), our special issue is truly international in the selection of writers discussed. Do you feel that women reporters still occupy a marginal position?

**Barbara Ehrenreich:** I don't know how to answer that. There are certainly a lot of women reporters—I don't know the numbers. But when it comes to the level of punditry, as you well know, it's all white guys, older white guys. Many mornings I listen to NPR and there are women reporting from Ukraine and Liberia and everywhere. It's great, but I wonder if they'll ever get to be talking heads. The overall thing that bothers me about journalism now is not about sexism or elitism, but it's a whole profession that's being destroyed or has been destroyed. There's no way to make a living. I mean, I made my living most of my life as a freelance writer. The kind of people who can do the writing are those who can afford it—unless there are some wildly overpaid examples left from the earlier days. But the kind of information we get on class, poverty, and race, in relation to the reporting, is confined to the relatively affluent. One big thing that I work on is a project I actually started, called the Economic Hardship Reporting Project, where we raise money so that people who are low income, which is a lot of journalists or people who have never been writers, can do the reporting and the essays on these sorts of issues.

**Flis:** What do you think of women reporters who expose themselves to extreme and dangerous conditions, such as war? One of the essays in our special issue talks about female reporters from the Spanish Civil War, for example. It discusses the work of Martha Gellhorn, Gerda Taro, and Andrée Viollis. I wonder if you feel that women perceive crisis situations differently from men. Svetlana Alexiyevich and many others claim that women have a different psychological and physiological makeup.

**Ehrenreich:** I have no reason to think there are differences, but I don't know. We're way past the notion that women are more delicate and can't be exposed. We're way past that. We keep forgetting that women bleed every month. I don't think there is some special sensitivity based on gender.

**Flis:** I'm from Slovenia and I often wonder how the socialism I grew up in affected women's rights. Also, communism, in essence, was probably more a state of mind than a method of government, at least in the former Yugoslavia. As a consequence of these ideologies, there was probably a lack of personal identity and individuality among people, or rather a fear of expressing such attitudes. What do you see as a major difference in terms of the development/formation of women's rights in the capitalist West, if compared to Eastern Europe, for example?

**BE:** You are raising basic issues about socialism that concern the submergence of the individual into the collective, which is historical and repellent. While I approve of self-sacrifice and being able to contribute to collective ventures, there is always a dialectic, a tension, with one's ability to stand back and be critical and reject what's going on.

**Flis:** I have a lot of admiration for your Economic Hardship Reporting Project, which gives unemployed or underemployed journalists a chance. Are there more women in these categories, and if so, why do you think this is the case?

**Ehrenreich:** I couldn't tell you. My coeditor and I on this project are both women. We maybe have attracted a disproportionate number of women writers and photojournalists about things that we're interested in and know. We've had a certain amount about abortion rights—that's just something we think about. On the other hand, some of our strongest pieces have been from men, and particularly black men. So, I will say again that the overwhelming problem for journalists right now is not sexism but the disappearance of our way of life.

**William Dow:** Here's a large question regarding narrative genres. Do you have a preference for what you'd like your writing to be called: narrative journalism, reportage, literary journalism, creative nonfiction, investigative journalism? A combination of these forms? None of the above?

**Ehrenreich:** I have no idea.

**Dow:** It's been called many different things, so I've just been wondering if you have a specific preference.

**Ehrenreich:** Well, it's not something I've really thought about.

**Flis and Dow:** Regardless of taxonomy, do you think that a more subjective kind of journalism is needed to comment on today's complex realities? Have perhaps the more traditional styles of reporting turned out to be inadequate and not suited to our present times? You generally write a subjective kind of journalism.

**Ehrenreich:** Well, not always. Sometimes I write quite impersonal sorts of essays. It seems to be what works best for whatever I'm saying, when I want to use the word "I" or not at all. It depends on what I'm doing.

**Dow:** But you do use the first person in most of your later books. Do you consider this to be the most empowering narrative voice?

**Ehrenreich:** Some of my work has been personal and first person. A lot has not been. The big change came with *Nickel and Dimed*,[2] which really had to be in the first person. And I had never done that before, written at length in the first-person singular. So when I realized that I had to do that and that I could do it, it was kind of fun and liberating. But I will tell you that there

is a pressure in the publishing world toward narrative that I had resisted for a time and then had eventually given into.

**Dow:** Are you speaking specifically about long-form narrative in the genres of reportage, literary journalism, investigative journalism, and creative nonfiction?

**Ehrenreich:** I feel like a dummy because I actually don't think in those terms. There was a book that I published in the last decade called *Dancing in the Streets*[3] that's not in the first person. At the very end I bring in a flash of personal experience, but that's just because I wanted to do that.

**Dow:** Do the form and content sometimes come together once you have your subject?

**Ehrenreich:** Sometimes it comes together, sometimes not so much. I'm struggling with the new book I'm working on. The first chapter will be somewhat narrative, but that will be the end of that.

**Flis:** What is your main professional and personal ethical guideline when you are interviewing people, especially people in dire conditions, doing field research, and later constructing your texts?

**Ehrenreich:** I actually don't like doing that—a terrible thing to say, maybe. *Nickel and Dimed* is not interviews; there are reported conversations. The truth is, I really feel uncomfortable interviewing somebody. It seems a little predatory: "Tell me about your suffering and your misery and everything so that I can turn this into a commodity."

**Dow:** I was under the assumption that you did quite a bit of this in your research.

**Ehrenreich:** This is actually something about which I've talked to my son, Ben Ehrenreich, who is truly a literary journalist, by the way. It was a great relief for him to discover similar ideas about interviewing. A few years ago he'd been through a project that involved interviewing the mother of a son who died in Britain. There are people who really take great pride in their empathy and in their ability to draw a story out of someone. He doesn't. I don't.

**Dow:** This is something I've been curious about: who do you imagine your readership to be?

**Ehrenreich:** I can't.

**Dow:** In 2006, the period of *Bait and Switch*,[4] you said something about preferring your readership to be from the professional-managerial class?

**Ehrenreich:** Did I say that?

**Dow:** Yes, I thought I read that in an interview. You don't recall that?

**Ehrenreich:** No, I don't recall saying that. But pretty clearly, that's the kind of people I was talking to and mixing with, and even impersonating.

**Dow:** But don't you have an image of a reader out there, someone you can imagine connecting to?

**Ehrenreich:** When I wrote essays for *Time* magazine in the '90s I sometimes did have someone in mind, an uncle who was conservative but would listen to arguments. So, sometimes I think of Uncle Jack. But then at some point I realized I could not confine myself. *Time* is a little bit stylized, or it was in the days that it was a magazine. But *Nickel and Dimed,* it's been called "plain spoken," which sounds to me a little bit like "slow witted." But I used words and made references there that are somewhat obscure. You'd have to go to a dictionary. And I thought, I don't care, I have to get away from "is this going to be at the right level?" So I have some words in there, like "glossolalia."

**Dow:** Your latest book, *Living with a Wild God*, has been called a memoir in many of the reviews. Is that what you would call it, or does your phrase "metaphysical thriller" work better?

**Ehrenreich:** I guess I was doing my best to promote the book. That's a good case, though. I started thinking of a book about the history of religion. That sounds a little bit ambitious, but I had certain themes. I was documenting or fascinated by the rise of monotheism—and very critical of it. The conventional wisdom is that this was such a huge advance in morality and understanding the world. I said, no, it was really the death of thousands of views.

**Dow:** So this is the origin of the project, to write a religious history?

**Ehrenreich:** Yes. I wrote a proposal for my agent and she said, "This is just too intellectual and academic—could you work something like a narrative into it?" And I remember just steaming for days—how could I do that? Well, it turned out I had a way to do it and I had a personal journal that I could build on. But there was a pressure to go for a narrative and so there are a lot of aperçus about the history of religion. But there's no consistent argument, and I feel a little bad about that.

**Dow:** Incidentally, the copy of your book that I purchased at an English-language bookstore in Paris was in the Religious Studies section. Were you expecting this kind of categorization?

**Ehrenreich:** Yes, that's fine. I don't care.

**Dow:** *Living with a Wild God* is probably your most intimate published writing to date. It certainly has a different tone from anything else that you've published. How difficult was it to reveal so much about your personal life?

**Ehrenreich:** I do feel a certain kind of embarrassment. But once I got on a track of making a narrative out of it I had to talk about, for example, my family. I didn't make any revelations that would be deeply mortifying—but some of it sort of is.

**Dow:** For me, some of the most poignant revelations in the book are when you have a conversation with or address—either in the second or third person—your sixteen-year-old self.

**Ehrenreich:** Yes. That kind of conversation is going on all through the book.

**Dow:** So many of your successful works, including *Living with a Wild God*—in which you engage in a fundamental quarrel with yourself—are cast, to return to this a bit, in the first person. How do you want to take the reader with you on this first-person journey?

**Ehrenreich:** I was told that it should be a narrative, so that implies some kind of time sequence, etc. I had no particular trick in bringing the reader along. The trick was always in going from the philosophical or metaphysical to the personal or finding ways to keep the metaphysical and personal moving along.

**Dow:** In *Living with a Wild God*, you provide the reader with perhaps the fullest description ever of the books you've read and the influences writers have had on you. These range from Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* to Agatha Christie mysteries, from Kerouac and Zola to Conrad, Proust, and Camus. In general, what literary quality do you want to give to your work?

**Ehrenreich:** What kind of literary quality? Well, this is just how it is. Why am I writer? Because I am a reader. I was as a child and still am a pretty compulsive reader. And in my youth I don't think we had young adult books. I was just from an early age thrown into the classics. I didn't know they were classics; they were just entertaining books, like Bullfinch's *The Age of Fable* (1855). I was just going for what was intriguing to me.

**Dow:** At one point in *Living with a Wild God*, you say that as an adolescent, "literature was [your] default activity."[5]

**Ehrenreich:** I was always sneaking off to a book. I was really excited about books.

**Dow:** It seems to me that in much of your work you masterfully engage in literary activity, using literary techniques in the creation of character, e.g., the rapid-fire character sketches of the McLean Bible Church career ministry in *Bait and Switch*[6]; the reconstructions of dialogue, such as the ironic exchanges between the narrator and Marge and Holly in *Nickel and Dimed*[7]; and in the use of figurative language, such as the many metaphorical constructions and explanations you provide in *Living with a Wild God*, for instance, "Metaphorically, you could describe the situation this way: I am adrift at sea for years clinging to a piece of flotsam or wreckage, alone and prepared to die."[8] Are literary techniques important to your writerly arsenal?

**Ehrenreich:** I'm not consciously thinking let's throw in a metaphorical

construction here, or something like that. My granddaughter recently had in the seventh grade an assignment to read something and identify metaphors. There was a list of literary devices. And I got so annoyed. I said, "Anna, that's not how I write. I don't sit down with these tools and say I'll do this one now or try that one." I don't think that way. I go with my subjective senses. I guess I honor that in some way. What you would call a metaphorical construction is not a writing device; it's how I'm seeing something.

**Dow:** In several of your works, there are two identities, or two Barbaras, an observer and a participant, an interpreter and a character. Some of the most powerful passages in *Living with a Wild God* involve verbal exchanges between a present-day Barbara and her adolescent self. Toward the end of the book, for example, in a mixture of justification and confession, you directly address your sixteen-year-old self. How difficult is it to keep authorial control when one is both the subject and object of a narrative?

**Ehrenreich:** Well, I don't know if we ever get away from that entirely. I don't think it's easy to avoid that. Now it's quite marked in *Living with a Wild God,* because the younger self is a character and yet she's a character with agency and subjectivity who can reach out from the past and address me, Barbara. I don't know how else to put it.

**Dow:** Is *Living with a Wild God* another form of what you've called "immersion journalism," though with substantive differences. Here you're immersing yourself in your past life and seeking answers to your "metaphysical questing."[9] And so, in more general terms, do you think of yourself as an immersion journalist who has much in common with an American debunking tradition (the critical part of your "search of a non-believer" in *Living with a Wild God*) and muckraking legacy (London, Sinclair, Steffens, Tarbell, Naomi Klein, etc.)?

**Ehrenreich:** When I started doing *Nickel and Dimed* I had never heard the phrase "immersion journalism." At one point I was doing some part-time teaching at a journalism school and I was introduced to that term. I certainly had read things like *Down and Out in Paris and London.* But it had never been a genre so I just thought here I am doing these jobs and what do I need to tell people about what goes on? At first it was kind of a mystery to me. What would I be saying? I earned so much today and I spent so much? That would be boring. And then I just began to freely talk about everything that went on. And, as you expected, my personal reactions were part of this.

**Dow:** Yes, of course. To expand a bit on the muckraking point: you've described your "real job" in *Living with a Wild God* as "a sentry patrolling the perimeters of the human community, always on the lookout for fresh outbreaks of violence and danger, ready to sound the alarm."[10] Is there any

alarm-sounding in this book?

**Ehrenreich:** I guess so, yes. We don't really collectively know what is going on in this world, universe, whatever. We tended in the way of Western science to think of the material world as the edge, as if the world were a mechanism that works itself out. And I'm saying, no, I think it's a little more complex—either scary or exhilarating, depending on how you think about it—to deal with an on-edge world.

**Dow:** And that maybe speaks to the open-endedness of the book. You make this point in *Fear of Falling*,[11] that fully knowing ourselves has a great deal to do with knowing our social class. How does your self-identification as a middle-class writer help you know yourself and guide your material? To what degree has your social class informed the answer to your recurrent question in *Living with a Wild God,* "What is going on here?"[12]

**Ehrenreich:** I'm sure that question comes up for many people who have always been in the same social class or in more stable situations, so I don't know. But "What is going one here?" goes beyond the social. When I talk about the situation, I'm just talking about life existence, the panoply of physical and other sorts of things I interact with every minute.

**Dow:** Right. Is there, though, an underlying sort of consciousness of yourself as kind of a middle-class writer?

**Ehrenreich:** What do you mean by middle class?

**Dow:** Well, that's the term that you used as a self-identification.

**Ehrenreich:** Yes, it's so imprecise it doesn't mean much. I came from the blue-collar working class. I kind of dipped back into it in certain ways in my thirties through my choice of a partner and the life we lived. I am economically privileged compared to most people. But I am driven by injustice and my passions are stirred by class injustice—as well as gender and racial. But I sometimes get myself in trouble by being critical of certain rich people.

**Dow:** The *New York Times* book review of *Living with a Wild God* called the book's narrator "unreliable."[13] Do we have an unreliable narrator or something much more complex in the narrative voice?

**Ehrenreich:** An unreliable narrator? I don't know what to make of that unless this reviewer had some kind of information into my history and biography that I don't have. I was really agonizing about what is the truth of that situation. I was not trying to be coy.

**Dow:** *Living with a Wild God* is centered on a mystical experience that results in an extended reflection on religion and belief. It seems to me that one of your key realizations is the profound importance your family legacy of atheism has had in shaping your identity—a more important force, you write, than "nationality or even class."[14] To what degree has this "encounter"

both confirmed and questioned your beliefs as an atheist—specifically your atheism derived from "a proud tradition of working-class rejection of authority?"[15]

**Ehrenreich:** Yes, those things are linked—at least from the peculiar history of my family. It's a strain of the culture of Butte, Montana, or it was—or probably of non-Catholic working-class culture in the late nineteenth century. I know a little bit about that: it was called "free thought." There were things that I heard in my family, like "never trust doctors, lawyers, priests, or bosses." Something may have been picked up from the free-thought literature. I don't have any evidence of that—but there are certain echoes. We were poor people but everybody I knew of could read, and they were curious. The rap on my family was that everybody was a genius and they really were smart people who thought about a lot of things. I tried to explain that in relation to mining. The question of the book that I like most was to think about this, and that link between my father and me and his kind of forged scientific interests.

**Dow:** You were educated as a scientist, and an "aggressive rationality" can be seen in much of your work. Do scientific rigor and mysticism coexist in *Living with a Wild God*, or at least end up tolerating each other?

**Ehrenreich:** I'm trying to take the subject of mysticism and look at it with a certain kind of rigor, not in the trivial sense of the mystical experience, but to say suppose we took seriously this kind of thing as data, which was what led me to such strange things as reading the Christian mystics.

**Dow:** Does your principal rejection of theism actually only concern monotheism and what you've termed "a parental god"?

**Ehrenreich:** The language here gets difficult, the semantics. There is such a thing as pantheism and there is panentheism—there are a whole bunch of these, which are all kind of hair-splitting. But they are not monotheism; they come closer to a world that is alive.

**Dow:** What does the evocative "wild god" of your title refer to? Is this an animistic god? A polytheistic god? Is this, finally, your god—or as much of a god as you can possibly believe in?

**Ehrenreich:** It's probably animistic. I was uneasy about having the word "god" in the title because it leads to: "Do you believe in God or not?" And: "You call it God?" But I decided I liked the way it sounded and I liked taking on directly that notion of a good, wise God. A big influence, and I do credit it, is science fiction. Not just literature, but science fiction. But with science fiction in the '50s they could raise questions: suppose there is a deity who was not good, suppose there is a deity who has his own agenda, etc. Science fiction was something that was permissible to me and that was neither part of my scientific atheist background nor my theistic background.

**Dow:** In *Living with a Wild God*, you argue, "My political instincts were, and remain, resolutely populist."[16] Regarding this point, political analyst Ruy Teixeira described you this way in 2003: "She's fundamentally a class-oriented populist, who doesn't really focus on what's feasible or effective in politics."[17] Is this an accurate description of you today? In other words, do your aspirations for social change continue to lie more in grassroots efforts and working-class militancy rather than in government reforms and policies?

**Ehrenreich:** Yes. I do not disdain policy reform. It's just that I come from a generation who believed that our notion of change would not come from above.

**Dow:** *Living with a Wild God* stresses the need for what you call "a responsible narrator,"[18] a forthright, morally sound, socially and politically conscious narrator who usually is, by the way, a ferocious feminist, unstoppable idealist, and committed socialist. Most of your responsible narrators resist and reject mainstream American verities. In the foreword to *Living with a Wild God*, you state, "I will never write an autobiography, nor am I sure, after all these years, that there is even one coherent 'self' or 'voice' to serve as narrator,"[19] and then you proceed to write what certainly can be considered an autobiography, presenting a highly recognizable, highly responsible Barbara Ehrenreich voice.

**Ehrenreich:** That's kind of embarrassing. I was thinking that there is nothing in *Living with a Wild God* about my experiences as an activist and agitator. It's just not there. There's little about the central thing, which is my family, my actual family, my children. So it's a highly selective tracking of this one particular thread. I could have, but I don't think it would have been that fascinating to write about the heady days in American socialism that I lived through—American socialism being, of course, miniscule. There were so many political debates, and comings-out, and comings-together, and so on.

**Dow:** This leads to a larger question. You've said that journalists are historically "part of the working class" as opposed to having any kind of "elite or privileged status."[20]

**Ehrenreich:** They were, yes.

**Dow:** What do you attribute this status to, and, given that the working class in the US has taken a severe beating in the last fifty years, what is your general prognosis on newspaper and magazine journalism in the US?

**Ehrenreich:** Pretty bad. Historically, in the '40s and '50s, beat reporters at a newspaper would be disproportionately male. That was not a prestigious occupation; it was, you know the phrase, used over and over again, shoe leather. Go out there and get the story. And then I was around for the fat days, too, which were in the '80s [and '90s]. And in some places there was money. Editors would take you out for lunch at fancy places. I was overpaid, I think, by *Time*.[21] All that's gone.

**Dow:** Have the poor and working class been eliminated from media consciousness? If journalists are part of the working class, should they have more of an obligation to write about this class and the working poor?

**Ehrenreich:** The people who would be best at that cannot take on the obligation if they can't feed themselves by doing so. And journalists who are privileged enough—I would say at this point in my life, I am—that's a responsibility. But I can't say that, for example, to a journalist we had with the Economic Hardship Reporting Project who was making his living in part by selling his plasma. He needs to write about these things, but I want him to eat.

**Dow:** What kind of counterculture exists in the US today? And are you hopeful about the future of this culture? How do you see your continuing role in it?

**Ehrenreich:** A counterculture, oh, God. The American counterculture that came out of the '70s and so forth has really been undercut by one basic thing—high finance/corporate America. It's hard to get a roof over your head without making all kinds of compromises. I don't see any visibly clear defendant of the counterculture I used to know. It's interesting—my son Ben has a huge circle of friends in Los Angeles, many of whom are writers or other kinds of fairly marginal people economically. And they are diverse: a lot of them are Latinos, a lot are from working-class backgrounds. It's different from the old counterculture—there's a huge interest in art and experimental things—and it's refreshing for me to be around those folks.

**Dow:** So, are you relatively optimistic?

**Ehrenreich:** No, I'm never optimistic. I don't know if you've read my book, *Bright-Sided?*[22]

**Dow:** Yes, I have.

**Ehrenreich:** My stance is not optimism. My stance is that the realities are really grim, yet we have to work hard. My stance is not that we will overcome and have a wonderful, fair, loving, kind world. It might not be possible, but I'll die trying.

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## Notes

1. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Living with a Wild God: A Nonbeliever's Search for the Truth About Everything* (New York: Twelve Publishing, 2014).

2. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting by in America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001).

3. *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

4. *Bait and Switch: The (Futile) Pursuit of the American Dream (*New York: Metropolitan Books, *2005).*

5. *Wild God*, 84.

6. *Bait and Switch*, 132.

7. *Nickel and Dimed*, 96–98.

8. *Wild God*, 207.

9. Ibid., 183.

10. Ibid., 195.

11. *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

12. *Wild God*, 235.

13. Parul Sehgal, "Vision Quest," review of *Living with a Wild God*," by Barbara Ehrenreich, *New York Times*, April 25, 2014, Sunday Book Review, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/27/books/review/living-with-a-wild-god-by-barbara-ehrenreich.html?_r=0.

14. *Wild God*, 203.

15. Ibid., 3.

16. Ibid., 186.

17. Ruy Teixeira, quoted in Scott Sherman, "Class Warrior," *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 2003, 41.

18. *Wild God*, 45.

19. Ibid., x.

20. Barbara Ehrenreich, "A License to Fight," convocation speech, Graduate School of Journalism, University of California at Berkeley, June 1, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiiQPklLTWk.

21. Ibid. In her Berkeley convocation speech Ehrenreich told students and faculty that her best-ever writing gig was ten dollars a word for writing her *Time* magazine column in the '90s.

22. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009).

# *Book reviews . . .*

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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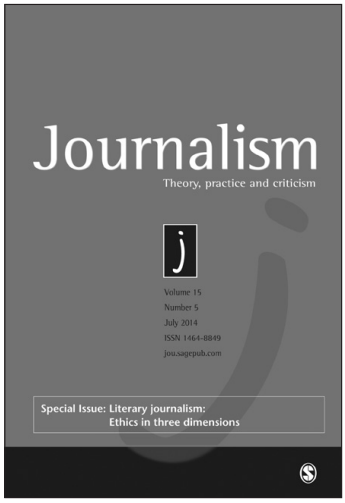
Susan Greenberg (left) and Julie Wheelwright, editors of "Literary Journalism in Three Dimensions."

# Scoping Out the Ethics of Literary Journalism

"Literary Journalism: Ethics in Three Dimensions"
edited by Susan Greenberg and Julie Wheelwright. Special issue, *Journalism: Theory, Practice, Criticism*, vol. 15, no. 5 (July 2014)

Reviewed by Thomas B. Connery, University of St. Thomas, United States




Any collection of articles or book chapters by various authors on a general theme more often than not turns out to be a mishmash of ideas and theoretical approaches on wide-ranging specific topics. Regardless of what the editors say in attempting to bring coherence to the mix, the articles or chapters seldom strongly hang together; such collections tend to promise more than they deliver. Such is the case with the articles in this special issue of the scholarly journal *Journalism,* which considers the ethics of literary journalism.

This doesn't mean that these ten articles aren't worthwhile or valuable or stimulating. They are. But rather than fully developed considerations of the ethics of literary journalism, they struck this reviewer as solid explorations of various aspects of literary journalism, with some ethical issues raised but superficially considered.

As with most examinations of literary journalism, the articles raise questions about the meaning and nature of literary journalism, which is an ongoing discourse, as it should be, and probably will see no end, which is fine. In their introduction, Susan Greenberg, University of Roehampton, London, a familiar name and face in IALJS, and Julie Wheelwright, City University London, say that literary journalism can be "summed up here as narrative writing that makes a truth claim about people, places and events." Indeed it does. I very much believe that literary journalism is and should be a big umbrella, so to speak, with room under it for many approaches, styles, and types, which implies a rather broad definition. This definition, however, *might* be so all-encompassing that the term "literary journalism" becomes meaningless.

And the collection naturally reflects that definition, with analyses of spy histories and narratives, journalistic accounts of historical events (specifically the 1981 Spanish coup), James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, the profiles of a highly regarded British theater critic, a book-length work on prison gangs in South Africa, confessional journalism and cancer columns, Middle East reporting/writing by a Dutch journalist and a British journalist, the New Journalism's influence on journalistic interpretation in the US, and two very different writers' use of first person, one a columnist who tended to focus on the personal and the other a journalist who conducted extensive

interviews with Nazis who ran death camps and with child murderers.

In their introduction, the editors are wise to ground their discussion in Norman Sims's "The Problem and Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," from the first issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* (Spring 2009, 7–16). They allude to the many conferences, books, and articles that have followed Sims's commentary and that first issue and they declare that this special *Journalism* issue is intended to "contribute to the debate and help move it forward, doing so through an ethics lens. The "three dimensions" reflected in the articles are the epistemological ("what tests of verification, falsification and experience do we set?"), the consequential (the impact on the public), and the challenge of balancing aesthetics and ethics, beauty and truth. According to the editors, the third dimension is especially relevant to literary journalism.

The disparate nature of the articles can be seen by looking at the volume's first article and one by John Tulloch that comes near the end. The "sources" in Greenberg's opening article, "The Ethics of Narrative: A Return to the Sources," is Aristotle's *Poetics* and *Rhetoric* rather than the Greek philosopher's *Ethics* (*Niomachean Ethics*). Aristotle's contentions are built upon with a heavy dose of Kenneth Burke (*The Rhetoric of Motives*), a taste of the literary critic Wayne Booth (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*), and a large measure of Mikhail Bakhtin, thereby connecting her discussion to John C. Hartsock's application of Bakhtin in *A History of American Literary Journalism*. In other words, the opening article introduces a range of communication and literary theory and criticism.

In his article, the late John Tulloch provides a perceptive and insightful use of first-person point of view in journalism and literary journalism (frequently in the ten articles journalism and literary journalism are used interchangeably). Although he also refers to Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* Tulloch doesn't ground his analysis in theory but instead uses Tom Wolfe's dismissal of first-person narration to explain how effective use of first person can contribute to "an authentic narrative voice." He illustrates this by focusing on two very different but equally effective examples of first-person narration in the newspaper columns and long-form nonfiction of Ian Jack and the writing and investigative reporting of Gitta Sereny, whose books include *Into that Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (about the commandant of the Treblinka concentration camp), and *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth*, and *Cries Unheard: The Story of Mary Bell* (as a child, Mary Bell killed two children). Tulloch concludes that the "main ethical risk lies in misleading the reader about the status of this first person" and the "inherent danger that self-revelation will collapse the distinction between the creation and creator."

Both the Greenberg and Tulloch articles are effective, and practitioners and scholars will find Tulloch's article of interest and his ideas worth considering and discussing, but there is little to no connection between the two articles other than they both refer to literary journalism and to ethics. Tulloch's brief conclusion regarding ethical challenges in using first person is typical of the ethical discussion in most of the articles. That is, it points to the ethical dilemma or conflict that could arise but doesn't indicate exactly why it is an ethical conflict or how it might be resolved. Ethical conflict implies two equally desirable choices and the application of "ethics"

involves resolving that dilemma. Exploration of applied ethics in literary journalism clearly is beyond the scope of this collection of articles but it's important to acknowledge that while this group of articles is a good starting point for further exploration of the ethics of literary journalism, it nevertheless just scratches the surface.

Having posited this caveat, students and scholars of literary journalism nonetheless should read these articles because most of them either advance our understanding of literary journalism or call it into question.

Here are the other eight articles in this special issue:

• Rosalind Coward's "How to Die Well: Aesthetic and Ethical Issues in Confessional Diaries" contends that journalists' accounts of illness and dying are "highly constructed narratives" that "conform to familiar narrative tropes."

• Kathy Roberts Forde's "*The Fire Next Time* in the Civil Sphere: Literary Journalism and Justice in America 1963" studies literary journalism's role in "struggles for justice and freedom in democratic societies."

• Frank Harbers and Marcel Broesma's "Between Engagement and Ironic Ambiguity: Mediating Subjectivity in Narrative Journalism" investigates the "mediating subjectivity of the reporter" by looking at the Middle East coverage of British reporter Robert Fisk and Dutch novelist/reporter Arnon Grunberg.

• Richard Keeble's "Intimate Portraits: The Profiles of Kenneth Tynan" discusses how a literary journalist can be positive about subjects "without resorting to sycophancy," and introduces the concept of the interviewer as performer.

• Philip Mitchell's "The Ethics of Speech and Thought Representation in Literary Journalism" uses discourse analysis in analyzing the writing of Spanish journalist Javier Cercas.

• John J. Pauly's "The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation" relies on archival research in arguing that the significance of the New Journalism "emerges only out of the close study of the institutional relationships that gave it life."

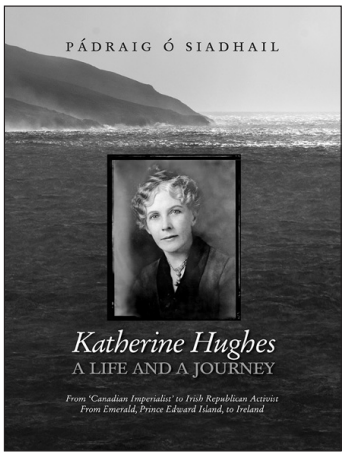
• Gillian Rennie's "Making a Prison Narrative Personal: Jonny Steinberg, the Gangster and the Reader" uses Steinberg's *The Number* to explore that author's "construction of himself as a reliable narrator" and its impact on the reader.

• Julie Wheelwright's "Beyond the Spooks: The Problem of the Narrator in Literary History" explores the challenge of evaluating sources that are "inherently compromises" by focusing on her own television documentary on a Soviet agent.

# A Canadian Literary Pioneer's Improbable Trip from Acclaim to Outcast to a Pauper's Grave

*Katherine Hughes: A Life and a Journey*
by Pádraig Ó Siadhail. Newcastle, Canada: Penumbra, 2014). Hardcover, 377 pp., $29.95

Reviewed by Linda Kay, Concordia University, Canada




As he conducted research on a famous Irish writer, Pádraig Ó Siadhail chanced upon an unpublished play that his subject cowrote with a woman named Katherine Hughes.

Siadhail was surprised. Intrigued. He considered himself an expert on Pádraic Ó Conaire, yet he'd never heard of the play Ó Conaire wrote with Hughes, never heard of Hughes, and had no idea how the two linked up.

Curiosity aroused, Siadhail sought to learn more about "this mysterious woman." Now, more than twenty-five years after coming across her name, the associate professor of Irish studies at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Canada, has published an absorbing account documenting the life of an extraordinary woman born in the 1800s who worked, as Siadhail notes, alongside some of the most powerful men of her time.

Her accomplishments are astonishing: teacher on a Native reserve, pioneering journalist and perhaps the first woman to cover a provincial legislature, acclaimed biographer on an international scale, first provincial archivist in Alberta, and first female private secretary to a Canadian premier. But it is her transformation from loyal government servant to someone viewed as a traitor to her country that occupies Siadhail.

Literary journalism scholars might naturally gravitate to her work as a journalist and author and give it more attention than Siadhail does here. Yet her controversial stance as an activist for Irish independence during World War I and beyond, to which Siadhail devotes most of his attention, played a crucial part in the most devastating incident of Hughes's writing life, as her provocative political views cost her authorship of a book that certainly would have enhanced her reputation as a literary figure in North America.

Born on November 12, 1876, on Prince Edward Island, Katherine Angelina Hughes was one of nine children. Her uncle served as archbishop of Halifax for more than two decades, and Siadhail details the family's roots in Ireland, their environment on Prince Edward Island, and Hughes's upbringing in a close-knit Irish Catholic family where service on behalf of the church was highly valued.

As a teenager in the early 1890s, Hughes trained to become a teacher. She then moved east to work in a church-run school on a Native reserve bordering Quebec and Ontario. Canadian government policy at the time promoted assimilation, and Native children were often taken from their parents and placed in residential schools, many run by the Catholic church, where they were effectively stripped of their language and culture. Hughes, like the majority of Canadians, supported the policy, although her letters to church officials—and her journalism—show that she empathized with Native people and, in particular, sought the betterment of her students.

Hughes left the teaching profession around the turn of the century and turned to journalism, writing for the *Montreal Daily Star* and later for the *Edmonton Bulletin.* She also set about documenting the life of her uncle, who died in 1906. *Archbishop O'Brien: Man and Churchman* depicts Cornelius O'Brien in reverent terms, with references to figures in ancient history and contemporary literature, showing both the breadth of the author's knowledge and the beginnings of her literary flair. Hughes also evinces a deep feeling for Ireland in the book, which would surface mightily a decade later.

Hughes left fulltime journalism in 1908 to become Alberta's first provincial archivist. She brought a hands-on journalistic approach to her new job, undertaking a rugged two-month journey through the wilderness of northern Alberta by stagecoach, riverboat, and canoe, using immersion reporting to gain first-hand accounts of the landscape and the population. The only woman among the travelers, she displayed her literary style in accounts for the *Bulletin*, to which she periodically contributed. "When my canoe shot in over the rough water to the landing," she wrote, ". . . coppery small boys ran towards us on the beach, while lean depressed train dogs made sad haste to the canoe, mutely inquiring for fish" ("In the Promised Land of Alberta's North," *Edmonton Bulletin,* January 8, 1910).

While still a journalist, Hughes had been approached to write a book on Father Albert Lacombe, recounting the priest's departure from Quebec as a young man in the mid-1800s to establish Catholic settlements and schools in the untamed West. Freed from daily journalism in 1908, she began drawing upon historical documents and an array of personal interviews with Lacombe and others to capture the priest's inner thoughts, feelings, and actions. Hughes drew high praise for *Father Lacombe*: *The Black-Robe Voyageur.* The *New York Times Review of Books* deemed it one of the best biographies of 1911, stating, "[A] good biographer is 'rarer than hen's teeth,' but Miss Hughes is one. Out of her book stands a figure as compelling as any in history. She has painted him like an artist . . . She has literally written history like a novel" (December 31, 1911).

Father Lacombe had served as chaplain for the railway construction crews when the Canadian Pacific Railway expanded west in the 1880s, and Hughes asked retired railway titan Sir William Van Horne, a transplanted American and the driving force behind Canada's transcontinental railway, to write the preface for her book. Van Horne agreed. Hughes and Van Horne would attempt to collaborate again a few years later, but not with the same happy outcome.

By 1913, the peripatetic Hughes was again on the move, accepting an appoint-

ment as assistant to the agent general for Alberta—an "agent general" being the representative of a British colony stationed in London, England. The move would augur a startling change in Hughes, which Siadhail relays in depth.

In 1914 London, as Siadhail details, Hughes befriended figures in the Irish separatist movement, and she learned Gaelic. It is here, Siadhail believes, that Hughes would link up with famed Irish-language writer Pádraic Ó Conaire, who taught Irish-language classes for the Gaelic League in London. Siadhail writes that although no proof exists, it would be tempting to envision that a romantic liaison developed. Hughes had become enraptured by discovering her Irish roots, and even used the Irish form of her name, Caitlin Ni Aodha. But working against a relationship, Siadhail notes, was the fact that Ó Conaire had a long-time partner and four children. Nevertheless, Siadhail believes their relationship went beyond teacher and pupil, as Hughes and Ó Conaire collaborated on a play (for which Hughes had high hopes), and Ó Conaire provided her with an introduction to significant figures in the Irish independence movement. Hughes would align with Eamon de Valera, the most influential political figure in Ireland in the twentieth century, and would remain close to the man she addressed as "Chief" for years to come.

While Hughes worked in London, Sir William Van Horne entered her life again on a visit to the city, asking her to help him write what he envisioned as a multivolume history of the Canadian Pacific Railway. She embraced the task and resigned her post in the summer of 1915 in order to begin the project. But when Van Horne died suddenly, his son Richard prevailed upon Hughes to instead write his father's life story.

By late 1915, Hughes had relocated to Montreal, earnestly gathering material for the biography. Between 1916 and 1918, she read thousands of letters and documents and traveled for months conducting interviews with old friends and associates of the railway tycoon. At the same time, she emerged as the public face for the Irish independence movement in Canada and the United States. She wrote an eighty-five-page book, *Ireland*, which appeared in 1917. Geared to a Canadian audience, it contained a study, derived from first-hand observation, of what Hughes viewed as the deplorable social, economic, and political conditions in Ireland.

With World War I still raging, the influential Canadian publication *Saturday Night* commented in March 1918 on a speech that Hughes made in Montreal sympathetic to Sinn Fein, calling the movement pro-German, anti-British and thus an aide to the enemy. Hughes, the magazine stated, had a "pleasing journalistic gift," but could find more productive work than "exploiting a cause which has meant the loss of hundreds of British lives."

Siadhail spends much of the book documenting Hughes's exhaustive travels through Canada and the United States, organizing and speaking on behalf of Irish independence. As her stance became ever more controversial, Siadhail notes that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police kept an eye on her movements.

That was the atmosphere swirling around Hughes as she finished the Van Horne biography. On the eve of her departure for Australia to promote the Irish cause, she was astonished to learn that her manuscript was about to be published under the

name of Walter Vaughan, a former railway employee, a friend of Van Horne's, and the retired bursar of McGill University, to whom Richard Van Horne had given the manuscript to edit without her knowledge.

Hughes knew her political stance had cost her the authorship. Siadhail makes it clear that Vaughan's role was essentially "that of editor determined to whip into publishable shape another's manuscript, not that of author, for the book in its final published form remained substantially the work of Katherine Hughes, as researched and written by her." Stunned and outraged, Hughes demanded "an equitable settlement" from Van Horne, and while no documentation exists, Siadhail believes a settlement of some sort may have resulted. Nevertheless, the event shattered Hughes. She felt like an outcast in Canada, and referred to herself as "a once-upon-a-time Canadian." She moved to New York, where her sister lived. She was broke when she died of stomach cancer in 1925 at age forty-eight. Siadhail traces her burial site to a pauper's grave in the Bronx.

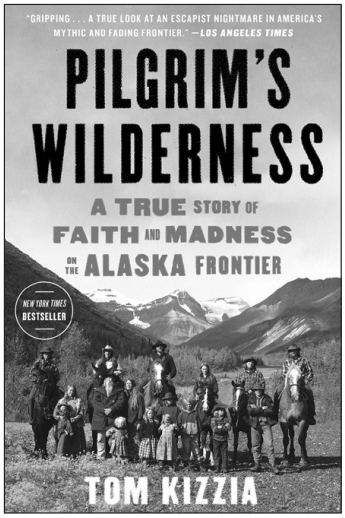
In the introduction, Siadhail states that he hesitated to undertake the biography due to a lack of material detailing his subject's inner thoughts and feelings. She kept no personal diaries, nor did she write a memoir. By necessity, Siadhail writes, his "study focuses on the external life —what she did—rather than providing matching treatment of the internal life—why she did it."

Despite his reservations, Siadhail has done a masterful job revealing the emergence of a modern woman in an era when the ideology of separate spheres still dominated society's worldview. And by documenting the range of Hughes's accomplishments as well as her journey from political insider to outcast, Siadhail's book importantly highlights the price Hughes paid for her controversial views. Already an accomplished writer, had she been properly credited with Van Horne's biography, perhaps Hughes might have died famous instead of forgotten.

# Hillbilly Heaven, Hillbilly Hell

*Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier* by Tom Kizzia. New York: Crown, 2013. Hardcover, 336 pp., $25; New York: Broadway Books, 2014. Paperback, 336 pp., $14.95

Reviewed by Jonathan D. Fitzgerald, Northeastern University, United States




Many of the greatest characters in Western literature are thought to be so for their complexity. We are often not sure whether we love them or hate them, whether their motivations are pure or not, if they can be trusted. Think of Jay Gatsby, of course, or Humbert Humbert, or Rabbit Angstrom, or Kurtz, or Seymour Glass, and the list goes on. This rendering of complex characters, a hallmark of literary fiction, is also one of the most distinctive features of literary journalism. In his introduction to the anthology he co-edited, *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*, Mark Kramer writes that literary journalists immerse themselves in their subjects' lives precisely to understand this complexity "at a level Henry James termed 'felt life'" (Sims and Kramer, 23) At this level of understanding, says Kramer, writers come to understand their subjects' "individual difference, frailty, tenderness, nastiness, vanity, generosity, pomposity, humility, all in proper proportion" (ibid.).

Tom Kizzia, author and former reporter for the *Anchorage Daily News* (now *Alaska Dispatch News*), knows something about this kind of immersion, and the complexity of character it can yield. In his 2013 book, *Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier,* Kizzia's subject is Papa Pilgrim, or Robert Allen Hale, Bobby Hale, or Sunstar, depending, perhaps, on when you met him. Kizzia, a tireless journalist, extensive researcher, and gripping storyteller, met Hale as Papa Pilgrim, but through his investigation, which spanned a decade, came to know him well in all of his other identities. And, in Kizzia's book, the complex character of Papa Pilgrim comes fully to life.

Between 2002 and 2008, the story of the Pilgrim family made national headlines, first for their battle against the National Park Service in Alaska, the result of bulldozing an out-of-use road to the ranch they purchased in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park, near McCarthy, Alaska. Though they eventually lost, the Pilgrims became heroes among anti-government activists. And then, just a few years later, Papa Pilgrim's even more harrowing crimes, the physical and sexual abuse of members of his family, came to light.

For Kizzia, the story of Papa Pilgrim and his family—including wife Kurina

Rose (or Country Rose, as Papa Pilgrim came to call her) and their fifteen children—begins when they move to their ranch outside of McCarthy. The property, which Hale dubbed "Hillbilly Heaven," represented the last in a series of efforts by the Hale family to live off the land, outside of a society they viewed as corrupt, and, ultimately, to live a kind of Christian life, the terms of which were set solely by Hale himself. They had tried to make such a life for themselves in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of New Mexico, but found that even in that remote place, their neighbors were too close and their proximity interfered with Hale's attempts to keep his family pure. Hale moved his family to Alaska, he told Kizzia, simply because, "We really enjoy our Christian life together. . . . We knew this land was in the middle of a national park," he continued, "but to us that just meant our neighbors would be few and far between" (157).

But that's not all it meant to live in the middle of a national park, as Hale found out when he received repeated entreaties from the Park Service to survey the land. Hale ignored the United States National Park Service requests, but rangers persisted in their efforts to survey Hale's land using snowmobiles and airplanes. On one such flight over the property, a ranger found that Hale and his family had bulldozed a road from McCarthy to their property, "thirteen miles through the national park," Kizzia tells us.

The standoff with the NPS launched the Hales into the public spotlight. Suddenly, the family that moved deep into the wilderness to get away from society was the subject of close inspection and speculation by the federal government, Alaskans, and even their neighbors in the remote town of McCarthy. And this is where Kizzia himself enters the story. As a reporter for the *Anchorage Daily News*, Kizzia wrote a series of stories on the family, and had many opportunities to speak with them and even to visit Hillbilly Heaven. In the book, the moment the reporter enters the story reinvigorates a narrative that, without his presence and voice, risked falling flat. At the start of Chapter 11, when Kizzia writes, "Not long after the Pilgrims reached McCarthy in early 2002, I started hearing stories" (155), his own story is reanimated. Indeed, Kizzia becomes a character in his own book, at first trusted and befriended by Papa Pilgrim, and, later, when Kizzia began to dig up Hale's past—his time in New Mexico, his scandal-ridden youth, and his bizarre ties to the Kennedy assassination—demonized and ignored by the family.

Kizzia's book is as much about journalism as it is about the particular story of Robert Hale. That is, Kizzia as a writer is interested in the role journalism plays in unfolding the story. His own newspaper, and indeed his own writing, was instrumental in this—hence the distrust he eventually encountered from the Hales. He also quotes extensively from the local McCarthy newspaper, the *Wrangell St. Elias News*. He's particularly fascinated by a pseudonymous writer who calls herself McCarthy Annie. She writes an unabashedly biased column defending the Hales in their fight against the Park Service right up until the end, when Hale became indefensible. The world would learn, as media attention focused on the family, that Hale had been physically abusing his wife and children, and, in the book's most harrowing turn, sexually abusing his eldest daughter Elizabeth, whom Hale refers to as Elishaba, the original Hebrew version of Elizabeth.

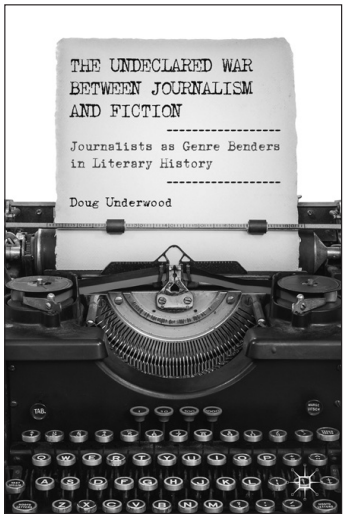
And, indeed it is through this name changing, the way a character appears one way through one perspective and yet completely changes when the perspective shifts, that Kizzia's narrative unfolds. In short, he understands the complexity of his characters in a profound way, precisely because he spends so much time getting to know them, both in person and through their backstories. Even at the end of the book, when all of Hale's egregious crimes come to light—he eventually pled guilty to charges of physical and sexual abuse, and died in prison—Kizzia still seems to grapple with the complexity of Hale's character. He writes of his reporting of Hale's trial, "In my notebook I had circled in red a comment . . . from Robert Hale himself: 'If my children look good, walk good, talk good, *are* good, well then how did they get to *be* good, if their father is so evil?'" Kizzia tells us, "I had scribbled a big question mark next to the quote" (281).

The strength of Kizzia's narrative, and of his abilities as a literary journalist, is the way in which he paints, in full color, the complexity of his main character. In the end, the reader is sure that Hale was a vicious criminal, but this judgment, like Kizzia's, does not come without a heavy dose of complexity, and, indeed, empathy. Kizzia's effectiveness as a storyteller lies precisely in his ability to portray a character like Hale, who lends himself to quick and easy judgment, in a way that problematizes such judgment. Kizzia sees the complexity of his subject and renders him so completely that the reader, ultimately, sees it too.

# Patrolling the Margins of Fact and Fiction

*The Undeclared War Between Journalism and Fiction: Journalists as Genre Benders in Literary History*
by Doug Underwood. New York: Palgrave Macmillan/St. Martin's Press, 2013. Hardcover, 250 pp., $64.95

Reviewed by Brian Nerney, Metropolitan State University, United States




When Norman Mailer's largely nonfiction book about the execution of killer Gary Gilmore, *The Executioner's Song*, won the Pulitzer in the fiction category in 1980, the award provoked a controversy among journalists, novelists, and critics. They had begun arguing in the 1960s, when New Journalists started using fictional techniques to enhance the storyline and pursuit of truth in their nonfiction. Mailer wrote that he was "enlisted then on my side of the undeclared war between those modes of perception called journalism and fiction" (1). Doug Underwood acknowledges Mailer's concept of a "war" between "the modes of perception reflected in journalism and fiction writing" (8), and therein lies the basis for the title of his book.

But as a former journalist and current professor at the University of Washington, Underwood does not simply take up the "war" on one side or the other. Instead, his scholarly side empathizes with Mailer's "vexation at getting people in the competing camps to appreciate how many important literary works have been created at the margins of factuality and fictionalization" (8). After acknowledging the fiction-versus-journalism paradigm, Underwood moves to a position where he can "champion blended forms of semi-fictional and quasi-factual writing, and honor the perspective of those writers who have come out of journalism but crossed genre boundaries in order to give expression to their authentic writing voice" (17). Underwood admires writers who were "obsessed with telling the 'truth' in their literature—whether it was in satire, fiction, nonfiction, or a blended version of these. Their impulse to expose and to dramatize the realities of life . . . took precedence over concerns about genre" (3). Like the writers that he admires, Underwood does not accept what Megan O'Rourke calls a "problematically rigid division of genres." Instead, he embraces her concept of writers as "genre benders" (19).

As he does so, he expands the concept in several ways. He relies on his earlier volume, *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700–2000*, in which he examines journalism's contributions to the literary tradition in the United Kingdom and the United States, to give historical perspective to his discussion of writers who chal-

lenge the boundaries between journalism and literary fiction. He also coins the term "journalist-literary figure," which he uses in both books, to identify the writer who blends journalistic research methods with fiction writing techniques in the pursuit of good storytelling and deeper truths about life that are frequently prohibited from daily news writing. The concept of the journalist-literary figure who crosses genre boundaries and the rich historical perspective produce two of the many pleasures of reading Underwood's book.

The journalist-literary figure represents Underwood's arriving at a middle ground, along with other interdisciplinary scholars such as Shelley Fisher Fishkin and Mark Kramer, who seek common ground and understanding rather than a discipline-based position. Second, through his knowledge of literary history and the newspaper industry, Underwood brings a tantalizing and rewarding depth to his discussion of "Challenging the Boundaries of Journalism and Fiction" (chapter 1) and "Artful Falsehoods and the Constraints of the Journalist's Life" (chapter 2). For example, he discusses Daniel Defoe's transformation of the heavily researched tract *Due Preparations for the Plague* into a best-selling blend of fact and fiction, *The Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) with the same ease as he discusses the blending of fact and fiction in Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* and James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. What's more, his thirteen-year background as a daily journalist and his understanding of the roles of aesthetics, style, theme, and deep emotions (e.g. catharsis) in literature enable Underwood to lucidly examine Hemingway's transformation from journalist to fiction writer, doubling down, for instance, on Hemingway's multiple treatments of bullfighting in *The Sun Also Rises* and in *Death in the Afternoon* (chapter 3).

As the authors and titles listed above illustrate, Underwood emphasizes the contributions of male journalistic-literary figures. For example, he devotes chapter 3 to Hemingway's transformation because other men, such as Thompson, Capote, and Wolfe, who popularized the New Journalism, were heavily influenced by Hemingway's change of career and his prose. Underwood briefly discusses writers such as Willa Cather and Joan Didion, and illustrates some of his points with the works of other women, but the imbalance between men's and women's voices calls for a chapter on one or more influential journalist-literary women writers.

In chapter 4, "The Funhouse Mirror: Journalists Portraying Journalists in Their Fiction," Underwood insists that journalist-literary figures, following the lead of Thackeray, Howells, Cather, and Dickens, "have offered up the journalist as a stock figure to be defined by many of the negative attributes that the public has come to associate with commercial journalism" (156). Underwood finds the typecasting so predictable that he identifies thirteen types of journalists-as-characters or caricatures, finding "provincial scribblers," "jaded denizens of the big city," and "cynical opportunists" to be common among novels by ex-journalists. In contrast, he appreciates the rarely found "journalist who really wants to write novels," "the tough and hard-shelled victim," and the "woman journalist who is thoughtful, sensitive, and resistant to the masculine and exploitative news gathering culture of the newsroom" (175–78). But why are so many journalist characters negative stereotypes? Underwood offers nine responses to the question, probably the most persuasive being that "many jour-

nalists actually do try to live up to the stereotype in their professional life," and thus many journalist-literary figures drew on what they saw in at least some of their real-life colleagues (185).

An insightful interdisciplinary scholar, in the epilogue Underwood advocates for the study of hybrid forms of journalistic literature with a spirit of "generosity but discrimination" because:

> [W]hen entering any discussion about the intriguing but precarious zone between factual and fictional writing, one looks for guideposts that we can trust a writer's insights—the humanity of a Defoe, the irony of a Twain, the social conscience of an Orwell, the integrity of a White, the demonstration of the principles in the works of those and other journalist-literary figures that truth in the deeper sense mattered to them more than anything else (198).

And that's what should matter to today's writers and scholars as well.

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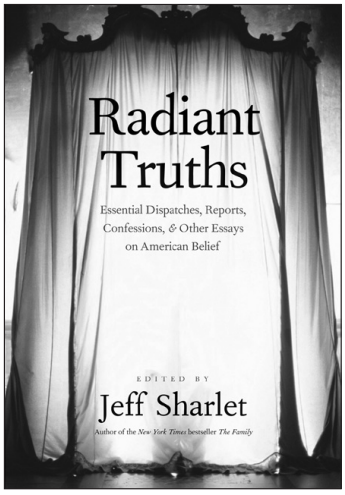
# Saying "Religion" Out Loud

*Radiant Truths: Essential Dispatches, Reports, Confessions, and Other Essays.*
edited and introduced by Jeff Sharlet. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.
Hardcover, 408 pp., $30

Reviewed by Amber Roessner, University of Tennessee, United States




"The evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1, King James).

Jeff Sharlet, who the *Washington Post*'s Michael Washburn called "one of the shrewdest commentators on religion's unexplored realms," takes up the topic of "things unseen" (10) in his latest endeavor, an anthology of literary journalism that documents the vast landscape of American religion. As in the past, he does not disappoint.

In *Radiant Truths: Essential Dispatches, Reports, Confessions, and Other Essays*, Sharlet offers readers an eclectic mix of American religious experience through his collection of voices, "a cacophony choir" (9) of some of the nation's finest literary journalists, from the well known to the lesser so. His roughly chronological treatment blends the words of Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Mark Twain—gods of the nineteenth-century American literary tradition—with those of their twentieth-century counterparts, experts of narrative nonfiction such as Zora Neale Hurston, James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, Gary Wills, and Ellen Willis. Alongside these seminal authors, he introduces us to a new generation of "mutant journalists," as he is prone to calling practitioners (Sharlet maintains a blog called Mutant Journalism), including Francine Prose, who shares the experience of shedding tears at the sight of Whitman's words in Zuccotti Park during a protest of the Occupy Wall Street Movement.

A clever practitioner of the craft of literary reportage, Sharlet ends his anthology with the words of Prose to circle back to his entry point, Whitman's *Specimen Days* (1863/1882). "A neat enough trick, but don't let it fool you," Sharlet warns in his introduction (3). A close read of the text will reveal that Prose's untitled lines are offered as a means of hope for a brighter tomorrow—as a cloth to wipe away the tears spilled from Matthew Teague's story of the innocent bloodshed of five Amish schoolgirls in "The Aftermath."

Along the way, Sharlet offers readers narratives of the nation's varied religious traditions and rituals. His anthology mirrors a patchwork quilt united by the editor's woven thread of time, place, and voice. For instance, one can trace the strands of religious pilgrimage from Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* (1869) to Ellen Willis's *Truth and Consequences* (1977). Both narrators walk away from their journey to Jeru-

salem unsatisfied, longing for something that they cannot yet find—whether it is an authentic experience or the willingness to endure the pain and sacrifice of servitude in pursuit of religious ecstasy. Willis's plain prose and feminist overtones, as Sharlet acknowledges in his apt commentary, echoes the work of Meridel Le Sueur.

Sharlet offers a vision of politics as religion in Le Sueur's "I Was Marching" (1934) and in an excerpt of Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night* (1968), and religion as politics in Barbara Grizzuti Harrison's "Arguing with the Pope" (1994). Likewise, he explores the relationship between science and religion through Anne Fadiman's "The Sacrifice" (1997).

Sharlet's anthology is equal parts east and west, pagan and Christian, orthodox and fundamentalist. Within his text, he even manages to pay tribute to his mentor, Michael Lesy, who taught him at Hampshire College in the early 1990s, by including "Shochets" (1987). That narrative is of course a mentor tribute of its own, a eulogy for cultural historian Warren Susman as much as it is an exploration of ritual slaughters and the act of dying a good death.

"The stories collected here," Sharlet tells readers in his introduction, fittingly entitled "This Mutant Genre," "are about what happens when we say 'religion' out loud." Harkening unto Sharlet's own words, readers should not let the chronology fool them. "Periodization and demographic representation aren't my concern here," he writes. "This book is an anthology. A selection. Which is to say, as believers and unbelievers so often do, it's personal" (3).

And, perhaps no one is better prepared to tell this admittedly personal story than Sharlet, a master of literary reportage. "Over the years," he tells readers, "I've written about churches, temples, and Buddhist centers, reported on exorcisms (individual and group), prayer cells and prayer rallies, squinted at my notebook among thousands of teens thrilling violently to the Book of Judges. There were quieter moments too: kitchen table Shabbat takeout chicken with the last Yiddish writer . . . whiskey with Mormons; tea before a shrine to an anarchist martyr's slingshot" (2).

Of course, any good reader of literary journalism already realizes this. Sharlet's first book, *Killing the Buddha* (2004), written with Peter Manseau, was described by *Publishers Weekly* as "perhaps the most original and insightful spiritual writing to come out of America since Jack Kerouac first hit the road." A careful scholar of literary journalism, however, was undoubtedly already aware of Sharlet and Manseau before the volume hit his or her local newsstands through KillingtheBuddha.com, an award-winning online literary magazine about religion and culture launched in 2000. Fans of the duo will be pleased that Sharlet included an excerpt from *Killing the Buddha*: "Heartland, Kansas," the story of the participant observers' jaunt with pagan witches deep in the forests of the Midwest.

Since that time, Sharlet has remained busy. From 2003 to 2009 he was a research scholar at New York University's Center for Religion and Media. Now Mellon Assistant Professor of English at Dartmouth, he continues to serve as contributing editor for *Harper's*, *Rolling Stone*, and many other magazines. The bestselling author and journalist, according to the *Post*'s Washburn, "belongs in the tradition of long-form, narrative nonfiction best exemplified by Joan Didion, John McPhee [and] Norman Mailer."

A scholar of literary journalism quickly learns to expect the unexpected from Sharlet. He begins his anthology like a good historian, by reclaiming the lost lines from Marianne Moore's *Poetry* (1919). "Imaginary gardens with real toads in them," the paradox of Moore's work, Sharlet contends, "is at the heart of literary journalism, the practice of using fictional techniques to write factual stories" (1).

From there, he provides insight into the brand of literary journalism that he practices, participant-observation, and how he came to the investigation at hand. "I'm most interested in the subset of religion known as believe," he acknowledges. "So with as clear-as-can-be-disclaimers—'Look, I don't really share your beliefs . . .'—I've often joined in. . . . I've called down the moon with half-naked witches and laid hands—spiritually speaking, of course, on whoever asked me to do so, even knowing that my touch was most likely profane" (2). In doing so, Sharlet offers readers a deconstruction of religion and reality that is rooted in social constructionism and seminal works from literary journalism studies.

For Sharlet, it was necessary to embrace the mutant genre—despite or perhaps *because of* its inherent imperfections—to tell his story of how our individual and collective identities are rooted in a uniquely American brand of belief:

> That "failure," literary journalism's only essential truth—the impossibility of perfect representation of reality, visible and otherwise—makes it uniquely suited for the subject of American religion, so often struggling to be one or the other, pious or democratic, communal or individual, rooted or transcendent. The story of this struggle is that of the selections I've made: American religion, a history in pieces" (15).

As Sharlet points out, literary journalism is often defined by a list of devices that it employs, but Sharlet's anthology offers scholars of literary journalism something more akin to the mash-up that he describes in his introduction, a blend of art and the who-what-where-when-why. *Radiant Truths* belongs on the shelves of scholars of literature, journalism, history, and American culture and should be cherished by all aficionados of literary journalism.

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# 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—focusing 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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John S. Bak, founding president, 2006–2008

On our cover is a photograph, c. 1900–20, of a marble head of a Greek goddess from fourth century B.C. The goddess is not particularized and so for this issue perhaps we shall name her Clio, the muse of history; or perhaps Calliope, the muse of poetry, might be preferred (the muses not being so familiar with literary journalism in those days). Or we could always fall back to Athena, the goddess of wisdom (but also war, which might play to the female combat reporters discussed in this issue).
*Courtesy Library of Congress.*

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## *Special Issue*

**Women + Literary Journalism**

- Guest Editor: Leonora Flis
- Roberta Maguire on Zora Neale Hurston + The Ruby McCollum Trial
- Nancy Roberts on Dorothy Day + Meridel Le Sueur
- Isabelle Meuret on Martha Gellhorn, Gerda Taro + Andrée Viollis
- Sue Joseph on Margaret Simons
- Anthea Garman and Gillian Rennie on Alexandra Fuller
- Bruce Gillespie on Edna Staebler
- Pablo Calvi on Leila Guerriero

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