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- Nicholas Lemann on the Journalism in Literary Journalism



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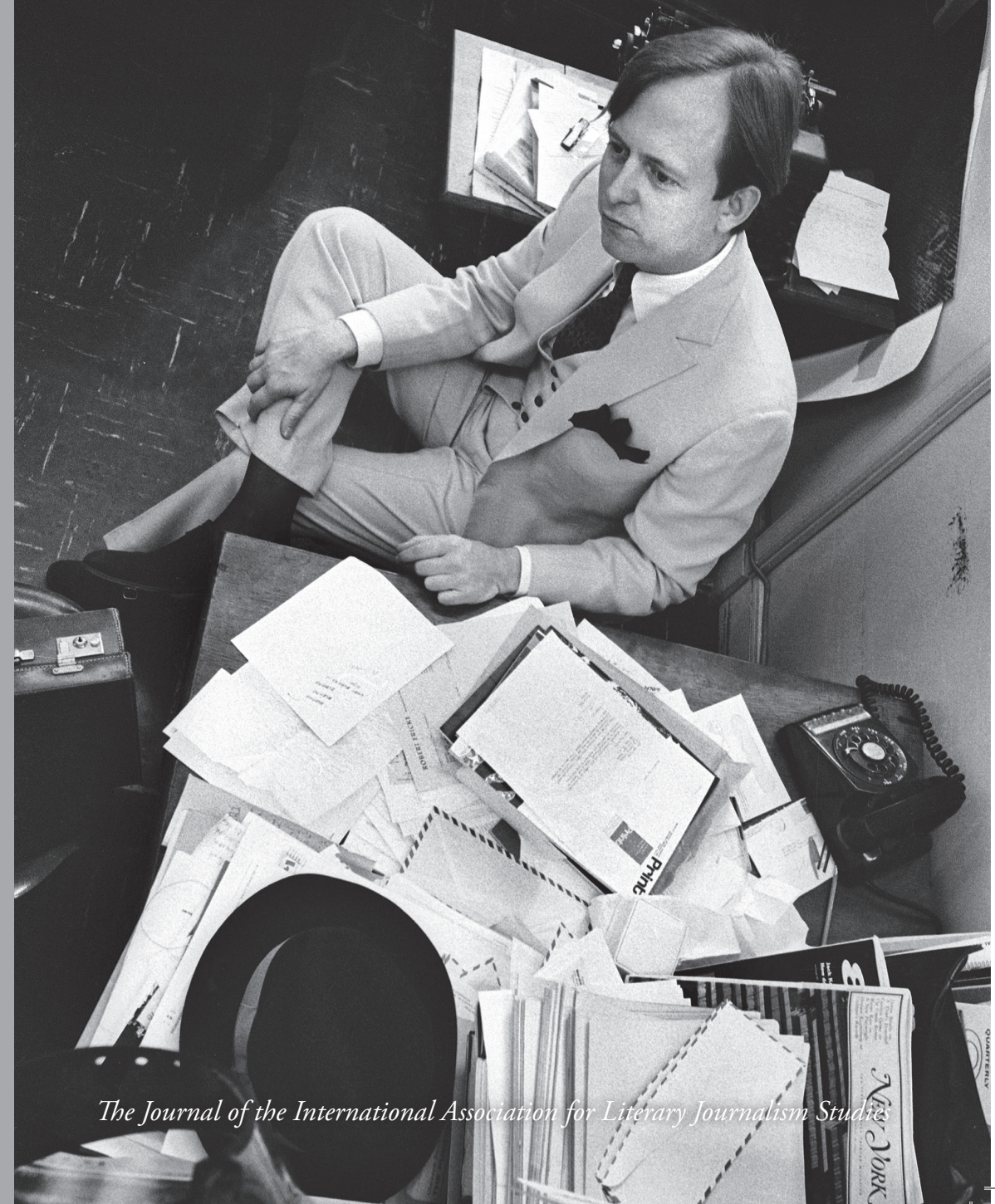
LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

VOL. 7, NO. 2, FALL 2015

■ SPQ+A: David Abrahamson interviews Michael Norman ■

Literary Journalism Studies

Vol. 7, No. 2, Fall 2015



The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies



Jack Robinson, who in late 1965 snapped the cover picture of Tom Wolfe at the *New York Herald Tribune*, shot countless pictures of politicians, film stars, rock stars, celebrities, and, yes, writers, for the *New York Times*, *Vogue*, and *Life* magazines, from the 1950s until the early 1970s, at which point he fled Andy Warhol's Factory scene, and its excesses, for Memphis, Tennessee. There, he led a much quieter, sober existence as a stained-glass window maker. Courtesy the Jack Robinson Archive, LLC; www.robinsonarchive.com.

Literary Journalism Studies

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SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

Email submission (as a Microsoft Word attachment) is mandatory. A cover page indicating the title of the paper, the author's name, institutional affiliation, and contact information, along with an abstract (50–100 words), should accompany all submissions. The cover page should be sent as a separate attachment from the abstract and submission to facilitate distribution to readers. No identification should appear linking the author to the submission or abstract. All submissions must be in English Microsoft Word and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (Humanities endnote style) <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html>. 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...



Although literary journalism can have immediate impact (*Hiroshima, Silent Spring*), it is not often thought of as newsworthy, or even newsy. Its essence usually involves deep immersion in the field—the gathering—followed by long bouts of rumination at the desk. The latter task, involving pure reflection—call it the not-gathering—is necessary if only to discover just exactly what the story is really about. The deskwork, or laptop work, or scroll work, or the pasting up and moving pieces of paper around on the wall kind of work, nourishes a complementary yearning to present material in as writerly a way as possible. Yes, voice is important.

And yet this not-news quality is not always absent. There have been two recent instances when the news included literary journalism. The big announcement was the awarding of a Nobel prize for literature in October to a writer who can be snugly labeled a literary journalist. And while not quite news of that magnitude, still impressively newsy was *Vanity Fair* pairing a current high-profile literary journalist with the patriarch of the New Journalism for an eighteen-page magazine feature.

The first event spurred contributor John C. Hartsock to offer the journal an excerpt from his forthcoming book, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience* (University of Massachusetts Press, early 2016). Specifically, *LJS* was interested in Hartsock's thoughts on Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich, whose books include *Zinky Boys: Soviet Voices from the Afghanistan War* (1992) and *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (2005). Hartsock writes that there is no question that Alexievich is the first exclusively literary journalist to win the Nobel, and explicates her particular kind of storytelling, which relies on detailed portraits of ordinary people contrasted with the grand schemes of the state, buttressing her prose with a wide breadth of examples from literature.

The less spectacular but still fascinating event is Michael Lewis's piece in *Vanity Fair*'s November 2015 issue. Entitled "The White Stuff"—presumably referring to Tom Wolfe's sartorial preference for white suits, not cocaine—it posits a fresh origin tale for the man who assumed the role of head cheerleader for fully, deeply researched stories told with verve, style, and, in his case, flash—stories that brought cultural currents and upheavals into focus in a way regular news stories and features could not. In Lewis's hands, the man who popularized the term New Journalism is treated in much the same way, that is, as a topic ripe for excavation, courtesy of the New York Public Library's 2013 purchase of the Wolfe archives. It's a beautifully told account, as Lewis injects a dosage of personal journalism into the historical narrative (for instance, he tries to explain to his daughter, who is traveling with Lewis to visit Wolfe, how much Wolfe had meant to him when he was growing up). I won't say more—well, okay, I am tempted to say that it is mandatory reading for literary journalism scholars and

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practitioners alike—except to tantalize by casually mentioning the jet pilot with the serendipitous name and Lewis taking us inside Wolfe’s Hamptons home.

From the *LJS* perspective, the timing of the Lewis piece could not be more propitious, as we had already been preparing for this very issue Michael Jacobs’s detailed examination of Wolfe’s methodological somersaults in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. Jacobs elucidates the complex situation of Wolfe wrestling with showing the reader the Merry Pranksters’ lives. These are classic issues for literary journalism: Exactly how does one climb inside the mind of an acidhead anyway? And if one manages to access this strange reality, how to spank it down onto the page so the reader feels it? Jacobs provides us with thoughtful answers. As a bonus, Jacobs tracked down the wonderful Jack Robinson Archive, which contains several striking Wolfe photographs from the mid-1960s, two of which the Archive graciously has allowed us to reproduce for this issue.

Wolfe is also mentioned in Julien Gorbach’s “The Old New Journalist,” an examination of crime reporter, columnist, playwright, author, and (most famously) film writer Ben Hecht’s possible role as a proto-New Journalist. In the later stage of his career, for reasons Gorbach explains, Hecht returned to nonfiction, specifically to write the story of Mickey Cohen. Gorbach provides examples of Hecht’s literary journalism, which read almost “Talesian,” but the book was never finished. Unfortunately, Hecht, the man who played the gangster concept into a lucrative Hollywood career, was then himself played by an old gangster.

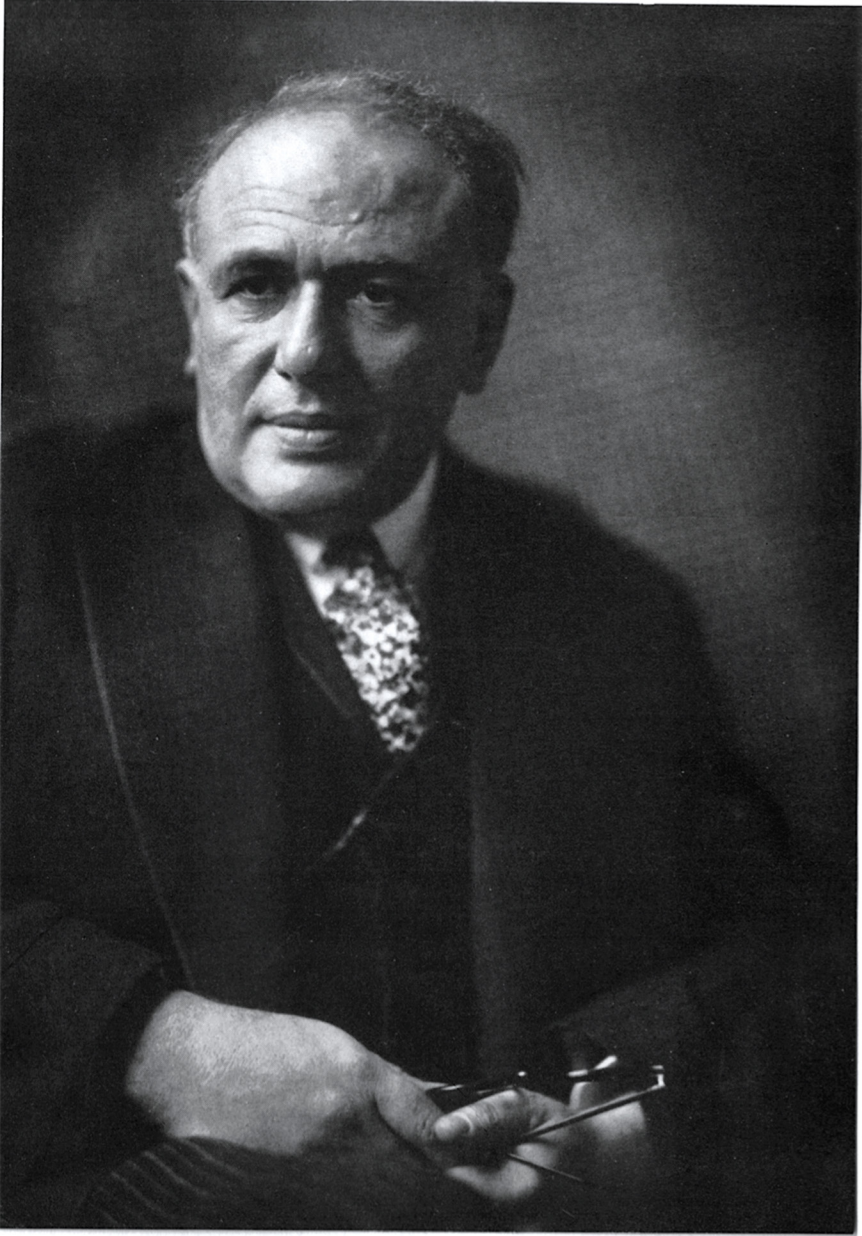
Wolfe also makes an appearance in Nicholas Lemann’s keynote address, “The Journalism in Literary Journalism,” which argues for more emphasis on doing the hard work of reporting, and for listening to what the social scientists have to say, and worrying less about the literary aspects of telling the story. Josh Roiland’s response to Lemann’s address, “By Any Other Name: The Case for Literary Journalism,” argues that the adjective literary should not be taken as a value judgment, but as an apt descriptor, and that we should be defending the use of the moniker literary journalism against intrusions from meaningless but social-media friendly terms such as long form.

Away from the influence of Wolfe (finally . . . this was not planned, dear reader!), and across the ocean, Kate McQueen’s contribution to this volume is a richly textured portrait of German newspaper columnist Paul “Sling” Schlesinger. Sling’s 1920s vignettes may remind some of Jimmy Breslin’s columns, that is, short stories based on fact. I am sure readers, whether familiar with Sling or not, will delight in McQueen informing us how Sling came to pretty much singlehandedly turning crime reporting into a credible form of literary pursuit, and influencing an entire generation of editors and writers in the process.

Magdalena Horodecka’s essay sorts out Polish literary journalist Ryszard Kapuściński’s relation to the ancient historian, specifically in the text *Travels with Herodotus* (2007). She examines Kapuściński’s long-term fascination with *The Histories*, along with his intellectual infatuation in the 1980s and 1990s with taking up the lens of hermeneutics, having read his Dilthey, Rorty, Ricoeur, and Barthes. At no point, however, was the master storyteller in danger of falling for “death of the author” postmodernism.

Finally, our Scholar-Practitioner Q+A teams up David Abrahamson with author Michael Norman. It is a treat to listen in on this conversation, as Norman describes, among other things, how a trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art teaches students to write better narratives. Norman and his wife Elizabeth are currently working on a follow-up to their book-length exploration, *Tears in the Darkness: The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath* (2009), with another challenging subject, this time about life and death inside Bellevue Hospital in New York. Norman has some penetrating, insightful thoughts on the nature of structure, and how vexing it can be to find exactly the right one for each story.

Bill Reynolds



Courtesy the Estate of Josy Schlesinger

Into the Courtroom: Paul “Sling” Schlesinger and the Origins of German Literary Trial Reportage

Kate McQueen

Independent scholar, Champagne–Urbana, United States

Abstract: This article is a critical portrait of Germany’s most influential trial reporter, Paul Schlesinger, who covered Berlin’s criminal court in the 1920s for a leading liberal daily, the *Vossische Zeitung*, under the pseudonym of Sling. It describes Schlesinger’s transition from feuilletonist to trial reporter, and shows how Schlesinger used literary techniques traditional to the feuilleton to elevate the then-undervalued genre of trial reportage to a place of cultural attention.

One of the biggest sensations in the German art world after World War I took place not on the classical stage but in the courtroom: in November 1921 Berlin’s public prosecutor charged the director and actors in a local production of Arthur Schnitzler’s play *Reigen* with the jailable offense of public indecency. Schnitzler’s piece was a bald-faced depiction of the hypocrisy of Vienna’s sexual mores, organized into ten pre- and post-coital conversations between a series of overlapping lovers. Considered unperformable upon completion in 1896, it fared little better with the public’s more censorious members twenty-five years later, who flung stink bombs and anti-Semitic invective at each lifting of the curtain. Like the beleaguered performance, the ensuing trial launched into the public eye not just a scandal over aesthetics and morality; it provided a platform for airing political outrage from right-wing groups of all feather, and became a convenient tool of cultural propaganda in the hands of a budding National Socialist movement.¹

This sudden clash of art and politics begged for a literary-satirical touch, and in place of their somber legal experts, Berlin’s *Vossische Zeitung*, a leading liberal daily, sent to court Paul Schlesinger, a staff feuilletonist who wrote

pieces of local color under the pseudonym of Sling. What Sling drew out of these days in court was of a different nature than the usual legal critique and stenographic report. Mood, metaphor, and “verbal blossoms” from the star-studded cast of expert witnesses provided much-needed humor and psychological insight into the happenings of the courtroom.²

With the *Reigen* trials Sling acquired what would become his signature beat, and with it the reputation as one of the Weimar Republic’s most beloved journalists. The *Reigen* articles also marked the beginning of literary trial reportage in the German press. Sling’s contemporaries—press scholars, legal professionals, and journalists alike—saw him as a stylistic reformer who transformed a “neglected journalistic form” to “works of high literary quality.”³ The following article investigates this literary turn through an overview of Sling’s courtroom coverage, with the following questions in mind: What did the feuilletonist bring to the courtroom? How did a literary approach to trial reporting change perception of the justice system in Weimar Germany?

Trial Reporting in Wilhelmine and early Weimar Berlin, 1880–1921

Prior to Sling’s arrival, trial reporting existed as a stunted and struggling genre, despite its founders’ best intentions. It had been initiated in the late nineteenth century by a new body of modern mass dailies, which challenged conventions by reporting on socially sensitive issues like crime and justice. This assertive journalistic spirit, however, did not translate easily into form. Early trial coverage was limited to prim, factual accounts done in the so-called “stenographic” style, published rather inconspicuously under local or miscellaneous news.⁴ Readers interested in splashier, romanticized versions of cases had to search outside the context of the daily press, in participant memoirs or specialized magazines like *Der Criminal-Reporter* or *Illustrierte Gerichts-Zeitung*.⁵ After World War I, Berlin newspapers took more latitude, relying increasingly on sensational crime stories to sell copy.⁶ Still, the expansion in court coverage did not greatly affect quality or style. Trial reporting continued as a bland, crime-focused genre that wandered between coverage of prominent local news and back-page entertainment supplements. Even as late as 1926, celebrity defense attorney Max Alsberg complained that news of the courts was hidden behind stories of “six-day races, boxing matches and other sporting events.”⁷

For all its ubiquity, trial reporting remained a controversial genre well into the twentieth century, popular with readers but regarded with suspicion by many spectators of the public sphere. Reluctant supporters granted it a weighty social role, agreeing with jurist Franz von Holtzendorff that “without truthful reporting of court hearings the public administration of justice can-

not happen at all.”⁸ But generally the mood was set by critics, who considered trial reporting to be “a field of lowly reportage for the purpose of satisfying curiosity and sensation mongering. The representation as well as the choice of material [serves] only the purpose of thrilling and amusing.”⁹

Journalists were no great fans either. Trial reporting in the early twentieth century was tough, unpopular work, which editors generally delegated to lesser staff reporters. “No one aspires to the court,” Sling admitted, particularly in Berlin, “[b]ecause everybody knows that ‘trial reporting’ means: going to ‘Moabit’ every day—and that is for most people, not just the accused, extremely uncomfortable.”¹⁰ The problem with Moabit wasn’t the district itself, a populous, working-class neighborhood in northwest Berlin. It was its grandiose courthouse, where the city’s criminal trials took place. Despite constant renovations, the sprawling, neobaroque building struggled to meet the needs of Berlin’s ever-growing population. *Berliner Tageblatt* crime reporter Walter Kiaulehn remembers that “people sat on top of one another, and in the dark too,” creating an “unforgettable atmosphere of familiarity” and dreadful air.¹¹ Sling’s reporting on day four of the *Reigen* trial corroborates this impression: “The air in the courtroom is getting worse, it’s becoming unbearable, and the trial [creeps along] lethargic and viscous in the morning hours.”¹²

Then there was the trouble of writing. Under the court’s cramped conditions, long, dull hours of proceedings had to be compressed into pithy reports, leaving little time and energy for critical approach or literary ambition. Journalists rarely received a byline, and those trial reporters who did not sink into obscurity could generally expect a harsh appraisal of their work.¹³ Unsurprisingly, legal experts like the *Vossische Zeitung*’s Erich Eyck preferred to publish commentary under the rubric of national politics or in specialized legal supplements. And the crime-minded among the German literati were partial to small cultural weeklies or book format, which offered more generic creativity as well as forgiving deadlines.¹⁴ In fact, the latter tended to eschew the courts entirely, taking one of two approaches: either that of the armchair polemicist, in the critical style of Maximilian Harden, or that of the gumshoed investigator, like Egon Erwin Kisch, who sought out crimes as they were happening. Both approached the subject of crime and punishment in an entertaining and critical manner, but without much interest in the courtroom itself or for the process of judgment for which it stood.

Sling and the Birth of Courtroom Feuilleton, 1921–28

Like his literary cohort, Schlesinger’s interest in the court was slow in the making. The Berliner, born in 1878, came to trial reportage by way of a circuitous and largely literary route, laconically self-described as having “done

a bit of everything.” After the youthful abandonment of an apprenticeship in a Berlin textiles business, Schlesinger took up “music, literature, yes acting. I wrote plays, became a journalist, moved around in Germany. Went abroad. After twenty-five years of wandering I came home.”¹⁵

With his return to Berlin in 1920, at the age of forty-two, Schlesinger landed in the feuilleton department of the *Vossische Zeitung*. “Auntie Voss,” as it was affectionately known, was Berlin’s oldest newspaper, a liberal institution revered for its high-minded political and cultural coverage. Since 1914 it had also been the flagship of the progressive multimedia concern, the Ullstein Verlag. This wasn’t Schlesinger’s first assignment for Ullstein; before and during World War I he had worked as a company correspondent in Munich, Paris, Lugano, and Bern, his articles scattered across the company’s many dailies, weeklies, and magazines.¹⁶ A position in the feuilleton of the prestigious *Vossische Zeitung*, though, was quite a step up in the world of German journalism. Originally a venerated arts and entertainment section set off from political news with a heavy black line, by the 1920s the moniker feuilleton more often referred to an editorial department than a specific news rubric. But the general character still applied: the feuilletonist promoted cultural content and stylized writing, leaving standard reporting and overt political commentary to his colleagues on page one.

Accordingly, Schlesinger’s early articles were amusing pieces of local color, sketches and anecdotes inspired by the author’s rediscovery of his home city.¹⁷ Moritz Goldstein, a fellow *Vossische Zeitung* feuilletonist and Sling’s successor to the court, remembered how the desire to “write Berlin” led Schlesinger everywhere from the elegant Westend to the proletarian districts around Alexanderplatz, and after exhausting the usual sources of public parks and public houses, a “pure need for material” drove him to the courts.¹⁸ Schlesinger had worked in the neighborhood of Moabit many years earlier. Inspiration came from the memory of lunchtime visits to the court and the surrounding pubs during his textiles apprenticeship, where court employees and observers swapped post-trial commentary over pints of beer. In those days, before the era of cinema, locals willing to brave long lines and limited seats on the public gallery’s slender pews were rewarded with the opportunity to “speculate, discuss, and fervently participate” in what writer Felix Hollaender dubbed the “theater of no money.”¹⁹

Schlesinger’s memory of the place where “my films rolled” served him well.²⁰ Thirty years had passed since his youth, yet the allure of Moabit courtroom remained. What had evolved was Berlin’s self-image, from the “Athens” to the “Chicago” on the Spree. Though its reputation proved worse than statistics actually allow, the crime rate had indeed risen, and so too crime’s place

of significance in the culture of Weimar Germany.²¹ The Berlin public by all accounts seemed to relish in its criminalistic image, a fascination since interpreted as not only a sign of the times but as a way to understand the apparent collapse of the prewar social and moral order.²²

Yet, ultimately, for Sling the literary appeal of Moabit lay not so much in the crime but in the courtroom itself. Natural affinities between the fields of law and literature—particularly the desire of each to illuminate truth despite fundamental differences in its extraction—make the appeal of the court understandable. German law seeks in every case first and foremost to determine the “*objektiver Tatbestand*,” the unvarnished facts of what happened, which ultimately form the basis of the court’s final act, the *Urteil*, or judgment. These facts are identified and protected within the context of a trial under the rules of evidence, ideally unmediated by subjective elements of motive and emotion.²³

The law’s ideal of unmediated truth, however, often “does not make a good story,” as Janet Malcolm points out. “[T]hat’s why we have art.”²⁴ Literature’s advantage over the law lies in its ability to operate with a much wider concept of the truth, one unfettered by such cares as real-life actions and motives. Its tools—imagination and language—are likewise unrestrained. In fact, they are lauded for more brazen acts of nonmimesis. The best early twentieth century example of this literary abandon comes not from Sling but from Franz Kafka, whose famous preoccupation with the legal system is best represented by *Der Prozess* (1925). The novel plots the tragicomic downfall of Josef K., accused, convicted, and ultimately executed by an unknown authority for an unnamed crime. Kafka gives us one strong instance of what happens when literature turns its gaze to the law: an imaginative exploration of timeless juridical issues like guilt and innocence, crime and punishment, civic order and belonging. And while the power of this fantastical trial can be located in its abundance as a metaphor, it also works on its most literal level. The story reproduces with uncanny accuracy an all-too-familiar terror of the individual thrown into a remote and inaccessible system of justice.²⁵

The specter of a seemingly hermetic justice system is exorcized in Sling’s work, too, although in Sling’s case the court process appears not as a literary trope but as an actual event. Journalism is, after all, a literary field bound by the imperatives of actuality in ways more similar to the law than fiction. But a literary approach to trial reporting—as the next section demonstrates—is capable of getting a truth beyond the *Tatbestand*, specifically by introducing, through the techniques of fiction, those mediating, subjective elements the law works so hard to exclude.

The Moabit Mirror: Literary Style in the Courtroom

1. Sling and Subjectivity

With Sling's rising fame in the mid-1920s, court officials slowly came to recognize the wide, sloping shoulders and unruly graying hair of Berlin's most unusual court commentator. Fellow journalist H.H. Bormann remembers that "if [Sling] entered a room during a trial and silently took a seat at his place among the press corps, there was always a movement, a bracing of the dais-throned members of the court."²⁶ But at first no one knew to suspect this bearlike man, with all the rumped appearance of an artist, rambling the court's corridors in short, sedate steps, of being "Herr Sling." And how could they? Anonymous authorship was still common practice in 1920s German journalism. Bylines were considered an honor that invariably elevated the subjectivity of the writing style, resulting in the cultivation of a recognizable authorial voice or a strong emphasis on opinion and impression. Even those journalists who were granted one, feuilletonists and political critics, often chose—like Schlesinger—to write under a pseudonym.²⁷ The advantage of this strategy was the ability to refine authorial subjectivity without the risk of identification, an art form Sling jokingly named "Suppressionism."²⁸

But, actually, the only aspect of suppression in Sling's work was his given name. His personality was instantly recognizable on the page, and the subjectivity that gave him an identifiable voice also formed something of a methodology for his reporting. Freely admitting his belief that "[o]bjectivity does not exist," Sling had no inhibitions about being led by inner impulses.²⁹ Amid fanatic scribbling at the press bench, between reporters, noses to their pads, seizing "only words," Sling would sit upright, "his gaze seemingly casually going around the room . . . gaug[ing] the surface of faces, the accused, witnesses, lawyers, judges . . . nearer and nearer . . . [until] suddenly his eye stopped and took in the entire person."³⁰ His strategy for reporting, Sling claimed, "depends on my soul's experiences. . . . In the courtroom I look out for the motives of the souls of those persons present, the accused, the witnesses. I also cannot help but attempt to look into the hearts of the state prosecutors and judges. The picture I take in creates in me sadness, outrage, apprehension, sympathy, contempt, amusement, sarcasm, love and hate."³¹

Strategic reliance on emotions, quicksand for conventional reporting, works for Sling's trial reportage for a few reasons. First, because legal proceedings aim so determinedly for objectiveness, the simultaneous process of trial reporting seems able to afford a certain amount of emotional generosity. Just how different this approach is from the objectivity of the court can be seen in comparison with another document produced from trial proceedings, the

Urteil, an efficient, specific, and above all purely expository record of the facts (*Sachverhalt*) and a corresponding legal interpretation (*Rechtliche Würdigung*) written by the presiding judge. Second, because Sling's process is not pure emotionalism, it is controlled feeling, with emotions carefully harvested and rigorously vetted. Sling describes his work further as the practice of a "responsible, subjective creation," the "suggestive notification" of one's own experience, which is "only possible in the compressed form of a newspaper report through the use of artistic methods."³² These methods include a mixed bag of literary devices and strategies traditionally associated with works of fiction. The greatest impact is made by Sling's flexibility with rhetorical modes, stepping beyond the exposition dominant in standard court reporting to a finer reliance on description and narration, which expand both the content and the form of the trial report.

2. Sling and Description

The descriptive mode's clearest contribution to court-focused journalism is an elevated sense of place. For Berlin this was no small matter. The architecture and the atmosphere of the Moabit criminal court were famously imposing, for defendants, for casual visitors, even for journalists, as *Berliner Tageblatt's* Gabriele Tergit was willing to concede. Tergit felt so intimidated on her first visit to Moabit that "I went through the courthouse, up the stairs, but I couldn't bring myself to open the courtroom door."³³

Most newcomers to Moabit were more in need of a Virgil than the usual "intermediaries between the two worlds," the court's civil servants and the regular members of the press, whose tools of demystification were limited to the stenographic report or the juridical critique.³⁴ Sling was better equipped to introduce the uninitiated to the sights and sounds of the court, as his lyrical portrait of the courthouse, "Die Atmosphäre von Moabit" (The Atmosphere of Moabit), demonstrates. "Soundlessness," Sling explains,

is one of the eerie components of the Moabit atmosphere. The pompous staircase, with its dreary and unfelt ornaments of sandstone allegories, is nearly always deserted. Sometimes a small troop of witnesses ascends the stairs, gathers in front of a chamber door. A few lawyers scurry in their robes across the corridors, or a state's attorney is called from his office, where he had retired during the deliberation of the court. One hears the voice of a guard, summoning a case, a witness. Very rarely, and all the more alarming, . . . the angry outburst of the convicted, the trumpet-like bickering of parties, whose argument has resumed outside of the courtroom. But otherwise silence.³⁵

In Sling's hands, the architecture of the court provides not only mood but metaphor for the potentially alienating nature of the justice system. Like

the courthouse it describes, the article is dominated by the entryway's enormous, dueling set of stairs, which cross upon each other with the visual effect of a Möbius strip. This main staircase "leads the visitor in from the street" as another hidden system of stairs "takes the detained accused on secretive paths from the holding prison directly into the courtroom. If in the courtroom a direct incarceration is ordered: a door opens, a figure is swallowed."³⁶ The overall effect is disorientation only by degrees less haunting than in Kafka's secret court. Passive language reinforces an impression of the lack of human agency, while the court, like all sprawling institutions, seems to take on a life of its own ("a door opens, a figure is swallowed"). In the end, a living building stands in contrast to its legal professionals, "agents" of "this tiered world," the real "victims of Moabit," who are "closed in the armor of correctness, fossilized like the ridiculous allegorical figures in the entryway."³⁷

On its own, this article reflects an inhumanity, seemingly inherent to the court, which also inspired his colleagues' grim, industrial picture of the same place, Tucholsky's "Moabit justice factory" or Goldstein's "machine that produces judgments."³⁸ But with every additional article, Sling's court becomes more animated, its chambers populated with unique and lively characters. This process is aided by description-heavy passages, which offer elevated insight into individual character on all sides of the bench. On the administrative side, Sling complicates the dismissive stereotype of the authoritarian and remote Prussian judiciary with a multitude of portraits, revealing a wide scope of talents and challenges: of good judges, exhausted judges, young and old judges, even the most brittle of them, like "Der Beamte" (The Civil Servant), not fossilized but sitting elevated at the tribune "rosy, correct, and decorative with a silver braid on his velvet cap."³⁹

But his best efforts are spent on unusual, colorful representations of those on trial, drawing on all cultural tools available. Over the years he tries out references to ancient history, to classical myth, and to contemporary literature. A thieving prostitute appears as an ironic Phyrne and brawling horse dealers as satyrs; other trials feature "Ibsenesque misunderstood women" and "Strindbergian martyred men."⁴⁰ More humorous is Sling's liberal use of zoomorphism. The court becomes a bestiary of criminality as colluders in real estate fraud are transformed into a flock of bickering birds,⁴¹ as a pimp's spiritual monstrosity is betrayed in his blubbery, seal-like appearance,⁴² or as a piscine writer angrily confronts the judge:

Accused and brought into the courtroom by an exceedingly cheerful constable of the court, a writer, whose name evokes the image of the most pleasant time of the year. The name equinoctial storm would be in view of this lady an inappropriate flattery, so let's call her Miss November. The charges

list coercion, breach of the domestic peace, insult and theft.

How she stood there, with tiny malicious eyes in the massive face, the strong mandible clapping up and down through uninterrupted speech, she resembled one of those grotesque fishes, which vents their tropical snouts on the glass walls of the aquarium.⁴³

The overall achievement of such description-laden texts lies in the clear and lively impressions they produce, which bring to focus details unimportant to the court's execution of the law but fundamental to understanding the dynamic of the trial and the character of those present. Sling's ability to recreate this dynamic for the benefit of readers not only aroused public interest in small, seemingly insignificant court cases, but also helped provide a greater social context for them. Read as a whole, the collected transgressions of individual defendants yield an elevated sense of the character of Weimar criminality. Sling's group portrait contains some of the era's most sensational offenses but is mainly populated by common citizens committing acts of everyday crime, that which Elder describes as misdeeds "between spouses and lovers, coworkers and schoolmates, friends and neighbors," with motives ranging from "sexual aggression [to] robbery, revenge, economic despair."⁴⁴

Unsurprisingly, Sling's reflection of Weimar crime hinges strongly on this final complaint. Not just crimes against property, domestic abuse, murder, even increases in insult become "compelling representatives of [Weimar's] inflationary culture."⁴⁵ And beyond the stock characters of the swindler, the thief, and the cat burglar, Sling places before his readers average people pushed to the edge, like the subject of his final article. In "Die große Wut des kleinen Mannes" (The Great Anger of the Little Man), the defendant stands accused of attempting to murder a colleague who, under the promise of a job, swindled him out of his last pennies, and who, when tried in court, received only a light sentence and probation. He begins:

In the dock of the large jury courtroom, the scrawny figure of the little old engraver seems to get lost, and one does not want to believe what offense brought him here: attempted murder. He is sixty-five years old, led a life full of work and disappointment, never did anything wrong before—and then he too had to try out murder.⁴⁶

The "he too" here is significant, a brief nod to the popular impression of the postwar rise in violence, although both the judge's gentle sentence (four months, one week incarceration) and Sling's interpretation show no ambivalence in placing guilt on external forces, which propel even "those of sweet temper" to "the hour when all patience and forbearance are consumed, when the heart is exposed, when the vengeful hand raises: shoots and stabs."

Accounts of violent crime from the ranks of “upstanding citizens”—such as police officers, schoolteachers, and civil servants—further blur the borders between the behavior of the bourgeois citizen and the criminal outsider.⁴⁷ One of the most sensational trials of 1924 is case in point. Limestone quarry director Fritz Angerstein was tried and convicted of killing eight people, primarily members of his household, with an axe. Angerstein’s gruesome crime makes him far less sympathetic than the old engraver of the previous case, and more shocking to the public as a sign of social and moral disintegration. But nevertheless Sling shows him to be a carrier of a similar moral. In Sling’s account, Angerstein was “not in any way somehow a noteworthy person, and we all would have passed by this petit-bourgeois without noticing him. But he was hardly what one might call an unlikeable person.” The normality of the man is what makes his crime all the more penetrating. “Angerstein’s crime is ours,” Sling writes. “[W]ho doesn’t know from himself or other persons nearby the sudden outbreaks, which—often for insignificant reasons—show a good husband to be an insupportable tyrant, a loving father as a Tartar? Just how far is the path to a crime?”⁴⁸

3. Sling and Narrative

The bigger reach across rhetorical modes is Sling’s narrative style, a creative use of voice and point of view, which at times included stylized narrative framing, the reconstruction of dialogue, and a strong authorial presence.⁴⁹ The biggest distinction between this “subjective” narrative style and objective reporting is not an emphasis on storytelling per se. For even the most conventional stenographic report gives a chronological summary of the courtroom happenings: beginning with the backstory of the crime, proceeding through excerpts of the courtroom examination, and concluding with the judge’s verdict. Rather, the difference lies in the freedom to follow other plotlines, and in this sense, the potential of narrative for trial reportage extends not only to style but also to content.

Sling’s articles regularly deviate from the standard report’s story of the crime in order to emphasize the story of the court procedure, one that is itself a narrative process. The first goal of the presiding judge is the construction of a legally acceptable record of events, filtered from information given in evidence. This narrative, the *Sachverhalt*, is important in its own right as an official version of what happened. It also forms the necessary basis for the judgment and sentence, two more landmarks in an even greater, socially significant story arc.⁵⁰

The advantage of the narrative approach over the stenographic is in part ideological. Narrative can complicate the picture of causality offered in the

Urteil, present also in the standard report's face-value presentation of crime, conviction, and punishment. An example of this critical potential in action is Sling's treatment of testimony, the narrative motor behind every trial. For his purposes, this method of evidence not only provides emotionally rich moments of interaction between the judge and other participants, it also offers a way to highlight complications in the legal process. Take, for instance, "Der Sachverständige" (The Expert Witness), in which an eyewitness attempts to give an adequate account of the drinking that preceded a murder.⁵¹ Despite exertion spent on "an exceedingly correct pronunciation," he cannot find the acceptable words to answer the judge's question about the defendant's state of inebriation:

Witness: "He was dead drunk."

Presiding Judge: "Whether he was 'dead' drunk or not, that decision you have to leave to the court. You are not an expert witness, rather an eyewitness. Was he drunk or not—"

Witness: "He was so drunk that he no longer knew what he was doing."

Presiding Judge (somewhat agitated): "I told you, you aren't supposed to give testimony as an expert witness."

Witness (has no idea what he is supposed to say).

Presiding Judge: "Did the defendant stagger?"

Witness: "One can be completely drunk without staggering."

Presiding Judge (exasperated): "For heaven's sake—how often do I have to tell you, that you are not an expert witness but an eyewitness!"⁵²

Here Sling uses dialogue, a tool of the stenographic report, but to a different end, not to repeat the story of the crime but to show the difficulty of its establishment. The problem isn't a lack of information, but a lack of understanding. The witness doesn't comprehend the difference between these two kinds of testimony, and the judge doesn't think to explain the difference. Between the two, however, the judge is more to blame; his struggle to elicit legally useful information happens despite the diligence of his eyewitness, an ironic outcome of the strict maintenance of courtroom procedure, which allows "one [to] express any sort of impressions before the court—just not in the vocabulary that lies within the [expert's] operating range."⁵³

Just as procedure can burden testimony, testimony can burden the efficacy of the court, as "Der Fassadenkletterer" (The Façade Climber) illustrates.

This article reports on the suspended trial of a façade-climbing thief, who was pushed out of an upper story window during a scuffle with the target of his intended crime. Sling takes advantage of wordplay and a creative structure to emphasize the narrative ambiguity behind the trial's indefinite postponement:

Der Fall des Fassadenkletterers von Kaiserhof, Wihlelm Kaßner, zerfällt in drei Abschnitte, erstens einen realistisch-romantischen, zweitens einen schwindligen und drittens einen zweifelhaften.

(The case of the Kaiserhof façade-climber, Wihlelm Kaßner, falls into three sections, the first realistic-romantic, the second dizzy, and the third dubious.)⁵⁴

Three uses of the word “fall” appear in this opening sentence: one meaning “case,” another literally the act of falling, and finally the verb *zerfallen*, “to fall apart,” which Sling uses to describe the story's structure. Sling also plays with *schwindlig*, the quality of dizziness associated with Kaßner's fall, which Sling also attributes to the contradicting testimonies of perpetrator and victim (*schwindel* means “fraud”). The court could expect a statement by Kaßner, a repeat offender facing a stiff sentence, to be inventive. But that his target, a businessman from Zurich, would also stretch the truth in his account, and to such an extent that he leaves Berlin in order to avoid perjuring himself, comes as a surprise. Two further attempts to explain what took place from the perspective of the court are equally unproductive, leaving the question posed outright by our bemused author—“[w]hich account is the right one?”—unanswered, and the trial unfinished.⁵⁵

These two playful accounts may have provoked little more than amusement among contemporary readers. Sling's coverage of perjury, though, demonstrates the potential of a narrative style to do more than entertain and inform. In a deluge of articles, Sling reported on the staggering, mid-decade increase in perjury charges facing Moabit.⁵⁶ Numerous articles recount the smallest lies told in the pettiest of disputes, over insults hurled across family kitchens, over worthless pieces of property.⁵⁷ Other reports reveal witnesses regularly and thoughtlessly perjuring themselves to conceal furtive sexual behavior, or to demonstrate misguided loyalty.⁵⁸ These lies, far from relevant to the conviction of serious crime, or even any crime at all, still occurred under oath, and as such carried a minimum sentence of one-year imprisonment. Story by story, Sling's articles demonstrated how poorly the court's procedure of administering sworn oaths (prior to witness statements) actually served their function. Meant to add an additional layer of verisimilitude to witness statements, these blanket oaths often only served to send otherwise

law-abiding citizens to jail. The narrative packaging of this reform-minded message proved more persuasive than statistics or polemics alone. Sling's stories were widely credited for generating interest for the necessary legislative reform, which passed in the Reichstag in 1930.⁵⁹

Much in the same way that Sling's use of description captures the mood and character of the court's various participants, his use of narrative in theme and mode provides a highly detailed reflection of the court's inner workings. The insight offered in these creative narratives is largely structural, not political.⁶⁰ They illuminate the complexity inherent to the courtroom process, so often obscured by the apparent causality of prosecution, judgment, and sentence. The closure drawn from the transformation of muddled reality into an orderly story is a necessary part of the court's social function. But, as the excerpts above suggest, the work of the court is by no means a conclusive process. In the end a case can be solved, but whether it can ever be adequately explained is less clear.

The open-ended nature of this juridical interpretation, however, was not meant pessimistically. The hope of Sling's subjective style—of description, of narrative, of humor, and other appeals to sentiment—is to fill in the gaps by getting at an emotional truth inaccessible to, or at least unusable for, the law. As modest as this ambition may be, its impact can be significant. As Sling's articles on perjury show, the reach of a politically neutral, literary approach can extend beyond empathetic engagement to concrete political change.

Conclusion

The feuilleton's presence in the courtroom left a lasting impression, even after Schlesinger's sudden death on May 22, 1928. During his fiftieth birthday celebration, Schlesinger suffered a heart attack on the dance floor in the arms of a young painter and died hours later.⁶¹ On May 25, a large crowd of press colleagues, legal professionals, and lay readers gathered in the leafy, suburban cemetery Stahnsdorfer Waldfriedhof to pay their respects. They also responded in print: an outpouring of obituaries and letters to the editor praised Sling as the "conscience of Moabit," for his ability to make all figures in the courtroom feel visible and adequately represented in the public eye. Fewer openly addressed Schlesinger, the stylist. Only the president of Berlin's superior court wondered with some incredulity that an "artist by nature" would devote his "best labor on small-time criminality."⁶²

Writers understood better. Under Sling's gentle cultivation, attitudes toward trial reporting among journalists had turned completely, from a disregarded field of reporting to a culturally relevant, even artistic genre. As early as 1924, Gabriele Tergit began to test her literary skills in Moabit, and quick-

ly “every Berlin newspaper had to have its little Sling.”⁶³ In addition to liberal dailies like the *Vossische Zeitung* and the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the left-leaning *Weltbühne*, the communist *Rote Fahne*, even the conservative *Berlin Lokal-Anzeiger*, took their piece of the courtroom drama. The most successful new courtroom reporters were people of belles-lettres: dramatists and novelists like Goldstein and Tergit, who freely admitted “if Sling had not made artworks out of trial reports, none of us would have been seized by this profession.”⁶⁴ That in the last decades, authors of newsprint and book alike continue to find the courtroom worthy of cultural attention is also Sling’s legacy. From the formerly exiled, postwar reporter Gerhart Hermann Mostar of the *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, who regularly cited Sling as his role model, to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*’s current trial reporter, Hans Holzhaider, who recently edited a new collection of Sling’s work, Schlesinger continues to be remembered not simply as the original, but as *Der Spiegel*’s trial reporter Gerhard Mauz claimed, “the only really legendary German trial reporter.”⁶⁵

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Notes

1. Gerd K. Schneider, "The Social and Political Context of Schnitzler's *Reigen*," in *A Companion to the Works of Arthur Schnitzler*, ed. Dagmar G. Lorenz (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2003), 27–58. *Reigen* was initially objected to as pornographic in nature and thus corruptive for young people. Due to active pamphleteering by the local sections of the Nazi Party, which pointed out that the author, director, and portions of the cast were Jewish, the criticisms quickly took on an anti-Semitic nature. Anti-Semitism played such a strong role in the trial that defense attorney Dr. Rosenberger argued that the "fight wasn't against *Reigen*, but rather a fight against the Jews." The trial ended with an acquittal on November 18, 1921.
2. Sling, "Reigen vor Gericht," in *Der Mensch, der schießt*, ed. Hans Holzhaider (Dusseldorf: Lillienfeld Verlag, 2013), 267. All English translations of German texts have been provided by the essay's author.
3. Otto Groth, *Die Zeitung*, vol. 2 (Berlin: J. Bensheimer, 1928), 422. Moritz Goldstein, quoted in Daniel Siemens, *Metropole und Verbrechen. Die Gerichtsreportage in Berlin, Paris und Chicago 1919–1933* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 68. Siemen's important German-language study on Weimar trial reportage is the only scholarly work to discuss Sling's trial coverage at length, although Siemen's interest lies in investigating the genre's social role as intermediary between the public and the justice system, and does not undertake stylistic analysis of Sling's texts or address the implications of style on the genre's formation or reception. Further information on Sling is limited to the forewords of the three collections of his work: *Richter und Gerichtete* (1929, reissued 1969), *Der Fassandenkletter vom "Kaiserhof."* *Kriminalfälle aus den zwanziger Jahren* (1989) and *Der Mensch, der schießt* (2013).
4. Not only was the method of transcription the dominant style of trial reporting, it was also largely the work of one journalist, Oskar Thiele, whose reports were bought by many of the Berlin dailies. See Sling, "Die Gerichtsberichterstattung," *Berliner Presse* 16.46, November 20, 1926, 1–2.
5. Hett, 51. Siemens, 62.
6. Johnson, 86. Sace Elder, *Murder Scenes. Normality, Deviance, and Criminal Violence in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 19.
7. Quoted in Imtraud Ubbens, *Sein Kampf für Recht, Freiheit, und Anstand war notorisch. Moritz Goldstein—"Inquit." Journalist und Gerichtberichterstatte an der Berliner "Vossische Zeitung" von 1918 bis 1933* (Bremen: edition lumière, 2009), 198.
8. Franz von Holtzendorff, *Wesen und Wert der öffentliche Meinung* (1880), quoted in Groth, *Die Zeitung*, 943.
9. Groth, 942.
10. Sling, "Die Gerichtsberichterstattung," 1–2.
11. Walter Kiaulehn, *Berlin, Schicksal einer Weltstadt* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1981), 505.
12. Sling, "Reigen vor Gericht," in *Der Mensch*, 269.
13. Such was the fate of Hugo Friedländer, the only Wilhelmine-era court re-

porter to have his articles collected, reviewed among others by Kurt Tucholsky, who deemed them “dumb and kitschy newspaper reports, useful only as light-weight refreshment for the memory.” Hugo Friedländer. *Mörder-Verräter-Attentäter. Gerichtsreportagen aus dem Kaiserreich*. eds. Gideon Botsch and Christoph Kopke (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg, 2008), 7–9.

14. Significant to Sling’s time was a series of modernist case histories, initiated in the mid-1920s, called *Außenseiter der Gesellschaft: Die Verbrechen der Gegenwart*, to which writers like Alfred Döblin, Egon Erwin Kisch, and Theodor Lessing contributed. Todd Herzog, *Crime Stories. Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2009), 34–56.

15. Sling, “Wie ich Gerichts-Berichterstatter wurde,” in *Der Mensch*, 20–22.

16. Sling also wrote paperback novels and children’s plays for Ullstein Buchverlag.

17. These pieces have been collected in Sling, *Die Nase der Sphynx oder Wie die Berliner so sind*. ed. Ruth Greuner (Berlin: Buchverlag Der Morgen, 1987).

18. Moritz Goldstein, *Berliner Jahre. Erinnerungen 1880–1933* (Munich: Verlag Dokumentation, 1977), 122. My survey of the *Vossische Zeitung*’s digital archives verifies this memory. From 1921 to 1928, Sling’s feuilletonistic contributions appeared several times a month, within either the entertainment pages or the local news supplement. By 1924, the majority of Sling’s articles were courtroom feuilleton, appearing initially under the fitting heading of “Moabiter Spiegel” [Moabit Mirror], http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/list/title/zdb/27112366/?no_cache=1.

19. Felix Hollaender, quoted in Alois Wosnitzka, ed. *Das Neue Kriminalgericht in Moabit, Festschrift zum 100. Geburtstag am 17. April 2006* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2006), 62.

20. Sling, “Wie ich Gerichtsberichterstatter wurde,” 20.

21. The Berlin public’s interest in crime is reflected not only in mass public involvement with high-profile criminal investigations but also in the popularity of crime-themed entertainment. To name a few examples, Fritz Lang packed the cinemas with tales of omnipotent criminals (*Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*, 1922), and child murder (*M*, 1931). Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weil’s gangster Macheath delighted audiences at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm (*Die Dreigroschenoper*, 1928), and Alfred Döblin fictionalized the criminal life in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929).

22. Elder, 45. Herzog, 2.

23. German criminal law bases its decisions for conviction on three required elements: the *Tatbestand* (the facts of what happened), *Rechtswidrigkeit* (possibility of self-defense), and *Schuld* (possibility of guilt). The *Tatbestand* covers “objective” and “subjective” elements; however, this “subjektiver Tatbestand” refers only to a basic, elementary awareness of the facts of situation. The German and American systems differ in other fundamental ways, mentioned briefly in the body of this text: German cases are decided by a judge and not by jury, decisions rely on legislation, not case law, and judges actively participate in German trials instead of remaining impartial referees like in American trials. See Richard S. Frase and Thomas Weigend,

“German Criminal Justice as a Guide to American Law Reform: Similar Problems, Better Solutions?,” *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 18, no. 2 (January 1995): 317–360.

24. Janet Malcolm, *The Crime of Shelia McGough* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 26.

25. Justice received its fair share of fictionalization during the Weimar era, too, in such novels as Franz Werfel’s *Der Abituriententag* (1928) and Lion Feuchtwager’s *Erfolg* (1930), and plays like Bertolt Brecht’s *Die Maßnahme* (1930).

26. H.H. Bormann, quoted in Sling, *Richter und Gerichtete*, ed. Robert M.W. Kempner (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1969), 7.

27. Ostensibly an abbreviation of his last name, Schlesinger, Sling is—in German—a phonetically powerful though quite meaningless *nom de plume*. Other court commentators of this generation also hid their identities behind the open secret of a pen name: Moritz Goldstein went by “Inquit.” Gabriele Tergit was the more known pseudonym of Elise Reifenberg née Hirschmann, who also wrote under Christian Thomasius. Fritz Hampel of the *Rote Fabne* was known as “Slang.”

28. Sling, “Wer ich bin,” in *Das Sling Buch* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1924), 7–9.

29. Sling, “Wie ich Gerichts-Berichterstatter wurde,” 14.

30. “Richter,” *Die Weltbühne* 22 (May 29, 1928): 849.

31. Sling, “Wie ich Gerichts-Berichterstatter wurde,” 15.

32. Ibid.

33. Gabriele Tergit, *Etwas Seltenes überhaupt* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1983), 10.

34. Sling, “Die Atmosphäre von Moabit,” in *Der Mensch*, 16.

35. Ibid, 15–16.

36. Ibid, 16.

37. Ibid, 19.

38. Kurt Tucholsky, quoted in Wosnitzka, *Neue Kriminalgericht*, 69. gol (Mortiz Goldstein), ? “Vom Tagewerk der Justiz. Der Apparat,” *Vossische Zeitung*, February 11, 1923, 5.

39. Especially relevant are Sling’s “Richterportraits aus Moabit,” in *Richter und Gerichtete*, 294–301.

40. Sling, “Phryne Ohne,” in *Der Mensch, der schießt*, 318–320; “Berlinische Satyrspiel,” in *Der Mensch, der schießt*, 155–157; “Der böse Mann und die böse Frau,” in *Der Mensch, der schießt*, 227–230.

41. Sling, “Der Geier, der Adler, der Kiebitz und die Rose,” in *Richter und Gerichtete*, 236–239.

42. Sling, “Das Untier,” in *Der Mensch*, 312–213.

43. Sling, “Die Schriftstellerinnen,” in *Der Mensch*, 237.

44. Elder, 8.

45. Johnson, 192.

46. Sling, “Die grosse Wut des kleinen Mannes,” in *Der Mensch*, 91–93.

47. Examples of such perpetrators include accounts of domestic homicide by a schoolteacher in “Dr. Bruno Schreiber,” in *Der Mensch*, 37–39, or by political personalities in “Sanitätsrat Böhme,” in *Der Mensch*, 39–44, and “Der Fall Heydeb-

rand," in *Der Mensch*, 66–69.

48. Sling, "Angerstein," in *Der Mensch*, 35–37.

49. Here I borrow from Harold B. Segel's definition of narrative style given in *Egon Erwin Kisch, the Raging Reporter* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1997), 75. The import of narrativity to journalistic genres outside of the feuilleton was not solely Sling's innovation. In the years following World War I, literary-minded reporters, particularly those writing under the banner of New Objectivity, found narrative an innovative, useful way to render first-hand experiences.

50. The trial receives its social significance particularly from the punishment assigned at the end, which—according to the philosophy of criminal law—provides communities with the functions of rehabilitation, prevention, and retribution. The effectiveness of the existing penal code in fulfilling these functions was debated with some intensity in the 1920s. See Sling, "Der Mensch der schießt," in *Der Mensch*, 13–15.

51. Sling, "Der Sachverständige," in *Der Mensch*, 378–379.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 379.

54. Sling, "Der Fassadenkletterer," in *Richter und Gerichtete*, 183.

55. *Ibid.*, 185.

56. By all accounts, the Emminger Reforms of 1924 acted as the catalyst for the increase in perjury convictions. This reform, intended as a money-saving measure, abolished Germany's limited use of juries, replacing them with professional judges. The expanded role of the judge led to a greater likelihood for conviction for cases of perjury, which in turn led to a sharp increase in the number of perjury charges initiated by the state's attorney. Perjury convictions rose from 407 Germany-wide in 1923 to 925 in 1924, and to 1,445 in 1925. Elder, 58.

57. Sling, "Die Familie und der Staat," in *Der Mensch*, 338–340; Sling, "Die spacke Waschwanne," in *Der Mensch*, 348–350.

58. Sling, "Die er kennt, sagt er Du," in *Der Mensch*, 343–346; Sling, "Die Meineidskönigin," in *Der Mensch*, 346–348.

59. Gustav Radbruch, for one, mentions Sling's role in testimonial reform in his foreword to *Richter und Gerichtete*, 11. The reformed law in the German Code of Criminal Procedure required witnesses to be sworn in at the judge's discretion, only when the statement has a direct bearing on the outcome of the case, and only after giving statement (§ 59 StPO) minimum penalty was also lowered, from one year to six months incarceration (§154 StGB), Thomas Vormbaum, *Eid, Meineid, und Falschaussage. Reformdiskussion und Gesetzgebung seit 1870* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1990), 104–112.

60. While Sling's articles were clearly motivated by a liberal world view, they were nevertheless independent of the political ideology driving the discussion of the Weimar judiciary in the 1920s. One such discussion revolved around the so-called crisis of trust in the justice system (*Vertrauenskrise der Justiz*), a perennial complaint about the political and class bias of the German judiciary, which had been reinitiated by the *Vossische Zeitung's* legal editor Erich Eyck in 1926, and heatedly debated

in the press by its more politically engaged members. Based on his collected work, Sling seems to have only mentioned this discussion in passing (“Der Strafrichter,” *Der Mensch*, 364–367). A more thorough culling of Sling’s articles online may reveal a more engaged participation, but the overall impression left by Sling’s collected coverage is a sympathetic and generally positive appraisal of the Berlin judiciary. Whether Sling’s situation outside the left-liberal party line is indicative of personal ideology or simply a matter of the critical limits of the feuilletonistic style may be difficult to determine. For a more detailed discussion of the Weimar *Vertrauenskrise*, see Siemens, 114–135.

61. Monty Jacobs, *Vossische Zeitung*, May 23 1923, 8.

62. Dr. Alfred Gerstel, quoted in Sling, *Die Nase der Sphinx*, 241.

63. Goldstein, *Berliner Jahre*, 122.

64. Quoted in Siemens, 74.

65. Sling’s influence on Mostar is cited in Frauke Höbermann. *Der Gerichtsbericht in der Lokalzeitung: Theorie und Alltag* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 1989), 24. Holzhaider’s collection, *Der Mensch*, appeared in 2013. Mauz is quoted by Gerd Meister, *Strafblog.de*, accessed May 31, 2014 strafblog.de/2012/02/28/wenn-unschuldige-explodieren/.

Paul “Sling” Schlesinger’s Crime Reportage Written During His 1920s Heyday

Editor’s Note: The following four columns, “The Naked Man on the Meadow,” “The Beast,” “The Writers,” and “The Crumbs of Humanity” are examples of Paul “Sling” Schlesinger’s crime reportage, written during his 1920s heyday. **Translator’s Note:** I could not find the precise issue and page number for two of the four articles. The collections that have been published do not provide this information, and looking for specific articles in seven years’ worth of dailies (in an online archive) is a monumental task. For the two that I did not track down, I listed the publication information for a collection I found at the University of Illinois library.

The Naked Man on the Meadow

November 25, 1923, p. 5, *Vossische Zeitung*.

On the gigantic stairwell of the criminal courthouse, I met him, searching, confused, with a flowing, undulating, magnificently curling head of hair. Of course, here he wasn’t naked—he had a very proper sport coat and trousers, leather spats, Schiller collar. He was strenuously searching for Portal V. “But my dear fellow, you’re already there—you now only need room 567.” Then he found that too. And after a bit of waiting he appeared before the appeals court.

The lay assessor’s court had sentenced him, due to disruption of the public order, to one month’s imprisonment, because he had the habit of walking around and working, in a piece of meadow he leased, completely naked. Now he had applied for an appeal, accidentally only against the sentence, the punishable offense he had admitted to. Yet he had not been forbidden from explaining his point of view.

Actually a handsome man, his low but not un noble brow under soft hair, parted down the middle, his unusual, dreamy, large brown eyes, the small, thin, rather downward sloping mustache—almost the head of a young

cavalry officer from Wallenstein's army. But when he opened his mouth, a colorfast, coarse Berlinisch poured forth, softened from the inside through some kind of world view.

Which is very simple. First of all, it is better to work in the heat of the day when one isn't wearing anything. Second, he didn't do anything immoral. He works exactly in the costume in which he was born. Also, there is no public path nearby, and he didn't understand the offense, the scandal.

The presiding judge regrets, for reasons of procedure, he isn't able to respond, since only the sentence is contested. And by the way, he wasn't convicted of indecent behavior but of a disturbance of the public order.

The curly-haired man smiles and says: "When I walk down the street with my long hair and people call after me, aren't I also provoking or disturbing the public order?" The judges smile. One of the assessors asks: "Couldn't you at least wear a bathing suit?"

And the curly-haired man smiles again, so mildly. "But swimming suits are harmful, and genitalia should be healthy!"

The state's attorney coolly motions to reject the appeal.

The court, however, alters the prison sentence to the highest fine allowed: ten billion.

And the man from the meadow goes happily along his way.

The Beast

May 27, 1924, p. 13, *Vossische Zeitung*

Like a seal trying to hobble to land, the small man stands behind the dock of the arraignment room, with a wool scarf around his fat, collarless neck, both flippers left and right propped up, between them his ball-round, cleanly shaven head. Further similarities to a seal cannot be drawn without offending this noble and lovable animal race; for it was not the seal's idea that men live off the sad profession of women. This occupation, too, was thought up by intelligent mankind.

The judge, the state's attorney, the police detective as an expert witness, yes, the accused, and witnesses negotiate the trial with a noticeable routine. It is so typical; the girl had, in an attack of desperation, reported the man to the police. Now, just as in the first trial, so in the appellate court, she doesn't want to know anything about it anymore. In the meantime, she has been worked

over by her associates. If she stands by the truth, she is threatened with violence; internally, she is coolly determined to perjure herself. Maybe she knows the judge won't take her under oath after all—even if he threatens to. She is anyway cool and resigned, with her hatless, shaggy, straw-yellow hair framing a gaunt wax-pale face. Resigned but not dumb and dull. Silently, her gray eyes look over to the judge.

The trial runs like clockwork. The detective says, “as is generally known,” the state’s attorney says “according to experience,” and the judge says “it’s just always the case.” A witness, a fifty-eight-year-old, still-practicing veteran of the trade, brings a certain light gruesomeness to the ensemble. Her uncalled-for cynicism bore a few punch lines of horrible edginess. One time she appealed to the expert knowledge of the judge: “How is a man supposed to live from that girl? Just look at her—does she look like a big earner?” Another opinion was heard, of course—a contradictory statement—in the preliminary hearing. One time, in a surge of morality, she wanted to prevent the accused from stealing. So she said, “Why do you go and steal when you have a nice girl out walking?”

Naturally, the profession of the accused is denied, and the girl is not placed under oath. But shortly before the court retires, an unusual happening occurs in this otherwise ordinary and businesslike trial. The judge lowers his voice and says very softly and with great emphasis:

Accused, you know that the witness is about to, on your behalf, swear an oath that will land her in prison. The girl was once close to you, and it can't be your wish to cause her imprisonment. I know, accused, who you are and what you are and I still believe in the bit of honor in you. I appeal to your honor as a man, since the girl is lying because of you. Tell the truth.

The judge's voice becomes quite warm. No person in the courtroom can help but be moved. And look: Out of the gray eyes of the straw-blond girl tears fall. The corners of her mouth twitch, and over her crying is something like a triumph song: She is still a human being!

Only the beast at the dock feels nothing. “I told you, your honor, that I did not take any money. More than that I can't say.”

And stares vacantly forward. And keeps silent and waits . . . accepts his sentence . . . pulls in his flippers . . . dives under . . .

The Writers

Originally published in the *Vossische Zeitung*. Reprinted in *Richter und Gerichtete* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1969), 216–17.

The situation was already interesting in the corridor of the courthouse due to a garter, obviously a lady's, lying there, abandoned.

Accused and brought into the courtroom, a writer, whose name evokes the image of the most pleasant time of the year. The name Equinoctial Storm would be in view of this lady an inappropriate flattery, so let's call her Miss November. The charges list coercion, breach of the domestic peace, insult, and theft.

How she stood there, with tiny malicious eyes in the massive face, the strong mandible clapping up and down through uninterrupted speech, she resembled one of those grotesque fishes that vent their tropical snouts on the glass walls of the aquarium.

In the meantime, as she stood there, one could see from beneath her skirt—too short for any occasion—the other end of that abandoned garter, from which at the very least a concerned seeker could take some comfort.

Being content with a small room, Miss November had rented her two-room flat to another writer with a small child. It came to differences. Miss November broke into her renter's rooms in her absence, took belongings of the renter to secure payment, and allegedly had not surrendered them in their entirety to the investigating bailiff. She did, however, conduct an extremely ugly speech over her renter's love life, and repeated her suspicions in a typed letter. The presiding judge wants to know what kind of writer Miss November actually is.

"I am an editor."

"Where?"

"I am not saying until the appeals court." The facts of the case are also not easy to establish from the accused, since she is continually speaking about her renter's love life.

"And with married men!"

"It has been known to happen," the judge says mildly.

Now the renter scurries into the room, as the primary witness: the writer, here before the court, of course without her child. No, she is also no longer in the blossom of youth and actually hardly attractive. A hard and miserable life is chiseled into her face, but it has not eradicated the gracefulness of a floating soul.

"What do you write, then?"

"I am a poet."

"Have your poems been published in books?"

"No—only in magazines."

Her voice went through the room, sweet and soft. But Miss November didn't let up.

"And she had company with the lights turned out."

"But Miss November," warned the judge.

"When *I* have company the lights are *never* turned out!"

Which may certainly be true, but awful.

In the end, Miss November was sentenced to a 150-mark fine for coercion, unlawful entry, and insult. Immediately she wants to appeal.

"You should reconsider," the judge gives his opinion.

"No," says Miss November, storming out, and spring sunshine floods the room.

This curious chronicler couldn't help but inquire afterward in which field of literature the owner of the torn garter is employed.

According to reliable reports, Miss November is—a fashion writer.

The Crumbs of Humanity

Originally published in the *Vossische Zeitung*. Reprinted in *Richter und Gerichtete* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1969), 209–10.

Humanity is a big, not particularly sweet cake that crumbles. The dark, small lady slunk into the courtroom—as if played by Orska. She doesn't know what she is supposed to do, not even why she should. She shows a suggestive smile, the smile of an intelligent Russian Jewish woman, and she believes in this smile. She uses it first on the court bailiff, then on the young lawyer-in-training, acting on behalf of the state's attorney, and finally on the judge himself. One could believe she is from the Russian ballet. She is a seamstress.

The judge is not pleased with the story, for she struggles with the German language, and she continually repeats: "I don't understand why I should pay 300 marks."

"You have been staying here without permission."

"But where should I stay?"

"Why didn't you stay in America?"

"They deported me."

"You aren't American?"

"No, Russian."

"Why didn't you stay in Russia?"

"My parents immigrated with me to America ten years ago."

"Why didn't you go back to Russia?"

"They wouldn't allow me back in."

The judge consults his files. It's true. He wants to know one more thing.

"Why were you deported from America?"

"I got involved with bad company. My parents didn't want to help me, and I then was put on a German steamer. I arrived in Hamburg, and came to Berlin. So why should I pay 300 marks?"

No doubt it's all true. It is also proven that she had tried to get a passport to return to Russia. But the Soviet government won't give her one because her nationality is unclear.

What is she supposed to do?

The judge acquits her, since she has done all she can do to leave Germany, and because she has no opportunity to go anywhere else.

Later, I meet her in the corridor. She smiles at me and asks:

"What is my fate?"

"You have been acquitted."

"Thank you, much obliged."

And she slinks up the stairs.

Crumbs of humanity. Alive without any right to exist.

Neither the great land of Russia nor the great land of America has even the smallest space left over for her. Nor Germany. Blew off the table and left the crumbs lying on the earth.

If the crumbs took the law seriously, they would have to shoot themselves.

How can one live without permission?

One does.



Svetlana Alexievich, Oct. 14, 2013. Elke Wetzig/Wikipedia Creative Commons

The Literature in the Journalism of Nobel Prize Winner Svetlana Alexievich

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Abstract: For the first time the Nobel Prize in Literature has been awarded for literary journalism as revealed in the work of Belarusian author Svetlana Alexievich. Fundamentally, her approach has been to juxtapose the everyday details of life against the secular mythologies of the state. Moreover, she makes it clear that the intention of her journalism is to be literary. As such, she is part of a larger Russian tradition, as well as a tradition practiced in the Soviet Union and other communist countries during the Cold War. The following is excerpted and adapted from the author's forthcoming book, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*, to be published by the University of Massachusetts Press in 2016. Permission to reprint passages from the volume is gratefully acknowledged.

There is a scene in Svetlana Alexievich's account about the Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s when a wife recalls how she and her soldier-husband got married. They go to the marriage registry office in their village:

They took one look at us in the Village Soviet and said, "Why wait two months. Go and get the brandy. We'll do the paperwork." An hour later we were husband and wife. There was a snowstorm raging outside.

"Where's the taxi for your new wife, bridegroom?"

"Hang on!" He went out and stopped a Belarus tractor for me.¹

Such is how one wife recalls the nature of their admittedly modest nuptials, riding away with her husband not in a limousine (much less a taxi) as one might today, but in a snowstorm on a farm tractor. But the scene takes on a powerful poignancy, because we know that her husband has died in Afghanistan.

And such is the nature of Alexievich's literary method, to explore how

larger ambitions in the form of secular mythologies—in this case, the Soviet Afghanistan venture—had, in the details, so devastatingly scarred people's psyches.

The announcement in October that Alexievich had received the Nobel Prize for Literature was, of course, a validation for scholars of a narrative literary journalism. A review of past recipients since the award was established in 1901 reveals that she is the first journalist, and indeed literary journalist, to receive what is undoubtedly the most distinguished recognition in the world for literary endeavor.² This is not to suggest that earlier recipients did not engage in journalism. But the award is given for an author's collected works, and what we can detect is that most recipients have been primarily authors of fiction, drama, and poetry. Ernest Hemingway was awarded the Nobel, but despite his work as a journalist (and literary journalist), he established his reputation as a novelist and short story writer. Moreover, his *The Old Man and the Sea* was singled out as the most recent of his efforts at the time; clearly, his journalism was not on the award committee's collective mind. There were some nonfictionists, such as Winston Churchill, who received the award. But it was largely for his work as a historian, biographer, and orator. What makes Alexievich's oeuvre so distinctive is that her work is composed almost exclusively of a narrative literary journalism, or the semantic variants of literary reportage and reportage literature.³ But such is her ambition. As she has observed of her method, "Documentary prose ought to transcend the strict boundaries between the formats of literature and journalism."⁴ She is seeking, then, to violate boundaries.

And yet she remains largely unknown, at least in the United States, precisely because of the formats established by the academy's boundaries. The lack of recognition is revealed in the lack of scholarship about her in the major bibliographies. A review of the MLA International Bibliography, the bibliography dedicated to literary study, reveals not a single entry on Alexievich in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.⁵ But the literature academy is not the only guilty party. The same is true of the journalism academy, and more broadly the communication academy in which journalism and other media are often housed. There is not a single entry to be found in the journals of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the largest learned society in the United States dedicated to the interests of journalism.⁶ The absence serves as an indictment: We detect that these sectors of the academy continue to wear disciplinary blinders and are incapable of looking beyond their constricting boundaries to see a literary journalism that has now been awarded one of the most distinguished awards in the world. And this is, of course, because Alexievich does not hesitate to violate and subvert those boundaries.

In the following I will examine Alexievich's *Zinky Boys* to reveal what

makes her literary journalism so distinctive—and indeed distinguished. My focus is on the manner of her writing and her ambition to challenge secular mythologies by means of the details of everyday life, or what I call the “aesthetics of experience.” Moreover, I examine how she intends clearly for her journalism to be literary, and how her work fits into a larger tradition extant not only in Russia, but also in Communist countries prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A Challenger of Secular Myths

Alexievich (also transliterated as “Alexiyevich”)⁷ was brought to the attention of the anglophone world with the excerpt “Boys in Zinc” taken from her volume *Zinky Boys*.⁸ “Boys in Zinc” appeared in 1990 in the British magazine *Granta*, a significant outlet for literary journalism in the 1980s and 1990s. The same year saw the full book-length version published in Russian and Belorussian. The English translation, *Zinky Boys*, appeared in 1992. The excerpt and book provide an account of how Soviet citizens coped with the deaths of husbands, sons, and friends serving with the Soviet military in the Afghanistan. “Zinc” refers to the regulation zinc coffins in which the bodies were sent back to the Soviet Union.

Prior to the book’s publication in Russian, Alexievich was more widely known in the Soviet Union during the period of late Soviet decline as the author of *War’s Unwomanly Face*, an account of the memories of Soviet women from World War II.⁹ Since *Zinky Boys*, her other English-language publication is *Voices from Chernobyl*, published in 2005, initially published in Russian in 1997.¹⁰ *Voices from Chernobyl* provides an account of the survivors of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor accident in nearby Ukraine in 1986.

Although Alexievich is a Belorussian national, her literary language is equally Russian, which served of course as the lingua franca of the Soviet Union.

In “Boys in Zinc” and *Zinky Boys* Alexievich provides vignettes or sketches of the survivors for what in sum amounts to a kind of narra-descriptive polyphony: “They are not documents; they are images. I was trying to present a history of feelings, not the history of the war itself.”¹¹ We can see this in a moving example involving Tamara Dovnar, the wife of an army officer killed in the war, after he had told her, “You can’t imagine how much I don’t want to die for someone else’s country.”¹² When she arrives with his parents at an airport to pick up his coffin, this is what she found:

“We’ve come to collect . . .”

“Over there,” he pointed over to a far corner. “See if that box is yours. If it is, you can take it.”

There was a filthy box standing outside with “Senior Lieutenant Dovnar” scrawled on it in chalk. I tore the board away from where the window should be in a coffin. His face was in one piece, but he was lying in there unshaven, and nobody had washed him. The coffin was too small and there was a bad smell. I couldn’t lean down to kiss him. That’s how they gave my husband back to me. I got down on my knees before what had once been the dearest thing in the world to me.¹³

“Boys in Zinc,” I should emphasize, is not strictly a formal interview—Alexievich interviewing Tamara Dovnar in, for example, a standard Q&A. Alexievich’s style reconstructs not only the event but also how the event is told, so that it appears that the narrator—the Soviet wife Tamara—is speaking directly to us. But unlike in fiction, Alexievich is not creating a fictitious narrator. Rather she is giving “voice” to an identifiable speaker. Indeed, Alexievich describes such a form as a “voice genre.”¹⁴

Alexievich has selected details that would resonate more deeply across Soviet and Russian culture than, say, American. In the case of Soviet culture, they are details that assault official mythologies. For example, “And at that time people continued to talk and write about our internationalist duty, the interests of state, our southern borders.”¹⁵ In “internationalist duty” and “interests of state” we detect patriotic euphemisms. In effect, they were euphemistic totalizations elevated to mythic stature in the Soviet Union. (Even “southern borders” takes on a mythic status, because borders are designed to keep out what challenges myth as a self-contained and global totality.) They reflect, as Joseph Brodsky said of euphemism, the inertia of terror,¹⁶ a terror that becomes refracted through the revealing narra-description or stories Soviet citizens shared with Alexievich. It is here that she begins to undermine or break down myth, countering it with what the young soldiers and their families confronted in an open-ended or inconclusive reality, one for which the myth did not and could not account. As Alexievich notes: “The censors saw to it that reports of the war did not mention our fatalities. There were only rumours of notifications of death arriving at rural huts and of regulation zinc coffins arriving at prefabricated flats. I had not meant to write about war again, but I found myself in the middle of one.”¹⁷

Among other examples, an army private recalls, “They lined us up on the square and read out the order: ‘You’re going to the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan to do your internationalist duty.’ And, ‘Before our first battle they played the Soviet National Anthem.’ But such totalized invocations of “internationalist duty” and the “National Anthem” sounded hollow because of what the secular mythology could not account for: “After the battle we scraped our own guys off the armour plate with spoons. There weren’t any

identification discs for fatalities.”¹⁸ The phenomenal particulars undo the myths to which the Soviet government had attached the ship of the Soviet people’s lives. The familiar comforts of the myths have been confronted with the unfamiliar for which they cannot account.

A military nurse recalls: “They told us it was a just war. We were helping the Afghan people to put an end to feudalism and build a socialist society.” But it is the horror of amputated limbs “just dumped” that begins to unmask the myth for what it is: a death machine.

Twice a week we had political indoctrination. They went on about our sacred duty, and how the border must be inviolable. Our superior ordered us to inform on every wounded soldier, every patient. It was called monitoring the state of morale: the army must be healthy! We weren’t to feel compassion. But we did feel compassion: it was the only thing that held everything together.¹⁹

Thus the myths of “sacred duty” (invoked in the name of an officially atheist state, no less), “inviolable borders,” and building a “socialist society” are subverted by the seemingly simple but powerful response of a visceral heart-wrenching compassion, one that takes on an ultimate value for the speaker.

A regimental press officer recalls: “Out there you felt quite differently about your country. ‘The Union,’ we called it. It seemed there was something great and powerful behind us, something which would always stand up for us.”²⁰ But eventually the myth of “Union,” the totalitarian state as totalized signification, is inadequate in accounting for the phenomenal realities of war.

Similarly, the myths propagated by the media are revealed as no more than misleading media constructions:

I remember, though, the evening after one battle—there had been losses, men killed and men seriously injured—we plugged in the television to forget about it, to see what was going on in the Union. A mammoth new factory had been built in Siberia; the Queen of England had given a banquet in honour of some VIP; youths in Voronezh had raped two schoolgirls for the hell of it; a prince had been killed in Africa. The country was going about its business and we felt completely useless. Someone had to turn the television off, before we shot it to pieces.²¹

What, figuratively, they wanted to shoot to pieces were the euphemistic myths of a country “going about its business” propagated by the Soviet evening news, which could not begin to reflect the horror of war even if it wanted or were permitted to do so.

But as the example of Tamara Dovnar illustrates, the myths were challenged not just on the battlegrounds of Afghanistan. More important for Alexievich’s account, they were being challenged and subverted at home, because, as S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert Dardenne have noted of myth in jour-

nalism, “telling it like it was supposed to mean,” in this instance back in the comparative safety of the “Union,” was beginning to emerge as a lie.²² This is what “the Union,” that myth of what was to be an Edenic dictatorship of the proletariat, had come to, challenged by the open-ended present of experience.

Then there are the details that would resonate more deeply across Russian culture, lying like a palimpsest beneath the Soviet. For example, the matter of the husband’s body going unwashed is more than just one of hygiene and respect for the dead. Instead, the ritual washing of the dead is a necessary and sacred rite in Russian Orthodox funerals because it helps to release the soul from the body.²³ Similarly, the kissing of the dead is another important rite in Russian funeral culture.²⁴ In a sense what Tamara Dovnar was doing was returning to the older Russian cultural mythologies of her grandmothers in a repudiation of the Soviet.²⁵ That she had at least some knowledge of religion (as did many Russians during the Soviet period) in that officially atheistic state is reflected in her recollection that before she married she had a dream on Epiphany, which in the Russian Orthodox Church is the date of Jesus’s baptism. She dreamed that she would marry a man in uniform.²⁶ She knew what Epiphany was, and here we see the undoing of secular Soviet myth with, in this instance, a more ancient mythos.

“Who Are We, and Where Are We Going”

Alexievich makes it clear that what she is attempting to do is indeed intended to be literary. This is because she is reflexively literary in a way that we do not often see, at least with American authors; indeed, from an American perspective, she may appear too consciously aspiring to be literary. Because “Boys in Zinc,” as it appeared in *Granta*, is composed of excerpts, what is lost from editorial elisions are the literary references. In the complete volume *Zinky Boys*, the initial chapter that much of “Boys in Zinc” is adapted from serves to frame the book as not only a journalistic undertaking but as a literary one as well. Eleven literary references are deleted from the chapter in the *Granta* version, which are references to writers, poets, and literary critics. The first is to Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, with the quote “Each substance of grief hath twenty Shadows.”²⁷ Then in succession Alexievich cites the critic Yuri Karyakin, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Alexander Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Dostoevsky again, Leo Tolstoy, singer-songwriter-poet Vladimir Vissotsky, Dostoevsky still again, and poet Boris Slutsky.²⁸ Shakespeare, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy should need no introduction. Karyakin, Vissotsky, and Slutsky are less well known in the West.²⁹ Also notable in the English translation of the book is that except for pages one and eight, every page through the first ten contains at least one reference to a

figure of some literary import. What Alexievich is suggesting, then, in invoking such an accomplished roster is that journalism can indeed be literary. This is not to say that Americans do not make literary references. They often do as epigraphs prior to the start of the narrative. Truman Capote does it with *In Cold Blood*.³⁰ What is perhaps unique from an American perspective with regard to Alexievich is how frequent such references are in the first ten pages of the text.

It is the nature of the quotes—direct and indirect—from her literary sources that reveals her intent to undermine Soviet mythologies by means of a literary investigation. Shakespeare, the first, makes reference to multiplicities of meaning beyond the source of each trauma: “Each substance of grief hath twenty Shadows.” As an illustration, the Soviet state informed loved ones of the deaths in cursory fashion, as if the cursoriness—like euphemism’s avoidance of terror—would decrease the pain, at least for the messenger. “In fulfillment of my duty as a soldier, I have to inform you that Senior Lieutenant Valerii Gennadievich Volovich was killed today at 1045 hours,” reads one telegram quoted in “Boys in Zinc.”³¹ What could not be stemmed in the fulfillment of one’s “duty” were the haunting “shadows” of grief that hovered above the cursory bureaucratism of the telegram.

With that as an introduction, Alexievich continues to build her case that hers is to be read as a literary document, one that consistently assaults secular mythologies. She quotes from Karyakin: “We should not judge a man’s life by his perception of himself. Such a perception may be tragically inadequate.” In the inadequacy we detect what humans cannot know about themselves. Alexievich adds, “And I read something in Kafka to the effect that man was irretrievably lost within himself.” Thus, among other interpretations, we see the age-old admonition against hubris—of the fall from grace through one’s overweening pride. Of the mythos associated with the warrior in the form of martial splendor and heroism, Alexievich writes, “Dostoevsky described military men as ‘the most unthinking people in the world.’” So she attacks, not so indirectly, the Soviet army, liberator of civilization, in one mythology, from fascism during the Great Patriotic War, as World War II was called in the Soviet Union and in Russia today. Later, “To write (or tell) the whole truth about oneself is a physical impossibility, according to Pushkin.”³² In other words, the global or totalized conception of oneself is not possible, and we detect an excess beyond knowing, this from Pushkin, widely regarded as Russia’s greatest poet.³³

Alexievich’s invocation of Lermontov engages in a role reversal. The Soviet military, ostensibly a civilizing force, is reduced to engaging in barbarities. Alexievich writes:

In Lermontov's [fictional] *A Hero of Our Times*, Maximych [the framing narrator, who makes available the "diaries" of the main and now dead protagonist Pechorin] says of the mountain-tribesman who has killed Valla's father: "Of course, according to their lights he [the killer] was completely in the right"—although [Alexievich as author is speaking again] from the Russian's point of view the deed was quite bestial. Lermontov here pinpointed the amazing ability of Russians to put themselves into other people's shoes—to think according to their "lights," in fact.³⁴

To be bestial and commit atrocities, in other words. Alexievich's observation from *A Hero of Our Times* is reinforced later on the same page: "In Dostoevsky's novel *Ivan Karamazov* observes: 'No man can be as cruel, so exquisitely and artificially cruel, as man.'"³⁵ Such is the myth that an army can be "civilizing" in the name of one's "internationalist duty."

She cites Tolstoy's observation that "man is fluid," in the sense that in the interests of the State, that global conception, he is expendable. Vissotsky, again less known in the West, was a poet and songwriter. Alexievich listens to a tape cassette of "Afgantsi" songs sung by Soviet Afghan veterans that express their contempt for the ideals—the myths—that sent them to Afghanistan. "Childish, unformed voices, trying to sound like Vissotsky, croaked out: 'The sun set on the *kishlak* [Afghan village] like a great big bomb'; . . . 'Amputees like big birds hopping one-legged by the sea'; . . . 'There's no hatred in his face now he's dead.'"³⁶

Alexievich quotes Boris Slutsky, one of the Soviet war poets of World War II who rose to prominence during the cultural thaw after the death of Stalin in 1953: "When we returned from war / I saw we were needed no more."³⁷ Such is the dim view she presents of the Afghan venture.

But there is still an additional dimension to Alexievich's literary intentions, again intentions perhaps difficult to appreciate from the American pragmatic perspective but very much inherent in her invocation of Russian literature, which is strongly inflected with a philosophical and even spiritual dimension. I do not mean to make the argument that the literary modernists and New Critics tried to make, that literary meaning can be essentialized. Rather, I am discussing a perception in Russian letters. One detects this when Alexievich invokes the Christian existentialist (and deeply devout Russian Orthodox) thinker Nikolai Berdyaev, who was also a Dostoevsky scholar. Toward the end of the first chapter she quotes Berdyaev: "Russian writers have always been more interested in truth than beauty."³⁸ The quote is notable not only for the preference it expresses, truth over beauty, but also because it challenges what for so long in anglophone culture served those intent on a transcendental literature, namely the conclusion to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which has for some belletristic aesthetes come to represent the "essence"

of literary aesthetics: “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,’—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”³⁹ Berdyaev is rejecting the Western view that the study of aesthetics is the study of the beautiful, and suggesting that truth can be something different. If there is any beauty, it is in the revelation of whatever “truths,” or insights as I would prefer, are revealed. (Nor should the conclusion to Keats’s poem be mistaken for the aesthetic principle several lines earlier that makes an irony of those famous final lines, namely, that the aesthetic “teases us out of thought” with the possibilities of meaning; truth as beauty and beauty as truth are ironic because we can never know if that is the case if we are forever teased out of thought.) More to the point, in an example of how the literary and the spiritual (or metaphysical) invest Russian literature, Berdyaev said, in a volume about Dostoevsky, that the author of *Crime and Punishment*, *Notes from the Underground*, and *The Brothers Karamazov*, among others, “has played a decisive part in my spiritual life. . . . He stirred and lifted up my soul more than any other writer or philosopher.”⁴⁰

So Alexievich firmly plants herself in the tradition of Russian literature. Having done so, she is led to ask a fundamental question: “Who are we, and where are we going?” The question is directed at “Russian literary people.” But it could only resonate broadly with all Soviet readers. Following the question, she makes clear that secular myth is indeed the object of her attack: “And it dawns on us that nothing, not even human life, is more precious to us than our myths about ourselves. We’ve come to believe the message, drummed into us for so long, that we are superlative in every way, the finest, the most just, the most honest.”⁴¹ Much as the New Journalists often assaulted the values underlying American culture, she is attacking the values underlying Soviet culture. And those who doubt, she adds, will be accused of “treachery.”

On the next page she quotes Berdyaev again: “I have always been my own man, answerable to no-one.” Thus he positions himself outside the state, which of course would not endear him to the Soviet regime, which reviled him. Alexievich responds to Berdyaev’s quote: “Something which can’t be said of us Soviet writers. In our day truth is always at the service of someone or something.” Or of the Soviet Union, for that matter, or of one’s “internationalist duty,” or of any of the other myths she assaults. Then she writes, “Dostoevsky insisted: ‘The truth is more important than Russia.’” Furthermore, after Dostoevsky she invokes the Bible: “Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ.”⁴² Alexievich adds, “Russia has had to suffer so many false Messiahs—too many to mention.”⁴³ Lenin, Stalin, Rasputin, Boris Godunov, the false Dmitry, among others. And that, after all, was a major underlying theme in much of Dostoevsky’s work, especially *The Possessed* (also translated as *The Devils*), and in the chapter on the

Grand Inquisitor in *The Brothers Karamazov* (Moreover, it was this chapter that proved such a powerful influence on Berdyaev's own spiritual views).⁴⁴

So we detect an array of literary influences in the opening chapter. One need not subscribe to the view of literature as spiritually or metaphysically transcendent in order to understand that literature in Alexievich's view has a moral or philosophical dimension. And that is the insight that an examination of Alexievich provides: her literary values frame her examination.

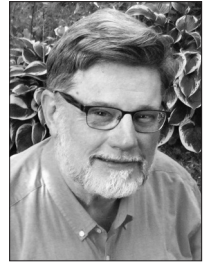
Reportage Literature as Subversion

We should bear in mind, too, that her work was part of a larger enterprise in the Soviet Union, as well as other Communist countries under Soviet domination during the Cold War. In the Soviet Union there was, of course, the older tradition of the Russian *ocherk* stretching back to the early nineteenth century.⁴⁵ As Charles Laughlin has observed of the Chinese variant, "What makes reportage literature fascinating is precisely its ability to satisfy . . . different expectations, especially in that through its commitment to concrete experience it resists easy assimilation into the machines of propaganda. That is, although it is ironically a form of great importance and treasured by the Chinese Communist Party, it possesses within it more than other forms, such as fiction and poetry, the potential to critique the shortcomings of the socialist order it helped bring about."⁴⁶

The same has been observed of Communist Eastern Europe. As Susan Greenberg writes, "The long, post-war years of communist censorship are commonly credited as a source of perverse inspiration for the writers of the former Soviet bloc, providing practice in the literary game of disguising universal meanings in the detail of the text."⁴⁷ The result was a resistance against and subversion of the existing political order. Still elsewhere, Sonja Merljak Zdovc has detected similar circumstances in the Slovene tradition, strongly influenced by the communist experience when Slovenia was part of Tito's Communist Yugoslavia: "Since journalists could not openly state their opinion of the political system, they wrapped it up in a feature story that had elements of short stories from the era of social realism. When painting the picture of poverty, they actually criticized the socialist authorities."⁴⁸ The "painting" of the aesthetics of experience provided the indictment.

Clearly, subversion is at the heart of Alexievich's "new reality" in *Zinky Boys*, confronting what the Soviet authorities did not want to acknowledge: the personal impact of the Afghan war on the lives of Soviet citizens. Again, as Alexievich observes: "Every confession was like a portrait. They are not documents; they are images. I was trying to present a history of feelings, not the history of war itself."⁴⁹

John C. Hartsock's first book, A History of American Literary Journalism (2000), received awards for outstanding scholarship from both the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication and from the American Journalism Historians Association. It has also been published in Romanian. He has lectured widely on the subject of narrative/literary journalism, and his articles have appeared in Prose Studies, Genre, Points of Entry, Journal of Communication Inquiry, and Critical Studies in Mass Communication. The founding editor of Literary Journalism Studies, his second book, Seasons of a Finger Lakes Winery (2011), won a first-place Gourmand Award in Paris for excellence in wine writing. Hartsock teaches at the State University of New York at Cortland and at the Umbra Institute in Perugia, Italy.



Notes

1. Svetlana Alexiyevich, "Boys in Zinc," trans. Arch Tait, *Granta* (Autumn 1990): 151.

2. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/.

3. John C. Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: The 'Other' Literary Journalism," in *Literary Journalism across the Globe*, eds. John Bak and Bill Reynolds (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 24–25.

4. Lettre Ulysses Award, 2003, www.lettre-ulysses-award.org.

5. Accessed October 12, 2015, five days after the Nobel announcement: <http://libproxy.cortland.edu:2062/ehost/resultsadvanced?sid=3f1e71f7-ffba-432e-a513-14af4528a607%40sessionmgr120&vid=12&hid=113&bquery=Alexievich&bdata=JmRiPW16aCZ0eXBIPTEmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl>. One nonscholarly article was cited: "Confronting the Worst: Writers and Catastrophe," *PEN America: A Journal for Writers and Readers* 7 (2006): 90–100. However, the bibliography describes the article as a "roundtable discussion" that includes Alexievich, among other authors. Moreover, the publication's website (<http://www.pen.org/pen-america-journal>) describes it as a journal that "publishes fiction, poetry, conversation, criticism, and memoir." The issue here is scrutiny of an author's work in peer-reviewed scholarly journals.

6. Again, accessed October 13, 2015: <http://online.sagepub.com/site/misc/search.xhtml>. This is not to suggest that there has been no scholarship. One can find occasional book reviews, for example. But what is conspicuous for its absence is the lack of scholarship by the literature academy and the journalism academy (the latter along with the communication academy), this for a genre that is both literature and journalism.

7. In the text, I will continue to use the spelling “Alexievich” because this is the preferred spelling on her website. See <http://www.alexievich.info/indexEN.html>. Also, all of her later works use this spelling. But in citations of her works I use the spelling under which the work was originally published in English.

8. Svetlana Alexievich, *Zinky Boys*, trans. Julia and Robin Whitby (New York: Norton, 1992). Besides republication in Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda’s *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Scribner, 1997), “Boys in Zinc” was also republished in *The Granta Book of Reportage* in 1993. The text cited here is the original 1990 *Granta* version.

9. S[vetlana] Alexievich, *War’s Unwomanly Face*, trans. Keith Hammond and Lyudmila Lezhneva (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988).

10. Svetlana Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl*, trans. Keith Gessen (Normal, OK: Dalkey Archive Press, 2005).

11. Alexievich, “Boys in Zinc,” 146.

12. *Ibid.*, 151.

13. *Ibid.*, 150.

14. Alexievich, *Zinky Boys*, 181.

15. Alexievich, “Boys in Zinc,” 146.

16. Joseph Brodsky, “On ‘September 1, 1939’ by W.H. Auden,” in *Less Than One: Selected Essays* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986), 317.

17. Alexievich, “Boys in Zinc,” 146.

18. *Ibid.*, 152, 153.

19. *Ibid.*, 156–57.

20. *Ibid.*, 157.

21. *Ibid.*, 157–58.

22. S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert W. Dardenne, “Myth, Chronicle, and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News,” in *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press*, ed. James W. Carey (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988), 71.

23. Elizabeth A. Warner, “Russian Peasant Beliefs and Practices Concerning Death and the Supernatural Collected in Novosokol’niki Region, Pskov Province, Russia, 1995,” pt. 2, “Death in Natural Circumstances,” *Folklore* 111, no. 2 (2000): 259; *Handbook of Burial Rites* (Toronto: Mount Pleasant Group of Cemeteries, 1985), 19.

24. Warner, “Russian Peasant Beliefs,” 264; Orthodoxinfo, orthodoxinfo.com/death/opencoffins.aspx; also witnessed by the author on numerous occasions.

25. It might be worth noting that Dovnar’s kneeling before her husband is another curious detail that echoes an older tradition. It is one drawn from Russian wedding culture. In the tradition, which goes back to the nineteenth century, the bride demonstrates her obedience to her husband by getting down on her knees and prostrating herself at his feet. It recalls the passage in the Epistle to the Ephesians, traditionally recited at Russian Orthodox weddings, which admonishes “the wife see that she reverence her husband.” Of course, this can justifiably prompt protests from feminists. But again we detect the turning to an older mythos, that of Tamara’s great-grandmothers, in a challenge to Soviet secular myths. See Henry

Neville Hutchinson, *Marriage Customs in Many Lands* (London: Seeley, 1897), 199; www.english.pravda.ru/society/family/21-01-2007/90176-wedding_tradition-0/#; Ephesians 5:33 (King James version).

26. Alexievich, "Boys in Zinc," 151.

27. Alexievich, *Zinky Boys*, 2.

28. *Ibid.*, 1–10.

29. Karyakin was the first notable Soviet man of letters to call for the restoration of citizenship to Russian novelist and Nobel laureate Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974 and stripped of his citizenship.

30. Capote, *In Cold Blood*, 9.

31. Alexievich, "Boys in Zinc," 160–61.

32. Alexievich, *Zinky Boys*, 3–5.

33. Harkins, *Dictionary of Russian Literature*, 314, s.v. "Pushkin, Alexander Sergeyevich."

34. Alexievich, *Zinky Boys*, 6. In most translations "Valla" is translated as "Bela."

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*, 7.

37. *Ibid.*, 10.

38. *Ibid.*, 8.

39. John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Keats*, ed. Harold Edgar Briggs (1819; repr., New York: Modern Library, 1915), 295.

40. Nicholas Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, trans. Donald Atwater (New York: New American Library, 1974), 9.

41. Alexievich, *Zinky Boys*, 8.

42. Matthew 24: 4–5.

43. Alexievich, *Zinky Boys*, 9.

44. Berdyaev, *Dostoevsky*, 188–212.

45. Hartsock, "Literary Reportage," 26–28, 34–42.

46. Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage*, 7.

47. Susan Greenberg, "Kapuściński and Beyond: The Polish School of Reportage," in *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination*, eds. Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 129. I find Greenberg's assessment especially useful because it goes beyond the contributions of Ryszard Kapuściński to the genre and provides insight into the more contemporary Polish experience, which has been little explored but which is indeed a rich tradition.

48. Sonja Merljak Zdovc, "Literary Journalism: The Intersection of Literature and Journalism," *Acta Neophilologica* 37, nos. 1–2 (2004): 17–22. See also Leonora Flis, *Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 165.

49. Alexievich, "Boys in Zinc," 537.



Nicholas Lemann, Columbia Graduate School of Journalism

The Journalism in Literary Journalism

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*Keynote address, International Association for Literary Journalism Studies,
St. Thomas University, Minneapolis, United States, May 8, 2015.*

I'm sure that very few members of this audience missed Janet Malcolm's recent review¹ in the *New York Review of Books* of Thomas Kunkel's *Man in Profile: Joseph Mitchell of The New Yorker*,² the new biography of the masterly writer. Malcolm's most famous grand and arresting pronouncement about journalism is now a quarter-century old. It's the opening sentence of her book *The Journalist and the Murderer*: "Every journalist who is not too stupid or full of himself to notice what is going on knows that what he does is morally indefensible. He is a kind of confidence man, preying on people's vanity, ignorance, or loneliness, gaining their trust and betraying them without remorse."³

I'll return to this in moment, but for now what's important is to note that Malcolm has pronounced again, by way of excusing Joseph Mitchell's habit of introducing fictional elements, like composite characters, into what was presented to *New Yorker* readers as nonfiction. Here's her new pronouncement:

Every writer of nonfiction who has struggled with the ditch and the bushes knows what Mitchell is talking about, but few of us have gone as far as Mitchell in bending actuality to our artistic will. This is not because we are more virtuous than Mitchell. It is because we are less gifted than Mitchell. The idea that reporters are constantly resisting the temptation to invent is a laughable one. Reporters don't invent because they don't know how to. This is why they are journalists rather than novelists or shortstory writers. They depend on the kindness of the strangers they actually meet for the characters in their stories. There are no fictional characters lurking in their imaginations.⁴

Whenever Janet Malcolm begins a statement about journalism with the word "every," one should count one's change. In the case of both passages I've

just quoted, she is really only talking about a tiny subculture within journalism, the one she belongs to: people who practice what's sometimes called "immersion journalism," entailing intimate negotiated relationships with subjects and a measure of literary aspiration. Neither of her pronouncements applies, for example, to wire-service reporters, bloggers and aggregators, opinion columnists, data journalists, statehouse correspondents, cartoonists, sportswriters, investigative reporters, essayists and critics, editorial writers, or members of the many other categories that together make up the vast numerical majority of practicing journalists. And even within Malcolm's small category, not every journalist-source relationship conforms to the seduction-and-abandonment model (sometimes it's the source who uses the possibility of access to seduce or corrupt the journalist), or to the invention model (more often than not, the subject is so well known as to make invention impossible).

Still, for a group that has chosen to use the term "literary journalism" in its title, Malcolm's latest pronouncement poses an interesting challenge: What is literary journalism anyway? Is Malcolm right, if you strip out her attention-getting exaggeration, in asserting that literary journalists, if not all journalists, are people who would prefer to write fiction but can't because they lack the imaginative capacity? How useful is it to think about nonfiction and fiction as a matched pair?

Probably the most fully articulated alternative view to Malcolm's of what literary journalism is has come from Tom Wolfe (though he doesn't use the term literary journalism), especially in two well-known essays, one in 1973 that was the introduction to an anthology called *The New Journalism*,⁵ the other in an article in *Harper's* magazine in 1989.⁶ In both cases, Wolfe, like Malcolm, discusses nonfiction in comparison to fiction, but, unlike Malcolm, he focuses on the deficiencies of fiction rather than those of nonfiction. The main deficiency, to Wolfe, is that fiction writers have abdicated their historic role as creators of intensively researched, realistic social portraiture, thus leaving a vacuum that journalists have filled by teaching themselves techniques historically associated with fiction, like third-person narration, dialogue, and intensely observed detail.

Wolfe himself has gone from writing nonfiction that was meant to replace fiction to writing the kind of fiction he believes in: broad tableaux informed by original reporting. He hasn't produced reportorial nonfiction in decades. But Wolfe has always stoutly insisted, in contrast to Malcolm, that journalists like his former self do not in fact work in a borderland between fiction and nonfiction—that when in his journalism he has used techniques of traditional fiction, like scenes, dialogue, characters, and even interior monologue, it has all been true, the hard-won reward of his reporting. After the publica-

tion of Wolfe's last book-length work of nonfiction, *The Right Stuff*,⁷ one of the pioneers of writing nonfiction that reads like fiction, John Hersey, by then somewhat grumpy about the work of the generation that succeeded his, went around and interviewed Wolfe's subjects, the first American astronauts, hoping to get them to say Wolfe had made things up—but they wouldn't.

To my mind, Wolfe's critique of contemporary fiction (other than his own) is not as devastating as he thinks it is, partly because his version of fiction's power is so particular to the work of a certain kind of social novelist. This is why his literary heroes are Balzac and Thackeray, rather than, let's say, Eliot or Tolstoy or Flaubert, also realistic nineteenth-century novelists but not primarily memorable for their detailed observations of social striving. Wolfe is projecting a contemporary magazine writer's preoccupation with elite power dynamics backward onto the history of fiction. Anyway, fiction has become somewhat more realistic over the time Wolfe has been complaining about its having abandoned realism. To give one example, when I stepped down as Washington correspondent of the *New Yorker* in 2003 to become dean of Columbia Journalism School, my replacement, very briefly, was the novelist Jonathan Franzen, who wanted the job as way of doing research for his novels. (A couple of moments from this adventure wound up in Franzen's celebrated 2010 novel *Freedom*.)

Let's now turn back to the point Malcolm raises: the idea of nonfiction as a poor substitute for fiction. Fiction's advantage is that—in the right hands, of course—it has access to a very rich suite of techniques and devices that give it great vividness, immediacy, and power, whose payoff is not just virtuosity of craft, but also profound psychological, philosophical, social, and even political insight. This advantage would make it seem only natural that, as Malcolm strongly implies, nobody with the ability to be a writer of fiction would choose instead to be a writer of nonfiction. So, by the Malcolm standard, nonfiction writers are properly understood as people who couldn't cut it in fiction. They're the dinner-theatre actors of the literary world. The best of them, like Mitchell, at least have enough pride not to get hung up on preachy newsroom bromides about maintaining strict factual accuracy.

Compared to all this, what can nonfiction offer? The most obvious weapon in its arsenal is verisimilitude. As Wolfe observes in his essays, it makes a story more powerful when its audience knows that it really happened—that's why movies so often claim to be "based on actual events." Some journalists, unfortunately, do have the power of imagination that Malcolm claims we lack, like the notorious fakers Janet Cooke and Stephen Glass, and there's a reason they chose to harness their fiction to the booster rocket of truth claims.

It's not just the power of fact that journalism has going for it; it's also

the power of inaccessible material. The best journalists have shown they can penetrate just about any location, high or low, in the social order, and satisfy our curiosity about what really goes on there. Novelists don't generally have this in the same measure; they are more imprisoned within their own experiences. One might even say that the greater the revelatory accomplishment of a work of nonfiction, the less artistically accomplished it has to be to succeed. Perhaps only Mitchell could have made us care about Joe Gould, a previously unnoted Greenwich Village eccentric, but just about anybody who was able to get the material could make us care about the observed daily details of President Obama's life.

But these are lesser advantages of nonfiction, compared to what I would argue is the fundamental one. Nonfiction is more than, literally, not-fiction. Nonfiction has a different central mission from fiction.

J ournalism is a running account of the world. Its name comes from "journal," and journals were invented to provide such an account. Journalism can be descriptive, or prescriptive, or exhortatory, or explanatory, but it's necessarily connected to society as lived. Fiction is art. It aims to create its own self-contained world, which may look like the actual world, but which has its own rules and achieves its powerful effects on its own terms. Journalism is craft, or applied art. It is to fiction roughly as architecture is to painting. It must deal with a set of presented conditions and rules, which ought to inspire, rather than constrain, its practitioners. An artist in front of a canvas can choose whether to make the painting look like the world or not. An architect has aesthetic choices to make, but the building has to have running water and heat and keep the rain out. For a journalist, the equivalent is making a faithful representation of society. What Wolfe says the novel must do, nonfiction, not fiction, actually must do. The novel can do whatever it wants.

It ought be clarifying to think about even literary journalism in this way. Yes, literary journalism ought to be executed in memorable, stylish prose. Yes, literary journalists should train themselves in voice and structure and characterization and description. But these are techniques that make nonfiction look more like fiction than it really is. They tend to be overemphasized inside the small culture of magazines, publishing houses, interested scholars, and MFA programs—for which literary journalism is a vital category, because these institutions are usually focused on the first word in literary journalism, literary. (And inside the somewhat larger, but shrinking, culture of institutions focused on the second word, journalism, people too often recoil in horror when presented with the aesthetic term "literary.")

I am proposing, in other words, that nonfiction is not fiction for people who lack imagination. It has another premise. The word denotes a social

function, not a mode of expression. If we start there, perhaps we can understand it better.

I should confess that I, too, had an essentially literary conception of literary journalism during the first phase of my career. I wanted to be a writer, not an analyst of society. By luck or happenstance, I wound up spending my life moving back and forth between publications that were primarily interested in description or storytelling—the writing side of journalism—and publications that were primarily interested in analysis or explanation, the thinking side. In the former category, I would put *Texas Monthly* and the *New Yorker*, in the latter category the *Washington Monthly* and the *Atlantic*.

My editor at the *Atlantic*, William Whitworth, who had spent his early career at the *New Yorker* and regarded it in the way that a reformed drunk regards his old barroom, would not permit a profile to be published in his magazine unless it could be shown to have a larger point that the subject of the profile illustrated. My editor at the *New Yorker*, David Remnick, is a recovering Washington policy journalist who usually will not permit an article about an important topic to be published in his magazine unless it's expressed via a profile of a compelling person. It has been quite useful to me to be tugged first in one direction for a while, then in the other, but the overall tug over time has been away from a purely literary conception of my work.

Somewhere along the line, somewhat by accident, I began spending a lot of time around social scientists, so that today I regularly find myself as the only journalist in a room of social scientists. What first drew me there was a need to understand what the immediate story I was working on was about, what it represented. But I gradually began to think more systematically about applying social science methods in journalism.

In recent years, a number of the most interesting and inventive journalists have fruitfully explored the intersection of social science and journalism. Even Wolfe, though he never said so in his essays about nonfiction, used sociological concepts as the mainspring of much of his work—rubrics he invented, like “the right stuff” and “radical chic,” have had staying power not because they were narrative techniques, but because they were provocative ideas. And since Wolfe, journalists like Malcolm Gladwell and Michael Lewis (both of whom, like the leading New Journalists of the 1960s and 1970s, have many imitators), have, in very different ways, injected elements of social science into literary journalism.

If you want to set forth a method associated with this kind of work, it would not begin with finding a character to describe or a story to tell. It would begin with what social scientists would call a research question. How did this happen? What might cause that situation to change? What makes

people or institutions behave in a certain way? You can then continue on the social science analogy: What's your experimental design—meaning, what reporting mission can you devise that would answer your research question? You would develop a hypothesis, a possible answer to the research question, to test rigorously, and possibly to modify or abandon in favor of a better one if it doesn't prove out in your reporting. You would analyze your findings, and find a way to present them. You might call this set of practices epistemology journalism.

None of this would preclude telling a story in a literarily accomplished way. Indeed, in some cases the reader might not even notice the presence of the process I've just described, in the same way that a resident of a house doesn't notice the engineering elements that make it function properly. As the paint and the trim and the furniture, the obvious aspects of how one experiences a house, go on last, so the narrative and literary elements of nonfiction can come after the conceptual and analytic elements, but their underlying centrality means that merely looking for stories to tell just isn't a good basic description of what literary journalists do. Indeed, pure storytelling is—sorry, back to social-science jargon—uncorrelated with communicating the deep truth of a situation. Storytelling can explain, or it can deceive. The journalist's primary job is to get at the truth, and then, secondarily, to find a story to tell that communicates the truth. I would define literary journalism as journalism that accomplishes both the primary and secondary missions at a high level.

I want to conclude with a few words about what you might call the logistics of literary journalism. Let's return to the architecture analogy. Literary journalism of the kind I've been discussing requires resources, because it takes time and requires first-hand reporting, often conducted in faraway locations. And, at its best, it is also a more collaborative enterprise than is fiction writing, so it needs more of an institutional structure, and that costs money, too. An old Wolfe essay, "From Bauhaus to Our House,"⁸ made fun of architects whose reputation is based on drawn but not built work. Such architects, I'm sure, don't actually prefer that their work not be built—they just weren't able to find someone to pay for it.

The execution cost of journalism is a fraction of what it is in architecture, but it still poses a challenge. Before the internet, literary journalism generally followed a gatekeeper model: the limited number of magazines, newspapers, and book publishers who purveyed it were going concerns, so the challenge for a writer was to persuade them to accept your work. Today, the barrier to publication, at least online, is far lower, but so is much of the economic and institutional support that anointed writers, at least, of literary nonfiction, used to be able to take for granted. Many of the traditional gatekeeper institu-

tions are far more constrained than they used to be, and the proliferation of new publishers (who often describe themselves using the somewhat grating term “long-form journalism”) are constrained as a basic design principle.

There is a temptation to reason backward from resource constraints to the ideal form of the work. For literary nonfiction this would mean that memoirs would (it would be more accurate to say already do) take up a higher portion of the total production. Next in logistical ease of execution would come lapidary work about ordinary life that can be executed in one’s own backyard—what Whitworth, my old *Atlantic* editor, used to call “universe in a grain of sand journalism.” This kind of work, which is often excellent, also seems to be taking up more space in the world of literary journalism.

I am concerned that, in a spirit of making a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, literary journalists and literary journalism scholars will begin to conceive of what is more easily possible as what is ideal. One can do this by focusing more and more on the “literary” in literary journalism, and less and less on the “journalism.” I think Malcolm slipped into this in her piece about Mitchell, and there are many other examples. For writers, it’s flattering to be told that it’s really much more about your talent than your reporting, so this view of our work can be quite seductive.

I’ve been arguing for a conception of literary journalism that treats its active engagement with the world as central. This kind of literary journalism isn’t just distinguished and memorable writing; it’s a valuable social artifact, because when done well it can lead readers to understand difficult, complex, inaccessible subjects that can otherwise play out outside the frame of active democracy. But just as there is a danger in understanding the value of literary journalism as residing only in how it is expressed, there is also a danger in proclaiming the necessity of reporting and assuming that the resources writers need to do it will somehow always magically appear.

Literary journalism needs money and strong institutions. It is not ideally done by a person alone in a garret. Thanks to people like you, the understanding of literary journalism as an important category of writing is increasing, but the means required to execute it well is not. Not every writer of literary journalism is in a position to try to do something about this problem, but those of us who are connected to institutional life can help, and we have an obligation to do so. In the last decade or so, a very loose and informal new support system for literary journalism, outside the traditional magazines and newspapers and book publishers, has begun to emerge. It resides in universities, nonprofit organizations old and new, writers’ colonies, struggling new publications, and elsewhere. Its continued growth is essential to the continued fulfillment of the potential of literary journalism. We should all make it

part of our work to nurture this system, as well as creating, analyzing, and teaching the writing it's meant to encourage.

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Notes

1. Janet Malcolm, "The Master Writer of the City," *New York Review of Books*, April 23, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/apr/23/joseph-mitchell-master-writer-city/>.
2. Thomas Kunkel, *Man in Profile: Joseph Mitchell of The New Yorker* (New York: Random House, 2015).
3. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 3.
4. Malcolm, "Master Writer."
5. Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism (1. The Feature Game; 2. Like a Novel; 3. Seizing the Power; Appendix)," in *The New Journalism*, eds. Wolfe and E.W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 3–52.
6. Tom Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-footed Beast," *Harper's*, November 1989, 45–56.
7. Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979).
8. Tom Wolfe, "From Bauhaus to Our House," *Harper's*, July 1981, 40–59. Republished as *From Bauhaus to Our House* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981).

By Any Other Name: The Case for Literary Journalism

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Keynote Response: Literary journalism has experienced a resurgence in recent years, and like all popular movements it has sustained a backlash from those who believe it fetishizes narrative at the expense of research and reporting. *New Yorker* writer Nicholas Lemann’s IALJS-10 keynote talk returned the spotlight to the social function of journalism: to provide “a running account of the world.” He argues that for literary journalism to complete that task, it must privilege research and reporting over artistic expression. This response essay expands on Lemann’s talk by clarifying misconceptions about what the “literary” in literary journalism means, and demonstrates that the debates about what to call this genre—debates that have been rekindled in recent years with the ascendance of such vague-but-vogue terms “long form” and “long reads”—are not new. This narrative history explores both the misbegotten trail of the term “literary journalism” and its attendant field of study, but it also argues that the label long form represents a neoliberalization of language that positions readers not to consider or question, but only to consume.

“**B**ut however vague and slippery a term, the New Journalism has become a convenient label for recent developments in nonfiction writing and for the sharp critical controversy this writing has stirred up.” So wrote Ronald Weber in his 1974 preface to the book he had compiled and edited, *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*.¹ Some four decades later, standing before a confederation of several dozen literary journalism scholars who had gathered from across the globe in Minneapolis, Nicholas Lemann wasted little time getting to the question that has bedeviled not only his audience of academics but also practitioners and, increasingly, casual readers: “What is literary journalism anyway?”² Nearly every book-length work of

scholarship on the subject has waded into this definitional morass, with journal articles often recapitulating those arguments in précis. To appropriate a phrase from Tom Wolfe, characterizing literary journalism has proven to be a real “whichy thicket.”³ For his part, Lemann cited Wolfe’s introductory manifesto to *The New Journalism*⁴ and his 1989 *Harper’s* essay, “Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast”⁵ as the “most fully articulated” description of the genre.⁶ Lemann pointed to Wolfe—whom he calls “one of the pioneers of writing nonfiction that reads like fiction”—in contradistinction to fellow *New Yorker* writer Janet Malcolm, who, a few weeks prior to his keynote address, had offered, anew, a porous and permissive definition of the genre, this time via a review of Thomas Kunkel’s biography *A Man in Profile: Joseph Mitchell of the New Yorker*. Lemann uses Malcolm’s dubious claim that Mitchell was an “artist” and therefore should be forgiven his fabrication sins, as his lecture’s point of departure in a journey that ultimately returns the genre’s emphasis to what he called the “hard-won reward” of accurate and truthful reporting, which, he argues, should be privileged over the more creative aspects of story composition.

Lemann’s talk is important because it emphasizes the social function of journalism. He reminds us that these stories have public and political significance, and warns that when journalists dubiously “harness their fiction to the booster rocket of truth claims” they undermine the credibility of all nonfiction. However, in making his case for the importance of reporting as the key mechanism for upholding literary journalism’s civic role, I believe Lemann sets up a false binary between the genre’s two terms, one that is predicated on a slightly overdetermined usage of the term “literary.” That adjective does not—or should not—connote high art and its attendant value judgment, as Lemann and many others have suggested.⁷ Instead, it should be understood as a descriptor of the range of literary elements that avail themselves to writers of nonfiction and fiction alike.

This misapprehension has a long history, as I’ll demonstrate in this essay. Moreover, the concern that narrative desire leads to factual promiscuity has been taken to almost absurd levels in recent years due to several high-profile journalistic transgressions happening alongside the proliferation of the terms long form and long read, which substitute concrete—if misunderstood—terminology for generalized abstractions that are divorced from journalistic history. These coincident occurrences have led editors and critics to call for journalists to be lashed to the mast of reporting so as not to be dashed on the rocks by the siren call of storytelling. Given this climate, it’s important to understand Lemann’s keynote as occurring within a specific cultural context. Literary journalism is experiencing an extended renaissance both as a creative

practice—reaching perhaps an apotheosis with Belarusian journalist Svetlana Alexievitch winning the 2015 Nobel Prize in literature—and as an object of study. And as is often the case with popular movements, this style of reporting and writing has experienced a backlash in recent years, the roots of which are tangled around the ahistorical-therefore-malleable descriptor long form and the erroneous belief that literary journalism stands for stylish or artistic journalism.

What follows is a narrative history of these various terms and their attendant field of study. The labels themselves are exceedingly important because they denote professional boundaries and offer a shared vocabulary for practitioners and critics alike. I interviewed writers, editors, publishers, and academics about their investment in these terms and their pasts. What they revealed is that there was literary journalism before long form, and there was literary journalism before Wolfe. And that history is a pretty good story.

A New Brand of Storytelling

In the fall of 1962 Wolfe read the opening lines of Gay Talese's *Esquire* feature, "Joe Louis: The King as a Middle-aged Man," and proclaimed "What inna namea christ is this?" Talese had seemingly stretched journalistic conventions in his profile of the Brown Bomber. He set the narrative in scenes. He included intimate details and full dialogue. He even reported Louis's thoughts. The story had the tone and temper of fiction, and Wolfe was beside himself, wondering, "*What the hell is going on?*"⁸

The answer, of course, was the New Journalism. Or so Wolfe claimed eleven years later in his anthology's introductory manifesto. As the genre's self-appointed spokesman, he did much to promote the myth that the New Journalism was, in fact, new, innovative, and revolutionary. In his classic, understated style Wolfe suggested that the New Journalism "would wipe out the novel as literature's main event."⁹

Not everyone agreed. Dwight MacDonald dismissed the style as a "bastard form" that wanted it both ways, "exploiting the factual authority of journalism and the atmospheric license of fiction."¹⁰ Lester Markel brushed the writers aside as "factual fictionists" and rejected claims that the work achieved a greater truth. Gerald Grant thought the creative license led to sloppy reporting. And Dan Balz just thought the writing wasn't very good.¹¹

In his appraisal of the Talese piece, Wolfe actually reproduced many of these same anxieties and suspicions. He confessed that his "instinctive, defensive reaction was that the man had piped it, as the saying went . . . winged it, made up the dialogue. . . . Christ, maybe he made up whole scenes, the unscrupulous geek."¹² If journalism was about accuracy and facticity, the thinking

went, then perhaps *new* journalism threw those covenants out the window.

Perhaps, but not quite. Talese didn't pipe anything. It all checked out. And while the New Journalism did have its transgressors and transgressions, their sins were not novel. It was the name and its attendant connotations that freaked everyone out.

Yet the term stuck, and with it contrails of criticism. Joe Nocera tried to proclaim it dead in 1981,¹³ fingering Hunter S. Thompson as the killer. John Hersey continued to fret,¹⁴ a decade after Wolfe published his anthology, that the legend on the journalist's license was changing. The senior scribe warned that the profession's key tenet must not succumb to change, nominal or otherwise. It must always read: *None of this was made up*. And yet through the 1980s and 1990s writers continued to produce deeply reported nonfiction narratives, to the point that when Robert S. Boynton compiled his collection of interviews with this next generation of authors he called his book *The New New Journalism*.¹⁵ And so for decades the proper noun popularized by Wolfe has been synonymous with a style of nonfiction that blended immersive reporting and narrative writing.

Until now. A half-century later, we're in the midst of a seemingly new form of storytelling—or at least a new *brand* of storytelling. And with that emergence a familiar pattern has unfolded: debates about what to call it,¹⁶ arguments over its ethics,¹⁷ questions concerning conventions,¹⁸ public controversies and handwringing.¹⁹ Whether we acknowledge it or not, we've been here before. Like the New Journalism, the style of writing now popularly called long form has an extended yet overlooked history, as do the debates over what to call it. And now, as it enjoys a renaissance in print, is amplified by curators online,²⁰ and breaks new ground in the digital world,²¹ it is more important than ever that we call it by its most proper name: literary journalism.

In his lecture, Lemann defines literary journalism obliquely, through metaphor and emphasis. He calls fiction an "art," and delineates it from journalism which is a "craft, or applied art." Lemann sees the relationship between the two as something akin to painting and architecture: a painting can exist for its own sake, but architecture, though it may have visual appeal, must also be functional. He argues that journalism, like architecture, "must deal with a set of presented conditions and rules, which ought to inspire, rather than constrain, its practitioners." He continues the analogy: "An architect has aesthetic choices to make, but the building has to have running water and heat and keep the rain out." Among the aesthetic choices that journalists encounter, Lemann counts style, voice, structure, characterization, and description, although he cautions: "But these are techniques that make nonfiction look more like fiction than it really is." Such a sentiment is problematic

because it reifies both categories and leads to the oft-repeated expression that literary journalism “reads like fiction.” The trouble with this phrase is that it treats fiction as a unified category of art that produces a singular, imaginative response. It also creates an implicit hierarchy where a deficient type of prose aspires to be like its admired relative. These types of binaries between form and function, art and craft do not have to exist. They are the product of hitching the “literary” in literary journalism to the same value judgment used to evaluate the aesthetic merit of a piece of art. When one thinks of the literary elements that Lemann lists above, not as frippery but as foundation, it then becomes easier to understand the work they do on their own terms.

This type of terminological exegesis, which might sound to some²² critics like academic hairsplitting, is actually a much more serious endeavor: historical accuracy. Wolfe’s origin story is seductive. It’s also false, ahistorical, and misleading. Likewise, the idea that long form developed *ex nihilo*²³—or even that it grew from the rib of the New Journalism—misrepresents the truth and cuts it off from important antecedents.

For example, when *Politico* hired Susan Glasser, now editor-in-chief, in June 2013 to serve as its long-form editor, it released this statement: “Susan and the rest of our senior team believe that high-impact, magazine-style journalism is not a throwback to the past. It is a genre that is even more essential in today’s hyperkinetic news environment. It is a style of reporting and a mindset about illuminating what matters most that has a brilliant future.”²⁴ And like all grand proclamations, of course, this one had been made before. In 1937, University of Minnesota journalism professor Edwin Ford wrote in his introduction to *A Bibliography of American Literary Journalism*: “More than ever today there is a need for the literary journalist; for the writer who is sufficiently journalistic to sense the swiftly changing aspects of this dynamic era, and sufficiently literary to gather and shape his material with the eye and the hand of the artist.”²⁵

It’s easy to exaggerate the present when you don’t acknowledge the past. Ford characterized his short compendium of titles as works that fell “within the twilight zone that divides literature from journalism.” He included authors like Dos Passos, Steinbeck, and Hemingway—writers who today could be said to be in the tradition of long form, except long form has no tradition. Calling or tagging a story #longform (or #longread) divorces it from the rich lineage of literary journalism in America. And when we’re cut off from that history we can’t answer questions like: Why is this style bubbling up now when the web, and its infinite length, has hosted journalistic content for twenty years?²⁶ What cultural causes led the New Journalism to ignite and flare in the 1960s? Why was Depression Era-journalism an especially

rich repository for this style of writing? What were the social and cultural conditions at the *fin de siècle* that contributed to the surfeit of stories that still survive today?

In his book *A History of Literary Journalism in America*, John C. Hartsock points out that in each of these historical periods, journalists faced an acute realization that the world was fraught (immigration, urbanization, depression, war, civil rights, et cetera) and made the epistemic determination that conventional ways of making sense of these social, cultural, and political ruptures would not do.²⁷ To borrow a phrase from fellow historian Thomas B. Connery, these writers needed a “third way to tell the story.”²⁸ And from very early on, many of these writers called that style “literary journalism.” Hutchins Hapgood used the term in a 1905 issue of *Bookman* magazine.²⁹ Ford deployed it in the title of his 1937 bibliography, and then two years after that Hapgood wrote in his autobiography *Victorian in the Modern World* that he felt at home when he began work at the turn of the century for Lincoln Steffens’s paper the *New York Commercial Advertiser* because he fit in with the editor’s “idea of a literary journalism.”³⁰ The term itself lost traction during the New Journalism era, but it reemerged in the early 1980s with the publication of Norman Sims’s *The Literary Journalists* (1984), an anthology of (mostly) *New Yorker* pieces from the late 1970s and early 1980s.³¹ It remains a book that certain writers still find indispensable.³²

But where did Sims get the term? He told me his usage began a decade prior to the publication of that first anthology, around the same time Wolfe put out *The New Journalism*. As Sims worked on his PhD dissertation in the mid-1970s at the University of Illinois, his adviser, the renowned communication scholar James W. Carey, introduced him to a group of Chicago journalists from the turn of the century, including George Ade and Finley Peter Dunne, who came to be known as the Whitechapel Club:

Editors started riding them for having a bit too much imagination. Their best work ended up fenced off into “columns” in the newspaper. We understand this now, of course, because they were writing “Fables in Slang” or using a half-fictional bartender named Mr. Dooley to convey their thoughts about the city.

I couldn’t figure out exactly what to call the editors’ restrictive stance, which had not appeared much in journalism beforehand. I started calling it “scientific” journalism, although I didn’t like that term because journalism has little relationship to science.

On the other side—the side of Ade and Dunne and others—I came up with a different term. On the first page of my dissertation, I mentioned Opie

Read, arriving in Chicago from Arkansas in 1887. The ride north “had taken him far away from the experiences of his youth, his adventures, and the home ground where he learned the skills of a literary journalist and humorist.” On the next page I said, “Faced with the difficulty of transferring lived experience into symbolic reports on paper, many of those reporters of the 1890’s grasped the same style.”³³

Sims credits his discussions with Carey—“a Rhode Island Irish genius”—with shaping his understanding of the style and its constitutive elements, which he came later to define as “immersion reporting, complicated structures, character development, symbolism, voice, a focus on ordinary people . . . and accuracy.”³⁴ Carey, he said, “understood the role of symbols in everyday life. While we were focused on its symbolic aspects, I preferred the term literary for this journalism. I find it remarkable that I still think of literary journalism in much the same way today.”³⁵

Although there certainly was scholarship about the genre before Sims’s first anthology—most notably Ronald Weber’s two edited collections, the aforementioned *The Reporter as Artist* and *The Literature of Fact: Literary Nonfiction in American Writing*³⁶—that text paved the way for countless articles and books to follow, including the classroom favorite *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism*, edited by Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda.³⁷ Their collection stretches centuries and continents with pioneering excerpts from Defoe, Boswell, and Dickens, and contemporary examples from some of the same writers—Wolfe, McPhee, and Didion—Sims included in his collection. Yagoda acknowledged to me their debt to Sims, especially with respect to nomenclature:

The term was out there, and I think we were most familiar with it via Sims. . . I actually don’t recall if we had a discussion on the point, but it definitely seemed appropriate for the kind of thing we had taught, were interested in, wanted to include in the anthology, so we went with it. As we proceeded with putting the book together, it continued to feel right.³⁸

The Kerrane and Yagoda anthology was part of a thriving decade for literary journalism scholarship. Sims put out two more collections, an invaluable compendium of scholarship called *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*³⁹ and a second anthology entitled *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*,⁴⁰ which he coedited with Mark Kramer. Conery published a seminal collection of critical biographies entitled *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*,⁴¹ which included an extended introduction that chronicled the main currents in the genre’s history, along with its distinctive literary and reporting characteristics. Edd Applegate put out *Literary Journalism: A Biographical*

Dictionary of Writers and Editors,⁴² and the Dictionary of Literary Biography series published *American Literary Journalists, 1945–1995*⁴³ under the editorship of Arthur J. Kaul. Kerrane and Yagoda's text also came that year, and Hartsock's history rounded out the decade.

Literary Journalism: A Confusing and Contentious Label

Building upon these publishing moments, the field of study reached an apotheosis in 2005 when a small collection of scholars convened a conference in Nancy, France, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* to discuss "A Century of Literary Journalism throughout the World." That meeting led to the creation of a scholarly organization devoted to the study of literary journalism across the globe. The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies now has more than 150 members from more than two dozen countries. IALJS holds a yearly conference attended by scholars (and, increasingly, by practitioners), and for the past seven years has published the peer-reviewed journal *Literary Journalism Studies*.

In every measurable way, literary journalism has established itself in the academic world. Yet the term has never caught on with writers and readers the way long form or long reads has, and there's still a great deal of confusion about what the label even means. An illuminating example can be found in a live chat that Nieman Storyboard hosted in late July 2013.⁴⁴ Jeff Sharlet and Leslie Jamison were the featured guests, and then-editor Paige Williams moderated a discussion about the term literary journalism. Unsolicited, I joined the conversation midway through, as did others, including the writers Ron Rosenbaum and Julian Rubinstein. At one point, I commented that Rosenbaum had a distinguished history as a literary journalist. He demurred, thanking me for the compliment, but eschewing the distinction that his work was "literary." The moment encapsulated the parallel path these conversations often take between writers and academics. Even in a forum devoted to discussing, defining, and delimiting the term there was confusion. And the root of that confusion is the mistaken belief that the adjective "literary" denotes a value judgment or is a rhetorical ploy for legitimacy.

Rosenbaum's aversion to that appellation is not uncommon; most writers are indifferent-to-hostile about the term. For instance, in the spring of 2014 I asked *GQ* writer Jeanne Marie Laskas, who is also the director of the writing program at University of Pittsburgh, if she had a preferred name for the kind of writing she did. She, uh, did not:

NO, NO and NO. In fact, I hate that we need a term at all. I write stories. If anyone cares, I'll clarify and say "nonfiction." Or "magazine stories."

The end. I don't mind "pieces." I don't mind "articles." I don't mind "long-form"—more on that below. What I hate is the begging for legitimacy we do with the terminology with stuff like "literary nonfiction," "literary journalism," or the one that really causes my brain to go into hot spasm: Creative Nonfiction. STOP IT! Readers don't care. Who are you writing for? The trend setters of the day? You care about them more than your reader, or your story, if you get stuck in this labeling nonsense. You care about your "career." You care about what people think of you. Well, okay. I understand, and "there, there little one, it's gonna be okay." You are special. Sure you are. Now go take that anxiety and do something else with it and just write your story.⁴⁵

Many of the journalists I've talked with agree with Laskas, though perhaps with slightly less verve.⁴⁶ When John Jeremiah Sullivan visited the University of Notre Dame (my then-academic home) in January 2014, one of my students asked if he considers himself a "literary journalist." Sullivan conceded that the name and its lineage, which he knew exceedingly well, made sense to him, but added that he's never much thought about the terminology. He said he and his magazine editors always just called and considered his stories "pieces."⁴⁷ And James Bennet struck a similar glossy note last year in his popular *Atlantic* jeremiad "Against Long-Form Journalism," concluding: "You might just call it magazine writing. And get on with it." So there does seem to be some unanimity among writers—but that doesn't mean they're right.

Long form as Neoliberal Term?

So why not call it magazine journalism? Because not all magazine journalism is the same. Open *Harper's* and look through its table of contents: Readings, Essay, Folio, Report, Reviews. Do the same with the *Atlantic*: Features, Dispatches, Culture File. All are nonfiction and all are in magazines, so how to distinguish them? More importantly, however, is the fact that this style of reporting and writing does not belong only to the province of magazines. It exists in books⁴⁸ and newspapers,⁴⁹ podcasts,⁵⁰ and broadcasts.⁵¹ It's journalism—thoroughly reported, fact-checked, and true. And it employs an A-to-Z list of literary elements, from allegory to metaphor to theme. The style has a professional history, the term an academic history, and yet in has never gained much traction in popular culture.

Given the erasure of these ancestral lines, why has long form become the new *nom de naissance*? One obvious answer is that the websites Longform.org and Longreads.com have made their attendant terms ubiquitous. They do great work—not only in curation, but also in presentation, innovation, and marketing—and in the meritocratic Twitterverse that great work is often rewarded. In October 2010, @Longreads had 7,000 followers;

today it has more than 180,000,⁵² while @Longform has more than 85,000.⁵³ And with such popularity comes a legion of imitators starved for some savior in an unstable media landscape. The news industry has always been competitive and copy-cattish. The online democratization of platforms and writers has only accelerated that historical process. No longer is this style of writing the domain of the *New Yorker*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *Rolling Stone*—and that's a good thing. Now, traditionally nonnarrative news organizations are creating their own brands: BuzzReads, SB Nation Longform, Politico Longform, et cetera.⁵⁴ Employing the hashtag #longform or #longread symbolically links a story to those popular curatorial sites—which often contain work from those traditional repositories of literary journalism—thus conferring a nod of legitimacy to the piece.

So what's wrong with that? Nothing, except the magnetism of the hashtag attracts such an array of fundamentally different stories that the term itself becomes superfluous. There are no delimiting elements. Is the story nonfiction or fiction? Does it contain reporting or reflection? These answers matter. They set up reader expectations. But the only clue we get from the classification long form is that the pieces have estimable length. Check out the #longform hashtag⁵⁵ and you'll encounter an unholy mishmash of stories that have no discernibly shared characteristics. A deeply reported narrative by Janet Reitman⁵⁶ shares the same space as a 3,000-word review of reissued Sleater-Kinney albums.⁵⁷ Both pieces certainly have merit, but it's wrong to classify them together. One is literary journalism, while the other is a music review. Such a statement does not mean that one is better than the other—forever strike the notion of value judgment from this definition—only that they are different. And it's important to find out what that difference means. But on the hashtag (and in popular culture), all they share, as if in some Linnaean nightmare, is the genus long form, which obscures distinction and promotes uniformity.

It would be wrong to lay all of this misunderstanding at the feet of Longform.org and Longreads.com, though. There are also sociolinguistic reasons for the term's ubiquity. Paige Williams, a *New Yorker* staff writer and University of Missouri journalism professor, explains: "It's clean and lean, like a good story."⁵⁸ To this characterization I would add that the term is utterly empty and void.⁵⁹ The label "long form" represents a neoliberalization of language. It's an abstraction that positions the reader not to consider or question, but only to consume. The idiom long form is just short enough to be effectively hashtagable, which contributes to its easy and pervasive deployment.⁶⁰ We use it only because it is short and because it is easy. Writers, readers, editors, and critics can project any and all of their own ideas and definitions onto

it, and we never have to argue or make our case. Simply put, long form is a problematic term because it deemphasizes the elements of the story—how the facts are reported, how the narrative is told—and instead shifts and holds attention on the virtues and limitations of length, a shrinking commodity in print, and near infinite resource on the web. And it's not a coincidence that as the term long form has become more popular, as we've seen a parallel rise in the troubling frequency of the term "content" used as a substitute for stories.⁶¹ Vagueness sells, and we're buying.

So why don't we use "literary journalism" to more accurately describe the kind of work we're all referring to when we say and use long form? There are two reasons. First, the term is clunky as hell. Two words, seven syllables in total, it doesn't exactly roll off the tongue. Plus it takes up too many characters to be a useful hashtag, and @LiteraryJournalism can't even exist because it violates Twitter's maximum username length. Second, the *seemingly* implied value judgment inherent in the adjective is a negative factor for many writers and editors. I'll concede the first point, that literary journalism is not sexy or graceful, neither clean nor lean, but the second point is mistaken: *There is no value judgment*. Literary journalism does not mean "higher quality" journalism. It is not a comparative. It does not mean better than conventional journalism. There are plenty of poorly done pieces in this tradition.

"Literary" is a descriptor, a robust adjective that denotes the use of rhetorical elements ranging from scene, character development, plot, dialogue, symbolism, voice, et cetera. Writers can employ these devices with greater or lesser facility, but the fact remains they are using elements that are often beyond the conventions of standard journalism. Journalism, the second part of this idiom, is equally important. Journalism distinguishes itself from other forms of nonfiction by one important component: reporting. Together, the two terms create a powerful and specific definition: *literary journalism is a form of nonfiction writing that adheres to all of the reportorial and truth-telling covenants of conventional journalism, while employing rhetorical and storytelling techniques more commonly associated with fiction*. In short, it is *journalism as literature*.

Naming Rites

The subordinating conjunction in that last sentence is important because it distinguishes this definition from a common British usage, which instead employs a preposition to create a wholly different genre: *journalism about literature*. Nonfiction in this category would include book reviews, profiles, criticism, et cetera. A European term that more closely approaches the accepted American definition is "reportage," which *Granta* employs and

defines as “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.”⁶² Still, Hartsock has shown that reportage has its own elastic and murky history, depending on country and context. What the phrase “literary journalism” does is literally connect conversations across continents. I asked John S. Bak, professor of English at the Université de Lorraine in Nancy, France, and the founding president of IALJS, how the organization decided on “literary journalism” as the descriptor of choice. He acknowledged that the debate at that first conference back in July 2005 was “hotly contested” and that Hartsock pushed for “narrative literary journalism” in order to “keep the term distinct from ‘Literary Criticism in Newspapers,’” another common interpretation by British critics. Bak continued:

Most of Europe used and uses reportage, but have begrudgingly accepted Literary Journalism, even the French, who call it in various circles *le journalism littéraire*—but it is not yet a common practice here. Most countries have their own brand name for the form, which was what we brought up during the naming of the association. But we stuck with literary journalism because reportage was too vague (any news report here can be called that, though the French have now turned to “recit” for stories and “reportage” for more in-depth reporting, though not necessarily literary.⁶³

Bak acknowledged that the whole naming debate was and is “confusing,” but reiterated that one of the goals of the association was to “coalesce that usage worldwide, and it has to a certain extent.” But, he said, when people casually call this style of writing “long form,” that usage further divorces the genre and its tradition from these global referents: “You can simply argue with people who use longform or longread as they are nonsensical outside of an English (i.e., US) context. And since the genre is worldwide, as is literature or journalism, that it needs a worldwide currency, thus LJ is translated often into LJ within the different languages worldwide.”⁶⁴

Worldwide usage is important. One of my few criticisms of Boynton’s introduction to *The New New Journalism* is his insistence that this style of reporting and writing is uniquely American.⁶⁵ It is not. This journal has published articles on literary journalistic traditions throughout Latin America,⁶⁶ as well as on authors and publications in the Netherlands,⁶⁷ Portugal,⁶⁸ South Africa,⁶⁹ Australia,⁷⁰ Germany,⁷¹ and Finland.⁷² It even devoted its Spring 2013 issue (volume five, number one) to Norwegian literary reportage.⁷³ But it’s not only IALJS that is broadening the worldwide usage, as the writers Tom Junod, Jacqui Banaszynski, Leslie Jamison, Chris Jones, Lisa Pollak, Michael Paterniti, and others can attest. They’ve all participated in the Power of Storytelling conference held every autumn for the past five years in Bucharest.

The conference is hosted by the Romanian quarterly journal *Decât o Revistă*, which was founded by the writer Cristian Lupsa and is devoted to the nonfiction storytelling of everyday lives and experiences of Romanians—a content trait shared with much American literary journalism. The Power of Storytelling features practitioners rather than scholars, but its growing popularity, as evidenced by the high wattage writers and performers it attracts, is further evidence of the renaissance of literary journalism.

Although the Romanian conference's preferred usage for this type of prose is "narrative journalism," the organization does note that that term has synonyms including literary journalism, creative nonfiction, and narrative nonfiction. While I don't believe these terms are synonymous at all—Why not narrative journalism? Because not all the stories are narratives. Why not narrative literary journalism? Because it's redundant. Nonfiction novel? A novel is invented prose—this hedging is indicative of the historical intricacies involved in the naming debate. Before long form and New New Journalism there was Truman Capote's "nonfiction novel," Alex Haley's "faction," Norman Mailer's "true life novel," and Barbara Lounsberry's "realtor" and "deep-see reporters." There also exist more general labels such as journalit, artful literary nonfiction, activist journalism, alternative journalism, underground journalism, precision journalism, advocacy journalism, new nonfiction, saturation reporting, submersion journalism, participatory journalism, and high journalism.⁷⁴

Perhaps the most ubiquitous term before long form and long read became de rigueur was the phrase "creative nonfiction." I regard this label as a catchall that covers all manner of imaginative, but not invented, prose, including memoir, autobiography, literary history, literary journalism, et cetera. An analogous comparison is to consider bebop, swing, and ragtime as distinct genres within the larger tradition of jazz.

Still, as Sims told me, "Names can be tough." Of all the variations and offshoots of the term literary journalism, "creative nonfiction" is the one that rankles him the most:

To my mind, "creative nonfiction" invited writers to make things up, and named it for what it was not, like calling an airplane a non-train. Of course, I taught journalism at the time, and almost all the writers in the genre were journalists. Journalists generally try not to make things up, which is fine, but it was the term "literary" that disturbed people. How could mere journalism be literary? Well, that was exactly the point we were trying to make. Get over it.⁷⁵

While Sims essentializes the meaning of "literary" here and gives it a value judgment that I believe is both misleading and unnecessary, his disen-

chantment with the umbrella term as a synonym of “literary journalism” is apt, and it is a feeling shared by Laskas, who told me:

I just delete the word “creative” whenever I see it next to the word “non-fiction.” Or I go off on someone and say hey, why don’t we say “Creative Fiction” and “Creative Poetry” too! I am not proud of myself in these moments. Also, right now we’ve got a lot of “lyric” essay talk going on. It makes me twitch but I am trying to be patient. “Essay” was good enough for Montaigne, so it’s good enough for me. Tell me you’ve written a “braided essay,” and I’ll say good for you. It doesn’t mean it’s art because you’ve called it something fancy. (Lately grad students seem to think any linear narrative is . . . crap.) If you want to be an artist you should study art and constantly push the real you to come out in whatever form you can best get it out. The minute you start caring what the labeling looks like in the great museum that will one day house your work is the minute your piece starts going into a death spiral.⁷⁶

Janet Malcolm’s Narrative Technique on Trial

Although labeling may be understandably distracting for writers, it is not without importance. Journalism is the only profession in the United States to enjoy constitutional protection. Consequently, what counts as journalism has material, legal significance. Beyond historical and linguistic accuracy, it is important to understand what these labels mean because journalistic genre classification played a role in “the only US Supreme Court case that directly addresses the First Amendment dimensions not just of altered quotations but of narrative technique in journalism.”⁷⁷ And it’s a case that, ironically enough, involved Janet Malcolm.

In November 1984, Jeffrey Masson, a prominent Sanskrit scholar and one-time, controversial projects director of the Sigmund Freud Archives, filed suit against *New Yorker* writer Janet Malcolm, her magazine, and her book publisher, Alfred A. Knopf. Masson alleged that Malcolm had libeled him via fabricated quotes in her two-part profile, “The Annals of Scholarship: Trouble in the Archive” that the magazine published in December of the previous year. (Knopf later published the book version, *In the Freud Archives*). Malcolm acknowledged compressing Masson’s quotations and rearranging time chronologies, but she defended her actions by staking them to the long journalistic history of cleaning up quotes and presenting them in a “logical, rational order so he would sound like a logical, rational person.” What ensued was a dramatic federal court battle that lasted nearly twelve years and reached all the way to the US Supreme Court.

So when Malcolm reviewed Tom Kunkel’s recent, meticulous biography, *A Man in Profile: Joseph Mitchell of the New Yorker*,⁷⁸ which documents,

among other things, how Mitchell's exaggerations extended beyond the composites he acknowledged creating in the character Old Mr. Flood, she brought along her own transgressive baggage. Writing in the *New York Review of Books*, Malcolm echoed the epochal, emphatic opening sentence of her earlier work *The Journalist and the Murderer*,⁷⁹ making the declamatory remark that writers aren't any more virtuous than Mitchell, just less gifted.⁸⁰ Malcolm's comments led Lemann to quip in his keynote: "Whenever Janet Malcolm begins a statement about journalism with the word 'Every,' one should count one's change."⁸¹

These indiscretions, of course, are not limited to a particular magazine or time period, nor are they indictments to the genre of literary journalism (even if we call it "long form"). No less than John Hersey readily acknowledged that his popular 1944 *Life* magazine profile "Joe Is Home Now," about GIs returning from World War II, was a composite of roughly twenty different soldiers.⁸² A decade later, Mitchell's good friend, the venerable A.J. Liebling, embellished details of the character James A. MacDonald, better known as the eccentric horseracing journalist "Colonel Stingo," a story he later published as *The Honest Rainmaker*.⁸³ Where was the reality boundary in Hunter S. Thompson's acid-washed dispatches for *Rolling Stone* during the 1970s? (And is it notable that no less a journalist than Pulitzer Prize winner Tracy Kidder admits to not caring what was real and what was fake?)⁸⁴ I've written previously about the intricate philosophy David Foster Wallace constructed for himself, as a fiction writer, for when he faced questions of accuracy versus truth in his journalism for *Harper's*, *Rolling Stone*, and other magazines.⁸⁵

These examples are not, as Malcolm wryly suggests in her review of Kunkel's book, reasons to pillory Mitchell, et al. Rather, they are (mostly) a reflection of changing journalistic mores. As Ben Yagoda demonstrates in *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made*, a survey of that magazine's early pieces illustrates that writers and editors did not differentiate between fact and fiction.⁸⁶ This distinction did not become fully codified in the magazine world until various protests about literary license erupted during the New Journalism era of the 1960s and 1970s. And there have been scores of subsequent transgressions with Malcolm's litigious treatment of Masson going to the core of this issue.

Kathy Roberts Forde masterfully documents the legalities of the Malcolm case in her book *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. The New Yorker and the First Amendment*. She notes that Judge Alex Kozinski of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals was one of the few justices in the numerous iterations of the Masson case who took genre history into consideration when

writing his opinion. In his 1989 dissent against the majority's ruling for Malcolm he wrote:

A more complex problem is presented when the story in question does not involve straight news reporting, but contains material of more lasting literary value, such as is frequently published by the *New Yorker*. A school of thought known as the New Journalism advances the view that an author has the right to vary or rearrange the facts of a story in order to advance a literary purpose. This is a highly controversial view among journalists, one not shared by many who have spoken on the subject.⁸⁷

Not all writers associated with the New Journalism would agree with Kozinski's permissive characterization—see Gay Talese shouting to a gathering of Goucher College MFA students: “Nonfiction means no fiction!”⁸⁸—but as Forde notes, *Masson v. New Yorker* dredged up old resentments toward the New Journalism and those grievances about the dissociation of accuracy and truth—key concepts when trying to determine falsity in a libel case.

The nebulous shade that genre variance offers journalists can be justifiably disputed on ethical grounds, but legally it safeguarded judgment for Malcolm, the *New Yorker*, and literary journalism. Forde concludes:

As much as Masson's lawyers, and the press at large, may have wanted the use of verbatim quotations to be a settled ethical principle in journalism, the principle clearly changed with circumstance—perhaps even as it moved from the genre of daily newspapers, the birthplace of the traditional report, to that of magazines, where the narrative report (like Malcolm's profile of Masson) has long flourished. The Supreme Court recognized this much in its ruling.⁸⁹

Longreads.com, Longform.org and a Bigger Party

What I hope is evident here is that the history of journalism in America is complex and dynamic. Standard newspaper conventions and their narrative counterparts in the magazine world have never been fixed.⁹⁰ *Masson v. New Yorker* highlights the breadth and consequence of these different genres. When we use the terms “long form” and “long read” as easy synonyms for “literary journalism” we flatten out these dimensions and reduce the past to a continuously regenerative present. Such ahistoricism leads to nonsensical phrases like the one used in a recent *Grantland* feature on the sportswriter Bob Ryan, which noted that during the Celtics scribe's heyday in the 1970s the *Boston Globe* encouraged “‘voice’ and ‘long form’ before those labels had been stuck on them.”⁹¹ Such determinism can also lead to blaming journalistic transgressions on the alleged fetishization of narrative, which happened in the aftermath of *Grantland's* problematic “Dr. V's Magical Putter”⁹² and

Rolling Stone's spurious University of Virginia rape story.⁹³ These are moments when professional discussions overflow into general public discourse, and when that happens it's important to not only have a shared vocabulary, but also a shared understanding of history.

But it wasn't history that Mark Armstrong was concerned with when he conceived of the website Longreads.com. Instead, he was trying to solve the persistent problem of figuring out how to pass the time on his daily New York commute from Cobble Hill into Midtown. "I began my career as a journalist," Armstrong told me, "but I started Longreads to serve my own needs as a casual reader."⁹⁴ The mission of the site and its concomitant Twitter hashtag was aggregation—collect and organize stories to read on those twice-a-day rides on the R Train. And for curation, Armstrong said, broadness was exactly the point:

I created #longreads (and chose the name Longreads) precisely because it didn't already exist as a term. It didn't have a history, that's what made it great for my purposes. It could be anything. The goal was to create a clear, simple way to organize and share any text over 1,500 words on the Internet. Longreads should include all genres that meet the word count requirement—longform journalism, essays, short stories, sci-fi, "literary journalism," interview transcripts, historical documents, book chapters, screenplays.⁹⁵

Despite the website's cross-genre imprimatur, it is arguably best known as the home of the Longreads Weekly,⁹⁶ a collection of the "Top 5 Longreads of the Week," most of which can be categorized as literary journalism. Armstrong sees the popularity of nonfiction on the site largely as a byproduct of the Internet: "Twitter . . . is a news- and media-driven environment, so it has been less accommodating to anything that is outside of that."⁹⁷ He added that fiction readers' current cultural preference for novels over short stories further limits the inroads fiction has made on the site. Nonetheless, Longreads does have a fiction tab,⁹⁸ and Longform.org added a fiction section in 2012 and has a Longform Fiction Pick of the Week.⁹⁹ Overall, Armstrong said he is pleased with the progress of his site:

I feel like Longreads and #longreads have solved the problems I initially set out to solve—create an ecosystem on the Internet that organizes, supports, and promotes in-depth reading and outstanding storytelling. I'm less interested in the terminology debate than the questions of how we continue to organize ourselves to ensure the sustainability of quality on the Internet, and remove barriers for independent publishers and writers to participate. There's been a huge increase in the number of publishers investing in feature writing, and they're seeing that their most popular stories will have long lifespans across Twitter and Facebook, so that's a positive sign.¹⁰⁰

And while Armstrong, like Laskas, is not worried about naming debates, he does acknowledge their presence and persistence: “Definitely. A lot of baggage with some of the terms.”¹⁰¹ And he tied that baggage to “a lot of angst about where journalism is headed regardless.”¹⁰² But he’s confident that sites like Longreads and Longform are “the future of online publishing.” While the traditional strength of Longreads and Longform has been curation, these sites are moving into funding and producing original content, whether it’s Longreads Exclusives¹⁰³ or Longform Podcasts.¹⁰⁴ As these sites continue to grow and this style of storytelling becomes even more ubiquitous, there is increasingly a need to have a way to extend the mode of understanding and analysis beyond print. It’s impossible to map the features of a long read or long form onto multimedia stories. How to define a long read when it’s an illustrated documentary?¹⁰⁵ What constitutes long form in a reported Instagram essay?¹⁰⁶ Here, again, the reporting tenets and writing elements of literary journalism are more easily quantifiable and transferable.

What does this reclamation history mean for the websites Longreads.com and Longform.org? Not much, probably, and that’s fine. I would prefer to see these terms used as online vessels for the delivery of literary journalism (and other types of stories) rather than be synonymous with the contents therein. Regardless, I’m a fan of both websites, and I appreciate the fact that they are a significant reason why this conversation is even relevant, to the degree that it is. Laskas, whose writing program at the University of Pittsburgh sponsors Longform.org, further explains:

We used to be the idiots of Creative Writing programs, if we were invited to the table at all. Now students are flocking to our classes. It’s a weird time. It’s exciting. Longform.org has played a role—a living museum of great nonfiction stories that had been all but dead for years. Magazine stories have a short shelf life in print, and now they’re eternal. This is huge for the genre. We’re suddenly the popular crowd. For those of us who have been writing this stuff our whole careers, it’s like, Oh, wow, people are noticing us? Really? We’re still writing the same kinds of stuff we’ve always written.

I love all of it because people actually care enough to argue about a genre that really wasn’t part of any public discourse before. The subjects we wrote about could drive public discourse, of course, but the genre? I don’t think people even thought of it as a genre. And now look. It’s fun. More people are writing it. The party is getting bigger and I’m jumping for joy, really I am, while at the same time trying to find a quiet corner in the room where I can go write my damn story.¹⁰⁷

Likewise, Sims sees these debates as good for business: “All the discussion of different names simply means that many people have recognized an inter-

est in this form. Literary journalism, or something like it, now gets taught and discussed in conversations about English literature, history, journalism, and other areas. It's all good."¹⁰⁸

In many ways, this discussion about terminology is really a discussion about stakeholders. Usage is always about power, and so it's important to understand who has a vested interest in calling this style or tradition of writing "literary journalism" versus "long form" versus "long read." The political economy of academia promotes the production of new knowledge and the reclamation of forgotten histories. Those processes emphasize nuance and complication (sometimes to esoteric extremes), which helps explain why the term "literary journalism" has gained more purchase inside the academy than outside of it, where distinct shades are more readily replaced with a generic gray. A good example of this type of historical shortsightedness can be found, unsurprisingly, on Wikipedia, where "long form" has its own entry, but literary journalism redirects (despite my own best efforts)¹⁰⁹ to "creative nonfiction."¹¹⁰

Conclusion

All of these terms can be understood as brands, but they should also be recognized as part of a general media literacy endeavor. The world of journalism is a world of jargon.¹¹¹ Not only is there an argot to describe different types of stories—from enterprise to sidebar to tick-tock—there's also a host of esoteric terms to describe various parts of those stories: lede, nutgraph, kicker, et cetera.¹¹² And of course, there are many different kinds of journalism: data, public, watchdog, et cetera. Likewise, the Pulitzer Prizes recognize and reward this diversity of story types.¹¹³ Under this big tent of professional terminology, surely there is room for a better understanding of literary journalism and its history. My frustration with the heretofore synonymous usage of long form and long read with literary journalism is akin to the frustration I feel when I see newspaper readers conflate opinion columns with straight news articles, and then use their own misunderstanding as the basis for leveling claims of institutional political bias. Worse is the easy (and erroneous) way all these journalisms get reduced to the problematic term "media," which has no referent. Ironically, the same critic who believes the long form naming debate is superfluous voiced the opposite belief for the same problem with "media."¹¹⁴

The current debates about what to call this style of writing recapitulate decades-old arguments that are often void of historical and occupational literacy. As frivolous as these examinations may initially appear, it is important to note that there is material importance in what we call this style of writing, just as there is importance in what we name *anything*. Names and definitions position readers, critics, and practitioners to read, write, and understand sto-

ries in specific ways. They create a shared vocabulary, denote a usable history, and delimit a common set of expectations. The point here is not to create a rigid taxonomy or a vaunted canon of who's in and who's out. Rather, the purpose is to promote discussion and questioning: What constitutes reporting? How is this genre different from the personal essay? What is the political significance of narrative news? These debates are important.

If literary journalism is what is meant by the popular usage of long form and long reads—and I don't think there's any question that in the journalism community it is—then let's call it literary journalism. The term is more accurate, has a historical lineage, connects the tradition across geographic and temporal borders, and prompts more questioning among readers.

When it comes down to it, what we're talking about is precision, a care for what words mean, what they convey. Perhaps the best reason for replacing long form or long read with literary journalism comes back to the fundamental tenet of reporting: accuracy. Literary journalism is simply a more accurate descriptor. And for journalists, what more reason do you need?

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Notes

1. Ronald Weber, preface to *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, ed. Ronald Weber (New York: Hastings House, 1974), 9.
2. The question comes in paragraph seven of his talk, about three-and-a-half minutes into his speech.
3. Tom Wolfe, "Lost in the Whichy Thicket: *The New Yorker*—II," *New York* magazine, published in the *New York Herald Tribune*, (April 18, 1965), 24.
4. Tom Wolfe, introduction to *The New Journalism*, eds. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson (1973; repr., London: Picador, 1975).
5. Tom Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A Literary Manifesto for the New Social Novel" *Harper's* (November 1989), 45–56.
6. Nicholas Lemann, "The Journalism in Literary Journalism" (Keynote, Annual Convention of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, Minneapolis, MN, May 7–9, 2015).
7. For example, Lemann states: "Yes, literary journalism ought to be executed in memorable, stylish prose."
8. Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 24.
9. Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 22.
10. Dwight MacDonald, "Parajournalism, or Tom Wolfe and His Magic Writing Machine," in *The Reporter as Artist*, 223.
11. Lester Markel, "So What's New?" in *The Reporter as Artist*, 258. Gerald Grant, "The New Journalism We Need," in *The Reporter as Artist*, 264. Dan Balz, "Bad Writing and the New Journalism," in *The Reporter as Artist*, 294.
12. Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 24.
13. Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 262.
14. John Hersey, "The Legend on the License," *Yale Review*, vol. 72, no. 2, February 1986, 289–314.
15. Robert Boynton, *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft* (New York: Vintage, 2005).
16. James Bennet, "Against 'Long-Form Journalism,'" *Atlantic*, December 12, 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/12/against-long-form-journalism/282256/>.
17. Caleb Hannan, "Dr. V's Magical Putter," Grantland.com, January 15, 2014, <http://grantland.com/features/a-mysterious-physicist-golf-club-dr-v/>.
18. Ben Smith, "What the Longform Backlash Is All About," Medium.com, January 26, 2014, <https://medium.com/@buzzfeedben/what-the-longform-backlash-is-all-about-958f4e7691f5>.
19. Jonathan Mahler, "When Long-Form Is Bad Form" *New York Times*, January 24, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/opinion/when-long-form-is-bad-form.html?_r=3.
20. Specifically, Longform.org and Longreads.com.
21. The digital magazine the *Atavist* has been a pioneer in merging traditional print-based literary journalism with emergent multimedia storytelling features.

22. See, for example, this testy Twitter exchange between New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen and me over the importance of terminological specificity: https://twitter.com/jayrosen_nyu/status/441243621337997312.

23. Matt Buchanan, "The Origin of #Long Things," *Buzzfeed.com*, April 11, 2012, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mattbuchanan/the-origin-of-long-things>.

24. Dylan Byers, "Politico Hires FP's Susan Glasser to Head New Long-form Journalism, Opinions Division," *Politico.com*, June 3, 2013, <http://www.politico.com/blogs/media/2013/06/politico-hires-fps-susan-glasser-to-head-new-long-form-journalism-opinion-divisions-165226>.

25. Edwin H. Ford, *A Bibliography of Literary Journalism in America* (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1937), 1.

26. One of today's best practitioners of the form, Tom Junod, has offered an astute cultural analysis of why our short attention spans are drawn to long stories. Junod argues that changes in communication mediums—endless web length, viewing on demand—have allowed writers and television producers to expand the length and scope of their stories, even as, paradoxically, the indices of interpersonal communication have shrunk. Tom Junod, "The Dominance of Looooong in the Time of Short," *Esquire.com*, September 17, 2013, <http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/books/reviews/a24818/the-dominance-of-loooooong-in-the-age-of-short-1013/>.

27. John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 15.

28. Thomas B. Connery, "A Third Way to Tell the Story," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Sims (1990; repr., Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 5.

29. Hartsock, *History of American Literary Journalism*, 9.

30. Thomas B. Connery, introduction to *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*, ed. Thomas B. Connery (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992), 16.

31. Norman Sims, *The Literary Journalists: The New Art of Personal Reportage* (New York: Ballantine, 1984).

32. At 8:22pm on November 22, 2013, the writer Susan Orlean tweeted a photo of Sims's *The Literary Journalists* with the caption, "I can't work unless I have a copy of this book next to me." <https://twitter.com/susanorlean/status/404039837826551808>.

33. Norman Sims, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2014.

34. Sims, *True Stories*, 6–7.

35. Sims, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2014. Carey's influence is wide in the world of communication and journalism, including the subfield of literary journalism. At Illinois he not only worked with Sims, but also John J. Pauly, another leading scholar in the field. Thomas B. Connery told me he nearly attended Illinois for his PhD as well (which would have placed him there at around the same time as Sims and Pauly), but chose instead Brown University, where, in a bit of academic serendipity, he also took up the study of literary journalism, using that

specific term—without knowing Sims's or Pauly's work—in the title of his own PhD dissertation: "Fusing Fictional Technique and Journalistic Fact: Literary Journalism in the 1890s Newspaper." Thomas B. Connery, e-mail message to author, May 15, 2015.

36. Ronald Weber, ed., *The Literature of Fact: Literary Nonfiction in American Writing* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980).

37. Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, eds., *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (New York: Scribner, 1998).

38. Ben Yagoda, e-mail message to author, March 1, 2014.

39. Norman Sims, ed., *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century* (1990; repr., Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

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

41. Thomas B. Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1992).

42. Edd Applegate, *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary of Writer and Editors* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996).

43. Arthur Kaul, ed., *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Literary Journalists 1945–1995* (Detroit: Gale Publishing, 1997).

44. Paige Williams, moderator, "Live Chat: Jeff Sharlet and Leslie Jamison on Literary Journalism," Nieman Storyboard, July 24, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130806132652/http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/2013/07/24/live-chat-jeff-sharlet-and-leslie-jamison-on-literary-journalism/>.

45. Jeanne Marie Laskas, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2013.

46. Laskas could not have been more helpful or friendly during and after our email exchange. After I explained to her that I was not a practitioner, but rather a scholar (a term that causes my brain to go into hot spasm) of the genre, she enthusiastically replied: "See, you get to call it anything you want! That's great! My rant is (apparently) aimed at practitioners, or more accurately, at the nagging piece in me that (apparently) longs for legitimacy just like everyone else. Apparently I feel a need to squash that piece and do serious damage to it lest it contaminate my work. That's the danger. What is wonderful is that there are people like you who now research and write about this style of writing and use words like 'taxonomies' when you talk about us. We didn't have that before. That is the beautiful thing." Jeanne Marie Laskas, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2013.

47. Ironically, Sullivan takes up a similarly historical task with his introduction to *Best American Essays 2014*. His densely researched introduction traces the long, tangled, and misunderstood history of the terms *essay* and *essayist*. Savvy consumers know, of course, that the essay has Gallic origins and can trace its provenance to Montaigne. Except, as Sullivan reveals, maybe not. Maybe these terms and their history are more complex. Maybe recovering that past and understanding what it means for our present is important. Maybe. John Jeremiah Sullivan, "Introduction: The Ill-Defined Plot," *The Best American Essays 2014*, ed. John Jeremiah Sullivan; Series ed. Robert Atwan (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2014), xvii–xxvii.

48. See, for example: Lillian Ross, *Picture* (repr., Boston: De Capo, 2002); Susan Orlean, *The Orchid Thief: A True Story of Beauty and Obsession* (repr., New York: Ballantine, 2000); Adrienne Nicole LeBlanc, *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble and Coming of Age in the Bronx* (repr., New York: Scribner, 2004); or Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (repr., New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

49. The *Tampa Bay Times* is an especially strong publication for this style of writing. It's the home of Pulitzer Prize-winning feature writer Lane DeGregory. Its website is www.tampabay.com.

50. The podcast *Serial*, which attempted to unravel the mystery of a murder cold case, was a sensation during the autumn of 2014. Host and executive producer Sarah Koenig crafted weekly cliffhanger narratives by combining elements like immersion reporting, complicated story structure, and dialogue. The much-anticipated second season is scheduled to begin in late 2015. *Serial's* website is www.serialpodcast.org.

51. The Public Broadcasting investigative program *Frontline* is an especially strong example of literary journalism in the broadcast sphere. Since its debut in 1983, it has won sixty-nine Emmy Awards, thirty-one duPont Columbia University Awards, seventeen Peabody Awards, and much more. Its website is www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline.

52. @Longreads user account on Twitter.com, <https://twitter.com/Longreads>.

53. @Longform user account on Twitter.com, <https://twitter.com/longform>.

54. In his keynote, Lemann acknowledges "the proliferation of new publishers" and notes that they "often describe themselves using the somewhat grating term 'long-form journalism.'"

55. Twitter.com hashtag for #Longform: <https://twitter.com/search?f=realtime&q=%23longform&src=typd>.

56. Janet Reitman, "Where the Tea Party Rules," *Rolling Stone*, October 14, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/where-the-tea-party-rules-20141014>.

57. Jenn Pelly, Sleater-Kinney review, Pitchfork.com, October 24, 2014, <http://pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/19860-sleater-kinney-start-together/>.

58. Anna Hiatt, "A Conversation with Paige Williams from Nieman Storyboard," Tow Center for Digital Journalism, November 13, 2013, <http://towcenter.org/a-conversation-with-paige-williams-from-nieman-storyboard/>.

59. Despite our difference of opinion on this point, Williams was an early advocate of this essay, which I pitched to her when she was the editor of Nieman Storyboard. Her initial and enthusiastic support of this and my other Nieman projects is greatly appreciated.

60. A similar thing happened with the creation of the phrasal verb "snow fall" in the aftermath of the much talked about *New York Times* multimedia story. John Branch, "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek," *New York Times*, December 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek>.

61. Amy Westervelt, "Content Used to Be King. Now It's the Joker," Medium.com, June 3, 2014, <https://medium.com/swlh/content-used-to-be-king-now-its-the-joker-d40703c18c73>.

62. Ian Jack, ed., *Granta Book of Reportage*, as quoted in John C. Hartsock, "Literary Reportage: The 'Other' Literary Journalism," in *Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, John Bak and Bill Reynolds, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 24.

63. John Bak, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2014.

64. Bak, e-mail message to author.

65. Boynton delivered an excellent IALJS keynote address, "Notes Toward a Supreme Nonfiction: Teaching Literary Reportage in the Twenty-first Century," at the organization's 2013 conference in Tampere, Finland. Like Lemann's keynote, it was subsequently reprinted in this journal. Robert Boynton, "Notes Toward a Supreme Nonfiction: Teaching Literary Reportage in the Twenty-first Century," *Literary Journalism Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 125–131.

66. Pablo Calvi, "Latin America's Own 'New Journalism,'" *Literary Journalism Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2010), 63–83. Juan Orlando Pérez González, "Revolution is Such a Beautiful Word!: Literary Journalism in Castro's Cuba," *Literary Journalism Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 9–28.

67. Thomas Vaessens, "Making Overtures: Literature and Journalism, 1968 and 2011—A Dutch Perspective," *Literary Journalism Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 55–72.

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

69. Nick Mulgrew, "Tracing the Seam: Narrative Journalism and Imaginings in South African Literature," *Literary Journalism Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 9–30. Anthea Garman and Gillian Rennie, "Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa: A White Woman Writer Goes West," *Literary Journalism Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 133–145.

70. Willa McDonald, "A Vagabond: The Literary Journalism of John Stanley James," *Literary Journalism Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 65–81. Sue Joseph, "Preferring 'Dirty' to 'Literary' Journalism: In Australia, Margaret Simons Challenges the Jargon While Producing the Texts," *Literary Journalism Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 100–117.

71. Beate Josephi, Edith Cowan, and Christine Müller, "Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible in German and Australian Literary Journalism," *Literary Journalism Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 67–78.

72. Maria Lassila-Merisalo, "Exploring the Reality Boundary of Esa Kero," *Literary Journalism Studies* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 39–47.

73. *Literary Journalism Studies*, Special Issue: Norwegian Reportage 5, no. 1 (Spring 2013).

74. Barbara Lounsberry, *The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 1990), xii; Lester Markel, "So What's New?" in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, Ronald Weber, ed.

(New York: Hastings House, 1974), 258; William L. Rivers, "The New Confusion," in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, 235; Ronald Weber, "Some Sort of Artistic Excitement," in *The Reporter as Artist: A Look at the New Journalism Controversy*, 14

75. Norman Sims, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2013.

76. Jeanne Marie Laskas, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2013.

77. Kathy Roberts Forde, *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 6.

78. Thomas Kunkel, *Man in Profile: Joseph Mitchell of the New Yorker* (New York: Random House, 2015).

79. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 3.

80. Janet Malcolm, "The Master Writer of the City," *New York Review of Books*, April 23, 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/apr/23/joseph-mitchell-master-writer-city/>.

81. Lemann, "The Journalism in Literary Journalism."

82. John Hersey, "Joe Is Home Now," *Life*, July 3, 1944, 68–80.

83. A.J. Liebling, *The Honest Rainmaker: The Life and Times of Colonel John R. Stingo* (New York: Doubleday, 1953).

84. Sims, *True Stories*, 310.

85. Josh Roiland, "The Fine Print: Uncovering the True Story of David Foster Wallace and the 'Reality Boundary,'" *Literary Journalism Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 148–161.

86. Ben Yagoda, *About Town: The New Yorker and the World It Made* (Boston: De Capo, 1997).

87. Kozinski also believed the Reid scandal paled in comparison to Malcolm's transgressions. After surveying the attendant literature, he concluded: "Unlike my colleagues, I am unable to construe the first amendment as granting journalists a privilege to engage in practices they themselves frown upon, practices one of our defendants has flatly disowned as journalistic heresy. The press can legitimately claim the right to editorial judgment when it is selecting the words itself; it cannot, and does not, claim the right to select words for others."

88. Norman Sims, "The Problem and Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," *Literary Journalism Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 7–16.

89. Forde, *Literary Journalism on Trial*, 174.

90. Even a cursory glance at this history reveals that the profession has undergone radical, systemic changes since the publication of the first periodical, *Publick Occurrences, Both Foreign and Domestic*, in 1690. These changes—topical, methodological, rhetorical, philosophical, political, and professional—were often the result of transformations in social, cultural, economic, and technological structures. What does the invention of the telegraph have to do with nascent conceptions of "objectivity" in the American press? Plenty. Read David Mindich's *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism* (rev., New York: NYU Press, 2000). And for the most comprehensive and compelling history of journalism in this country, I

recommend Christopher Daly, *Covering American: A Narrative History of a Nation's Journalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

91. Bryan Curtis, "The Commissioner," Grantland.com, October 10, 2014, <http://grantland.com/features/the-commissioner-bob-ryan-nba-career-boston-celtics-boston-globe-larry-bird-new-book-scribe/>.

92. Jonathan Mahler, "When 'Long-Form' Is Bad Form," *New York Times*, January 24, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/opinion/when-long-form-is-bad-form.html?_r=1. Mahler's piece was just one of several that responded to the controversy of the Grantland.com January 15, 2014, feature, "Dr. V's Magical Putter," by Caleb Hannan, which investigated a "mysterious inventor" who engineered, marketed, and sold "a scientifically superior golf club." In the course of his research, Hannan learned that "Dr. V.," whose real name was Essay Anne Vanderbilt, was a transgender woman. Vanderbilt did not want Hannan to disclose this information in his story, but he resolved that it was part of unraveling the mystery of the club and its marketing. Subsequently, Vanderbilt committed suicide. Hannan incorporated all of these elements in his story, which led to a tense debate about ethics within the journalistic community that spilled over into what some wrongly dubbed the recent fetishization of narrative.

93. George Packer, "Rolling Stone and the Temptations of Narrative Journalism," *New Yorker*.com, April 6, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/rolling-stone-and-the-temptations-of-narrative-journalism>. Packer was responding to the fallout from Sabrina Erdely's now-retracted *Rolling Stone* story, "A Rape on Campus," November 19, 2014, about a sexual assault and subsequent investigation at the University of Virginia. The thinly-sourced story produced almost immediate suspicion and was eventually discredited, leading publisher Jann Wenner to enlist the Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism to investigate the magazine's editorial practices to determine where they failed. On April 5, 2015, *Rolling Stone* published the school's findings and recommendations in a report entitled, "'A Rape on Campus': What Went Wrong," <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/features/a-rape-on-campus-what-went-wrong-20150405>.

94. Mark Armstrong, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2014.

95. Ibid. Whereas Longreads sets its word length at 1,500, Longform.org collects and recommends "new and classic nonfiction" articles that are "over 2,000 words that are freely available online."

96. "The Top 5 Longreads of the Week," Longreads.com, <http://blog.longreads.com>.

97. Mark Armstrong, Twitter direct message to author, September 11, 2014.

98. "Longreads Fiction," Longreads.com, <http://longreads.com/articles/search?q=Fiction>.

99. "Longform Fiction Pick of the Week," Longform.org, <http://longform.org/fiction>.

100. Mark Armstrong, e-mail message to author, March 12, 2014.

101. Mark Armstrong, Twitter direct message to author, January 25, 2014.

102. Mark Armstrong, Twitter direct message to author, January 25, 2014.

103. “Longreads Exclusives,” Longreads.com, <http://blog.longreads.com/category/story/>.

104. “Longform Podcast,” Longform.org, <http://longform.org/podcast>.

105. For example, the work of Carrie Ching, an investigative multimedia journalist who produces reported narratives such as “Level 14: Inside One of California’s Most Dangerous Juvenile Homes,” combines illustration, animation, narration, and closed-caption text within the video, ProPublica, April 2, 2015, <https://www.propublica.org/article/video-inside-one-of-californias-most-dangerous-juvenile-homes>.

106. Jeff Sharlet has pioneered the InstaEssay, a reported narrative accompanying a photograph on the social media platform Instagram.com. Instagram limits users to 2,200 characters (roughly 400 words) per image, so the stories do not qualify as “long reads” and have never been referred to as “long form.” However, they do contain many of the narrative elements of literary journalism, augmented by the immediacy of the accompanying photograph. Sharlet has written about his InstaEssays for the *New York Times* and Longreads.com. Sharlet, “Instagram’s Graveyard Shift,” *New York Times*, January 22, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/25/magazine/instagram-graveyard-shift.html?_r=1. Sharlet, “#Nightshift: Excerpts from an Instagram Essay,” Longreads.com, September 2014, <http://blog.longreads.com/2014/10/01/nightshift-excerpts-from-an-instagram-essay/>. Sharlet, Instagram account, <https://instagram.com/jeffsharlet/?hl=en>.

107. Jeanne Marie Laskas, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2013.

108. Norman Sims, e-mail message to author, March 13, 2013.

109. Wikipedia is a “free-access, free-content Internet encyclopedia.” Its users generate and maintain its content. And while it promotes itself as allowing users to “edit most of its articles,” these edits are subject to the scrutiny of anonymous “administrators” who determine the veracity and efficacy of the post based on the organization’s content guidelines and policies (namely, that the information has to be verifiable and the user must produce a source for the information presented). In this structure, the administrators have a great deal of power even when users with more editorial expertise attempt to correct mistakes on pages. Over the years I have attempted to create a unique page for “literary journalism,” which has historically redirected to the entry for “creative nonfiction” when a user searches that term on website. Administrators have always reverted these attempts, prompting me to post a jeremiad on the “Talk” section—where users can make their editorial arguments for edits—of the “creative nonfiction” page criticizing the historical short-sightedness of the administrators who are unwilling to decouple “literary journalism” from “creative nonfiction.” No administrator ever responded to my post. Josh Roiland, “Literary Journalism Needs Its Own Page,” Wikipedia.org, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk:Creative_nonfiction.

110. “Creative Nonfiction,” Wikipedia.org, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creative_nonfiction.

111. *Wall Street Journal*, “Glossary of Terms: Journalism,” 1998, <http://www.encoreleaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/WSJ-terminology.pdf>.

112. Journalistic Terms and Definitions, <http://www.slowburn.com/clients/fais/journalism/jterms.html>.

113. The Pulitzer Prizes: Past Winners and Finalists by Category, <http://www.pulitzer.org/bycat>. The Pulitzers would be a good place to start if one *wanted* to make a value-judgment claim about the higher quality of literary journalism. The awards are rife with writers and stories in this genre. Another argument can be found in a comprehensive list of the “Top 100 Works of Journalism in the 20th Century,” compiled in 1999 by the journalism faculty at New York University and more than a dozen industry legends and experts. Of the 100 selections on the list, forty-one can be called literary journalism, including the top two: John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* and Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, both originally published in the *New Yorker*, “The Top 100 Works of Journalism In the United States in the 20th Century,” <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/Top%20100%20page.htm>. Finally, the genre achieved perhaps its most significant validation when the Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded, for the first time ever, to a literary journalist, the Belarusian reporter Svetlana Alexievitch.

114. NYU journalism professor Jay Rosen, who had previously mocked me about the frivolity of the long-form naming debate, essentially made the same point I make in this article when he engaged other Twitter users about the term “media.” In an August 16, 2014, tweet he wrote: “That term—‘the media’—has no referent. That’s why people use it when they really mean ‘an Op-Ed I saw’ or ‘a talking head I hate watch.’” Rosen’s analysis on this matter could not be more correct: Twitter post, August 16, 2014, 9:30 p.m., https://twitter.com/jayrosen_nyu/status/500801758776803328.



Screenplay writer, author, playwright, and columnist Ben Hecht.

Ben Hecht: The Old New Journalist

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Abstract: This study traces the last years of Ben Hecht's writing career, arguing his importance in postwar American literature. He produced ten novels, about 250 short stories, some twenty plays, more than seventy screenplays, and many radio and television scripts. Perversely, his legendary success as a Hollywood screenwriter only served to undermine his literary reputation, so that his prose remains overlooked to this day. But while Hecht's first book, *Erik Dorn*, published in 1921, was an alienation novel written some twenty years ahead of its time, his final cycle of nonfiction books anticipated the New Journalism of the 1960s. None better exemplified his blend of fiction and nonfiction than an unpublished biography of the Jewish gangster Mickey Cohen, the so-called king of Hollywood's Sunset Strip. Cohen personified the "tough Jew" for Hecht, and research on the biography became a confrontation with a myth that the author himself had constructed and disseminated to the American public. A Chicago crime reporter in his youth and inventor of the gangster movie, Hecht had become a militant propagandist for the Zionist cause back in the late 1940s. He had originally befriended Cohen when the two joined forces to raise money and smuggle weapons to the Jewish "terrorists and gangsters" of Palestine. The Cohen manuscript thus illuminates Hecht's significance as both a twentieth-century writer and a man who played a role in history.

In the opening pages of his mammoth autobiography, the journalist, novelist, dramatist, and screenwriter Ben Hecht made light of a regret that haunted him for much of his life. "I can understand the literary critic's shyness towards me," he famously quipped. "It is difficult to praise a novelist or a thinker who keeps popping up as the author of innumerable movie melodramas. It is like writing about the virtues of a preacher who keeps carelessly getting himself arrested in bordellos."¹

Film historians now refer to Hecht as Hollywood's most legendary screen-

writer, but perversely, his achievements in film only served to undermine his literary reputation.² An iconic figure in that great migration of writers who came west with the advent of talking pictures, Hecht used his movie work to finance his prose. Over the course of a remarkable career he produced ten novels, about 250 short stories, some twenty plays, more than seventy screenplays, and many radio and television scripts.³ His output for the studios during the Golden Age of Hollywood transformed modern cinema, but as biographer Douglas (now George) Fetherling noted: "It is difficult today to understand the harmful effect that had on his standing as a literary man. The common notion, that he had sold his creative soul to Hollywood . . . remained unchallenged until the 1960s, when his books were nearly all out of print and forgotten."⁴

This study considers the legacy that Hecht built during a final, fifteen-year stage of his writing career, when a British boycott of his films, a backlash to his militant Zionist activism during the 1940s, prompted him to return to prose. It argues his enduring importance as one of the great American writers of the twentieth century, one who cross-pollinated various cultural forms with extraordinary wit and exuberance. Hecht could weave romantic tropes and styles into endless tales, spinning them out like the fabled heroine of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

Film scholars have acknowledged that his movies brought a new sophistication to popular culture, transforming it into something richer and more significant than it had been before he came along.⁵ Less acknowledged, however, is his place in the literature of the postwar era. His debut in fiction, *Erik Dorn*, published in 1921, had been an alienation novel written some twenty years ahead of its time. The naturalistic sketches that he had simultaneously churned out for *One Thousand and One Afternoons* in Chicago, his daily newspaper column, foreshadowed the literary journalism that would begin to emerge after World War II. Hecht's books after 1950, beginning with his autobiographical masterpiece, *A Child of the Century*, represented a return to what he had started with those columns. The cycle of memoirs that he produced during his final years, and, most especially, his unpublished biography of the gangster Mickey Cohen, were a natural evolution for this journalist and storyteller—a hybrid of memory and fancy, vivid fact, and inventive narration that anticipated the New Journalism of the 1960s.

Background

Born February 28, 1894, on Manhattan's Lower East Side to newly arrived Russian Jewish immigrants, Hecht spent an idyllic childhood in Racine, Wisconsin, before landing a job at the *Chicago Journal* in 1910.⁶ At an age

when other young men join fraternities, Hecht found fellowship among the tribe of city newsmen. While reporting crime and scandal, he also rose as a leading light of an avant-garde literary movement, the Chicago Renaissance. He contributed to Margaret Anderson's groundbreaking modernist journal, the *Little Review*, and, as a disciple of H.L. Mencken, produced a steady stream of short fiction for the magazine the *Smart Set*.

By 1920, Hecht was a seasoned reporter but still a young man, and he returned from a year as a war correspondent in Germany with a new awareness about journalism and his place in it. In *Erik Dorn*, the One Thousand and One Nights in Chicago columns, and, soon thereafter, in the Broadway play *The Front Page*, he investigated the media and reflected many of the major concerns voiced by critics and scholars of the day. But Hecht set himself apart in that he effectively combined insights into media with skills as a practitioner.

While moonlighting in public relations, Hecht began his One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago column for the *Chicago Daily News* in June 1921. Every day, for more than a year, he would produce a different tale about the city. He had envisioned the column as a feat of storytelling, a high-wire act, just as Scheherazade's 1,001 Arabian tales had been—though the sultan's wife had performed for her life, while Hecht was just doing it to prove that he could. In the fall of 1922, bookstore proprietors Pascal Covici and William McGee published a collection of sixty-four of the columns in book form, interleaving them with expressionistic illustrations in black ink by the artist Herman Rosse. In the book's preface, *Daily News* editor Henry Justin Smith explained Hecht's "Big Idea—the idea that just under the edge of the news as commonly understood, the news often flatly and unimaginatively told, lay life He was going to be its interpreter. His was to be the lens throwing city life into new colors."⁷

Each story, each slice of life, was a shard in the kaleidoscope of modern city life. A great financier finds himself distracted on a rainy day by thoughts about his own insignificance; solitary souls wander through the mists of a downtown that "is like the exposed mechanism of some monstrous clock"; a poor widow spends so lavishly on her husband's funeral that she loses her children; a Mr. Prokofieff directs a chaotic, circus-like modernist opera; hundreds of fishermen sit all afternoon along the Municipal Pier, staring across Lake Michigan at oblivion. There are portraits, ironic yarns, and mood pieces painted in brush strokes: "A dark afternoon with summer thunder in the sky. The fan-shaped skyscrapers spread a checkerboard of window lights through the gloom." As Smith noted, "Comedies, dialogues, homilies, one-act tragedies, storiettes, sepia panels, word-etchings, satires, tone-poems, fugues, bourreess—something different every day."⁸ In "The Tattooer," for example,

Hecht describes an artisan who has lived past his glory days:

The automatic piano in the penny arcade whangs dolorously into a forgotten tango. The two errand boys stand with their eyes glued on the interiors of the picture slot machines—"An Artist's Model" and "On the Beach at Atlantic City." A gun pops foolishly in the rear and the three-inch bullseye clangs. In a corner behind the Postal Card Photo Taken in a Minute gallery sits Dutch, the world's leading tattooer. Simple tattoo designs cover the two walls. Dragons, scorpions, bulbous nymphs, crossed flags, wreathed anchors, cupids, butterflies, daggers and quaint decorations that seem the grotesque survivals of mid-Victorian schools of fantasy. Photographs of famous men also cover the walls—Capt. Constantinus tattooed from head to foot, every inch of him; Barnum's favorites, ancient and forgotten kooch dancers, fire eaters, sword swallowers, magicians and museum freaks. And a two column article from the *Chicago Chronicle* of 1897, yellowed and framed and recounting in sonorous phrases ("pulchritudinous epidermis" is feature frequently) that the society folk of Chicago have taken up tattooing as a fad, following the lead of New York's Four Hundred, who followed the lead of London's most aristocratic circles: and that Prof. Al Herman, known from Madagascar to Sandy Hook as "Dutch," was the leading artist of the tattoo needle in the world.

Here in his corner, surrounded by the molding symbols and slogans of a dead world, Dutch is rounding out his career—a Silenus in exile, his eyes still bright with the memory of hurdy-gurdy midnights.

"Long ago," says Dutch, and his sigh evokes a procession of marvelous ghosts tattooed from head to toe and capering like a company of debonair totem poles over the cobblestones of another South State Street. But the macabre days are gone. The Barnum bacchanal of the nineties lies in its grave with a fading lithograph for a tombstone. Along with the fall of Russian empire, the collapse of the fourteen points and the general dethronement of reason since the World's Fair, the honorable art of tattooing has come in for its share of vicissitudes.⁹

Hecht reached to determine the limits of what reporting could offer the storyteller. His column harkened back to the daily columns of George Ade and Eugene Field in the Chicago newspapers of the 1890s, which may have been the first signed columns to appear in any American paper, and the Mr. Dooley stories of Finley Peter Dunne. These were varieties of the newspaper "sketch," a broad category of newswriting that encompassed any report based on personal observations. Hecht's style most resembled the relatively unmannered realism of *Stories of the Streets* and of the *Town*, Ade's column, which grew directly out of reporting experience.¹⁰

But in the end, Hecht did find the limits of shoe leather, at least for himself. The final column of his collection features a character known only as “the newspaper reporter.” The reporter returns from a long day on the streets, and opens his notepad to find that some “secret of the city,” which he had thought that he held in his mind during the day, has now slipped away from him. The next day the reporter tries to ferret out the secret by interviewing people who lie on the grass in Grant Park, staring up at the clouds, but upon returning home again, finds the secret has eluded him once more.¹¹

While the American Society of Newspaper Editors, soon to be formed, in 1922, would be insisting upon objectivity as a standard of professionalism, One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago reflected a growing acknowledgment of the subjective nature of journalism. Hecht’s supervisor at the *Daily News*, Charles H. Dennis, and four other ASNE founders drafted a code that called for “truthfulness, impartiality, fair play and decency.” Still, this was a time when newspapers were adopting more nuanced ideas about objectivity, distancing themselves from the “naïve empiricism” once understood as realism in the 1890s. Like the debut of the political column at this time, the more frequent use of bylines and the emergence of “interpretive reporting” in the form of news summaries and analysis, Hecht’s column suggested that facts and events require interpretation and that every report contains a point of view.¹²

A leading voice of this new skepticism about objectivity was Henry Luce, who worked as a legman for Hecht on the column (much to Hecht’s dissatisfaction). Within two years Luce cofounded *Time*, a newsweekly full of summaries and analysis. “Show me a man who thinks he’s objective,” Luce had said, “and I’ll show you a man who’s deceiving himself.”¹³

These doubts about objectivity, the call to police journalism, and the birth of an industry of public relations experts who massaged data and carefully calibrated messages coincided with growing pessimism about the notion of a public that was capable of reason and informed decision-making.¹⁴ Collectively, though, the new attitudes about the press and the public were symptomatic of something deeper at work. They reflected a profound new skepticism about the power of reason and the knowability of truth, a pervasive lack of confidence, and sense of distrust that was a legacy of World War I. Hecht’s search for realism had only affirmed his subjectivity. He had gone off as a reporter seeking facts and found “that the city was nothing more nor less than a vast, broken mirror giving him back garbled images of himself.”¹⁵

His first novel, *Erik Dorn*, which arrived on bookstands in the fall of 1921, offered a perspective that was diametrically the inverse of what he provided each day in his column. As the story begins, Dorn is Hecht as he imag-

ines himself six years in the future: no longer a reporter or columnist, now a thirty-four-year-old editor for a newspaper. He has become jaded about the human drama that plays out across the city each day, all the writhing turmoil and tragedy captured in newsprint and churned out “sausage fashion” in a half-million newspapers a day. Whatever secrets the city holds have been revealed, and he is weary of them all. Walking the streets and scanning the reams of copy that cross his desk, he sees the tumult of human activity like the patterns on an anthill. His eyes trace these geometries, but they are meaningless. Newspapers, with their editorial bromides and shrill sensationalism, hold up a mirror to this carnival of life, delivering “a caricature of absurdity itself.”¹⁶ Dorn, meanwhile, is captive to the mocking laughter in his own head, his own devastating irony. “The book as a whole is as beautiful and disturbing as a live thing,” wrote a reviewer for *Vanity Fair*. “It remains to consider how far *Erik Dorn* is a brilliantly colored caricature of a generation of disillusionists, a generation which, though still young, can find no reason for its continued existence but that the blood is warm and quick in its veins.”¹⁷ Dorn voiced his generation’s pessimism, echoing Walter Lippmann’s denunciations of the public that same year, lamenting that people “want black and white so they can all mass on the white side and make faces at all the evil-doers who prefer the black. They don’t want facts, diagnosis, theories, interpretations, reports.”¹⁸

At the same time, in the character of Dorn, Hecht gave form to the anxieties of a new era’s corporate efficiency. In an introduction to the 1963 reprint of *Erik Dorn*, Nelson Algren would credit Hecht with anticipating the themes of alienation and conformity—the latter personified by the “organization man”—that permeated American literature after World War II. “I’m like men will all be years later,” Dorn says, “when their emotions are finally absorbed by the ingenious surfaces they’ve surrounded themselves with, and life lies forever buried behind the inventions of engineers, scientists and business men.”¹⁹ In the early 1920s, this was efficiency in the manufacture of everything from tin cans and Ford automobiles to machine guns and bootleg whiskey. It was an efficiency that Hecht and other Chicago newsmen would soon associate with a fresh breed of gangsters and, in particular, with the cold-blooded Al Capone.

This editor’s detachment is not objectivity—far from it. Algren suggests that Dorn’s cynicism is merely “a hideout from the winds of passion” that blow within him. Biographer Fetherling argues, on the other hand, that Dorn is a man with more talent, intellect, and promise than he knows what to do with, and thus ultimately finds himself dissatisfied and disillusioned.²⁰ He feels things, even falls in love, but ultimately can’t help mocking his own folly. In short, while Hecht’s daily experiment in realism with his column had led

to a deeper sense of subjectivity, his newspaperman Erik Dorn is his original romantic egoist, the first of many to follow: a malcontent who is brilliant, coldly efficient, but driven by a mad hidden passion.

Erik Dorn and the collection *One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago* brought Hecht national attention, but it wasn't until he was in his mid-thirties that he scored his first bona fide hit, with the 1928 Broadway debut of *The Front Page*. A collaboration with fellow newsroom veteran Charles MacArthur about Chicago newspaper life, *The Front Page* was credited by Tennessee Williams as having "uncorseted American theater,"²¹ and it has been hailed as the greatest comedy ever written for the American stage.²²

By 1928 Hecht had already written *Underworld*, the silent film that would launch a gangster movie craze and earn Hecht an Academy Award. Over the next forty years he spun out blockbusters with a resourcefulness, versatility, and speed that at times resembled sorcery. He justifiably claimed to have "invented the gangster movie," following up *Underworld* with *Scarface*, a 1932 epic produced by millionaire Howard Hughes to be the gangster movie to end all gangster movies.²³ He likewise helped invent the screwball comedy, following *The Front Page* with *Twentieth Century* (1934) and *Nothing Sacred* (1937).²⁴ He also produced such classics as Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) and *Notorious* (1946), and penned the final draft of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) in one marathon session with producer David Selznick. Hecht was the man the studios turned to whenever they were in a jam: He could write well in any genre, and at lightning speed.²⁵ *New Yorker* critic Pauline Kael later credited him with half the entertaining movies that Hollywood ever produced.²⁶

But Hecht is unique among great American writers in also playing an important role in history, a role that would alter the trajectory of his literary career and add a new dimension to his enduring relevance. His Judaism had never been an important aspect of his life until 1939, when, as he later explained in his autobiography *Child of the Century*: "I became a Jew and looked on the world with Jewish eyes. The German mass murder of the Jews, recently begun, had brought my Jewishness to the surface."²⁷ Though remembered as a Hollywood legend, he is more significant as the man who broke the silence about the Nazi murder of European Jews.

While the American press remained oblivious to the reports that surfaced early in World War II of a German extermination plan, Hecht launched a massive, one-man publicity campaign. He delivered speeches, published jolting, full-page newspaper advertisements, and orchestrated star-studded theatrical spectacles at Madison Square Garden and the Hollywood Bowl that raised awareness and mobilized public pressure on the Roosevelt administration for an Allied rescue program.²⁸ But unable to change British and Ameri-

can policies over crucial months of the war, Hecht bitterly came to realize that he would fail to save any significant number of Jews, and he held the Allied leadership culpable for the genocide.

After the war, he became notorious as a militant supporter of Jewish nationalism—a second brief, spectacular career as activist that would have a long-term impact on his future as a writer. In his advocacy of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, the Zionist guerillas warring to drive the British Empire out of Palestine, Hecht embraced the labels of “terrorist” and “gangster” with propaganda that climaxed in an infamous May 15, 1947, newspaper advertisement. Headlined “Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine,” it declared that American Jews had “a holiday in their hearts” every time the Irgun bombed or killed British troops in Palestine.²⁹ Amid the storm of outrage that followed, Hecht approached the flamboyant Hollywood gangster Mickey Cohen for help raising money and procuring arms and matériel, which the mob then smuggled to the Jews of the Holy Land.

When the British Cinematograph Exhibitors’ Association announced a boycott of Hecht’s films in mid-October 1948, it cited his “holiday in their hearts” advertisement. Though Britain finally lifted the boycott in 1952, as late as 1956 Hecht was denied credit for *The Iron Petticoat* out of fear of losing the British market.³⁰

Back during the years of Hecht’s desperate plea for rescue, he had appealed to the conscience of his fellow Americans, but had also forged an image of the new “tough Jew” of Palestine.³¹ Thus this former Chicago crime reporter and inventor of the gangster movie created the myth of the “tough Jew” of Israel, and in the last stage of his writing career, confronted the realities behind the myth that he himself had created. His friend Mickey Cohen, a former pro boxer, freelance “heister,” and chief enforcer for Benjamin “Bugsy” Siegel, was the living, breathing personification of that myth. He was also a charming psychopath.

Hecht collaborated with Cohen on the gangster’s biography, writing it in a style that would by the 1960s be recognizable as “New Journalism.” The project became a final wrestling match with issues of literary style that he had originally framed with his first two published books, *One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago* and *Erik Dorn*. Yet the enigma of the cunning, manipulative Mickey Cohen also raised a fresh challenge for the aging reporter, and Hecht’s efforts to untangle this mystery offer a final word on his life and legacy.

The Old New Journalist

“Memory is the worst of playwrights,” Hecht wrote. “Its ghosts have no time sense. They intermingle, overlap, pop up in the wrong places at the

wrong time. And they even tell lies. But I welcome their mendacity and disorder without criticism. It is not easy to remember oneself.”³² He could empathize with his many old friends and colleagues in Hollywood who found themselves out of work when blacklisting became policy, though he himself did not suffer so cruel a fate. “The cold war blew like an icy wind across the country to the Pacific Coast,” remarked screenwriter John Howard Lawson, one of the so-called Hollywood Ten who were fired for refusing to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Hecht was no Communist, but after the British announced their boycott of his films, he returned west for “a chill Christmas week—there were no jobs or parties for me. The movie moguls, most of them Jews for whose pockets I had netted over a hundred million dollars in profits with my scenarios, were even nervous of answering my hellos, let alone hiring me.” His circumstances were, nevertheless, not nearly as dire as for those listed as subversives in the infamous *Red Channels* pamphlet. The fact that at one point he used the name of his chauffeur, Lester Barstow, as a pseudonym after the studios agreed to hire him for half his usual fee, suggests that he was struggling to maintain a comfortable lifestyle with his wife, Rose, and their daughter, Jenny—a large household staff, homes in Nyack, New York, and Oceanside, California, and an apartment in Manhattan.³³

Whether the British boycott encouraged Hecht to return to prose late in life, this final phase was like the third act to one of his better scripts: In hindsight it would seem inevitable. He spent five years writing his massive autobiography, *A Child of the Century*, completing the 950-page manuscript in July 1953. In the meantime, he continued to earn a paycheck, churning out screen work at his usual breakneck pace, and expanded into the new medium of television. In the fall of 1958, Hecht hosted a weeknight television talk show on Manhattan’s WABC-TV, inheriting Mike Wallace’s production staff after the future *60 Minutes* star interviewed Mickey Cohen, and the LAPD sued the network for libel. Though *The Mike Wallace Interview* departed from prime time, Hecht kept the pot boiling on local television. In addition to his caustic and colorful “Bedtime Stories” delivered each night, he jousting over the merits of Hollywood with native son Budd Schulberg; swapped murder and gangster stories with crime photographer Weegee; sifted through the political dirt with columnist Drew Pearson; compared notes on writing, rebellion, and bohemianism with Jack Kerouac; and, in what proved to be a final straw for the station management, questioned Salvador Dali about a newly invented form of sex.³⁴

Yet in the conclusion to *Child*, Hecht wrote that he inhabited a world full of ghosts. His parents were long dead, as was his indomitable aunt, Tante

Chasha, and his old newspaper buddies from the days before World War I, Sherman Duffy and Wallace Smith. Herman Mankiewicz, fellow screenwriting pioneer during the 1920s and 1930s, had just passed away, and Max Bodenheimer, the tragic poet who had once been Hecht's close confederate in that great modernist literary movement, the Chicago Renaissance, would soon be murdered in the Bowery. Even some who were still alive seemed more like wispy spirits than fellow living souls. Charles MacArthur, Hecht's once illustrious partner in such comedic classics as *The Front Page* and *Twentieth Century*, was living out his last days as a dissipated alcoholic. Keenly aware of his own mortality, Hecht's thoughts were now more than ever focused on his literary legacy.³⁵

Clearly *Child of the Century* was a determined effort to leave something substantial behind. Taking his title from Alfred de Musset's *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, he drew on his experiences to write "inside history," offering an extraordinary window into his era. Fetherling noted:

Hecht was truly, as he said, a child of the century: a member of that generation born close to 1900 and the first to come of age with the big-time gangster, the automobile, the world war, the skyscraper and the interior monologue. . . . In its depiction of one person's progress across the landscape of his time, it falls within the tradition of the best American autobiography that stretches from Benjamin Franklin through Henry Adams to Emma Goldman.³⁶

Like the epics he had written for film and stage, it featured a giant cast of characters, rendered in short, deft anecdotes, from Louis Brandeis to Groucho Marx, both Roosevelts, and dozens of the great writers, artists, and celebrities of his day. A final 115-page section describes Hecht's activism during the Holocaust and ensuing fight for a Jewish state: his attempts with the brilliant young activist Peter Bergson to rescue Europe's Jews from extermination, and fundraising for the Irgun guerillas in Palestine. Historians ever since have found it difficult to write against the grain of Hecht's compelling narrative, to the great consternation of his political foes.

As for the book's critical reception, Hecht could hardly count on support from the great arbiters of literary taste of the day, the "New York Intellectuals," particularly since he had launched a preemptive strike against them. In recalling New York City's wild, *fin de siècle* party during the 1920s, he had contrasted the old smart set with the current clique. Today's elite New Yorker "is as tame as a white mouse, and as given to running in circles. He is not a New Yorker unless you wish to insult him. He is a Citizen of the World with a grown-up soul. . . . With his second helping of ghoulash, my New Yorker takes up the problem of India. His small talk seldom embraces less than a

continent.”³⁷ When the writers he was referring to, such as Irving Howe and Leslie Fiedler, thereafter acknowledged Hecht at all, it was with scorn, mostly as an example of the self-hating Jew that he had represented as author of a notorious 1931 novel satirizing a Jewish theater producer, *A Jew in Love*.³⁸

Nevertheless, *Partisan Review* darling Saul Bellow proclaimed the book’s importance in the *New York Times*. “Among the pussycats who write of social issues today,” Bellow wrote, “he roars like an old-fashioned lion.” Though Bellow hadn’t picked up a copy of Hecht’s early novels or the *Broken Necks* collection³⁹ in twenty years, he still remembered the stories, the characters, and even some of the odd phrases: “the scribble of rooftops across the sky,” “the greedy little half-dead.” As a fellow Chicagoan and recent recipient of the National Book Award for *The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow graciously acknowledged the debt he owed Hecht and the other writers of the Renaissance: “What was marvelous was that people should have conceived of dignifying what we saw about us by writing of it, and that the gloom of Halstead Street, the dismal sights of the Back of the Yards and the speech of immigrants should be the materials of art.”⁴⁰ Four years later, Jack Kerouac would similarly tip his hat to Hecht as a guest on *The Ben Hecht Show*. Unlike the friendly reception that Kerouac received from his host on the program, most others who interviewed the author about *On the Road* had been hostile.

A Child of the Century opened the floodgates in Hecht, unleashing a current that would flow into his later books. His ensuing career as a nonfiction memoirist, and the influence *Child* would have on his biography of Mickey Cohen, is particularly significant given the literary context of the day. There were two major trends emerging in postwar literature that would move in opposite directions. One, sparked in backlash to the 1930s social realism of writers such as John Dos Passos and James T. Farrell, eschewed a broader social and political landscape to focus on inner lives. In the brooding and paranoid atmosphere of the McCarthy era, the fiction of J.D. Salinger and Jewish writers such as Bellow and Bernard Malamud “set out on a course of self-examination,” noted Mark Shechner. “[T]hrown back on its own resources, it became more introspective and more literary.” Starting in the 1940s, this became identifiable as the literature of “alienation,” a catchall explanatory term for something that drew literary intellectuals like a magnetic force.⁴¹

The second trend was literary journalism, a resurgence of an old tradition kept alive after World War II by Norman Mailer and John Hersey, and by *New Yorker* writers A.J. Liebling, Lillian Ross, and Joseph Mitchell in the 1950s. After the phenomenal success of Truman Capote’s “nonfiction novel” *In Cold Blood* in 1965, the “New Journalism” exploded with a wave of new talent—Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, Joan Didion, Jimmy Breslin, Gay

Talese, Michael Herr, and others.⁴²

A year before Hecht's death in 1964, the University of Chicago Press acknowledged his place in alienation literature with what amounted to a backhanded compliment that made the occasion far more bitter than sweet. The press had issued a new edition of *Erik Dorn* as part of its Chicago Renaissance series without giving Hecht the opportunity to preview Algren's rather unusual introduction, which contained disparaging remarks about the author and the novel. Furious, Hecht refused the invitation to the publication party. "I have no hankering to pose in your local festivities as a literary patsy," he wired.⁴³

Algren's introduction was itself a backhanded compliment. Though he had accredited *Dorn* as an alienation novel produced decades ahead of its time, he suggested that this was a dubious achievement. Since the book was the portrait of an empty, nihilistic "organization man," the whole enterprise was essentially a farce. "For no American yet has written a novel this good yet this bad," Algren asserted. "This is the one serious work of literature we have that by the same token stands as a literary hoax." Ultimately, Algren didn't commend the book or the author: "For the value that is derived from the novel today is not within the novel itself, but from the curiously prophetic shadow that a book, written a half century ago, now casts across our own strange times."⁴⁴ When Hecht retorted that this criticism displayed "a Beverly Hillbilly kind of intellectuality," Algren's comments were more unequivocally damning.⁴⁵ "He hasn't done anything since *Erik Dorn*," Algren said. "He's made one or two good movies and some awful bad ones. . . . He won't take responsibility for his own talent."⁴⁶

Since this assessment echoed the criticisms that had been leveled against Hecht for many years, it became the conventional wisdom at the end of his life. Even his book editor at Doubleday, Margaret Cousins, who said she adored him, wrote ten years later: "Actually, I don't think he ever lived up to the brilliant promise forecast by his first book—the novel *Erik Dorn*—when he was hailed by critics as a Daniel-Come-to-Judgment, because he was more interested in living than in writing. Writing was his sometime mistress, but he was married to life."⁴⁷ Hecht certainly had a reputation as a *bon vivant*, but this seems a curious conclusion to draw about so remarkably prolific an author.

If Hecht can be credited as a pioneer of the alienation novel, then with greater hindsight, it is likewise appropriate to acknowledge him as a forefather of New Journalism, a contribution that he made, simultaneously, with the One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago columns. Literary journalism had existed long before Hecht's time. But the 400 sketches of Hecht's

Chicago column revived this tradition and introduced it into the modern newspaper of the Jazz Age, reflecting the new crosscurrents shaping journalism: the rising skepticism about journalistic objectivity even as the American Society of Newspaper Editors codified objectivity as a professional standard. Fusing the factual data gathered by legmen with his own subjective impressions, psychological insights, and storytelling, Hecht forged a hybrid that Tom Wolfe would one day proclaim as a new literary form in his seminal 1973 anthology.⁴⁸

The worst that can be said of *Dorn* and Hecht's collected columns is that the prose was fitful and the stories lacked emotional depth; perhaps neither book added up to anything substantial enough to endure as a classic. This, however, had more to do with relative youth and immaturity of the author than with discipline, craftsmanship, or storytelling talent. A lifetime of experience separated this writer from the author of the cycle of books that started with *A Child of the Century*, the latter being a man who was mellower and significantly wiser. As the stories of *Gaily, Gaily*⁴⁹ demonstrate, the older Hecht possessed a command over narrative and a steady, natural rhythm that made his work more accessible. Fetherling noted one striking aspect of *Child* "is the verve with which Hecht invokes the environments of his past, as though he had never left them, while at the same time analyzing and appraising them. The two actions are not distinct but take place simultaneously, giving the whole book an unusual quality of detached exuberance."⁵⁰

Hecht had returned to prose, but with the minor exception of *The Sensualists*, he no longer tried to write novels. Instead, his books proceeded from where he had started as a journalist and columnist. Writing in the 1970s, Fetherling had argued: "Hecht the Memoirist was the kind of writer their detractors accuse the present New Journalists of being. He shifted focus away from a careful analysis of the facts toward an impressionistic truth supported by a mesh of tiny detail. Much of the detail was certainly as he remembered it, but some was included because it sounded plausible. None of it was researched."⁵¹

The Mickey Cohen project was the closest Hecht would come to a return to journalism, the one book—with the exception of his ghost-written 1954 "autobiography" of Marilyn Monroe—that wasn't populated by ghosts. A large excerpt finally appeared posthumously in the March 1970 premiere issue of *Scanlan's*, a groundbreaking monthly that showcased aggressive investigative reporting and slashing cultural criticism, launched by the maverick former *Ramparts* editor Warren Hinckle and Sidney Zion, a *New York Times* alum.⁵²

A latter-day Hecht champion, Zion provided an introduction to Hecht's piece that hailed his work for the Irgun and explained Cohen's role in the

fight for a Jewish state. "Writing this tale, I am aware that it may sound a little crazy to a lot of people," Zion added. "What was a gangster doing helping Israel? . . . And the Irgun. Weren't they a bunch of right-wing Jewish terrorists?"

The untold truth is that scores of Jewish outlaws were busy running guns around Mr. Truman's blockade while their liveried cousins shook their heads in shame or sat in those Frank Lloyd Wright temples rooting for the English.

Those who had supped with Jewish mobsters will hardly be surprised by this. . . . Thus, the old Meyer Lansky mob on the Lower East Side of Manhattan was actively hustling guns for Palestine. And in Jersey City Harold (Kayo) Konigsberg, then breaking into the head breaking business, performed extraordinary tasks for the Irgun.⁵³

Scanlan's made the connection between the old journalist and the New Journalists more than just theoretical. The magazine was "going to start Hecht's literary renaissance," Zion told the *New York Times*, when asked about the Cohen piece. "Some kids read it and thought it was beautiful," he added. "There's closing the generation gap for you."⁵⁴ The excerpt, "The Unfinished Life of Mickey Cohen," ran alongside a feature written by a rising new talent named Hunter S. Thompson, who despite his success with *Hell's Angels* was still too much of a handful for the mainstream glossies. Thompson's profile of Olympic ski champion Jean-Claude Killy had first been commissioned by *Playboy*, which recoiled in horror when he turned in an 11,000-word exposé savaging the celebrity athlete as a mindless shill for Chevrolet. After *Scanlan's* published the piece alongside Hecht's, editors Hinckle and Zion provided Thompson the opening he had been waiting for. As a follow-up for their June issue, they teamed Thompson with a macabre British cartoonist named Ralph Steadman and sent the pair off to do their worst. The resulting story that surfaced out of an alcohol-poisoned delirium, "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," immediately gained Thompson notoriety for a first-person style "so outrageous it needed its own name": Gonzo.⁵⁵

News of Hecht's book had first come to light as Cohen was hitting the peak of national celebrity, over a year after his October 1955 release from McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary, where he had been serving a five-year sentence for income-tax evasion. Cohen had risen during the 1940s as chief enforcer and protégé of Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel. With Siegel's assassination in June 1947, Cohen had assumed the mantle of king of the West Coast rackets just as Hecht had reached out for help raising money and shipping guns to the Irgun. The pint-sized Jewish gangster's meteoric ascent had made him a prime target: In the late 1940s, he survived more than a dozen

assassination attempts in a gang war the press had dubbed the “Battle of the Sunset Strip.” As if this had not earned Cohen enough exposure, by the time he was incarcerated in 1951, his very public friendship with the lantern-jawed evangelist and media phenomenon Billy Graham further burnished his fame.

As Cohen had told the Kefauver senate committee investigating organized crime, he drew headlines every time he spat on the sidewalk, and news of Hecht’s upcoming book was treated with maximum fanfare. “Mickey Cohen’s bizarre quest for publicity is easily understood when you hear that Ben Hecht is writing his biography—with a view toward the big movie money,” announced Walter Winchell on May 31, 1957. Weeks earlier, the *Los Angeles Times* had reported that since the previous summer, United Artists had been considering a movie to be written by Hecht titled *The Mickey Cohen Story*, or *The Poison Has Left Me*, but no decision had yet been reached. Cohen’s delivery of a 150-page manuscript at Hecht’s home in Oceanside, California, two months after Winchell’s announcement, also garnered national attention. “He must have done it himself,” Hecht told the press. “No one but Mickey uses words that way. It’s a gold mine of facts—I haven’t seen so many facts since I was a newspaper reporter.”⁵⁶

But Hecht had reservations from the start, which he mulled over months later as he waited for Cohen to emerge from the shower—his third of the day—at the Del Capri, an exclusive residential motel in Westwood. On the one hand, “[I]t could be a fine shoot-’em-up story, with important sociological overtones,” Hecht mused. “Mickey leads me into an understanding of my time, and not a jolly one.” But though Hecht was often nostalgic about his newspaper days, he had no desire to go “hopping around for data” like a cub reporter.⁵⁷

Another source of concern was the ex-convict’s new claim of being a changed man. Cohen had identified himself as a florist, no less, the proprietor of Michael’s Tropical Plants operating out of a greenhouse on South Vermont Avenue, which actually sold plastic fakes. Having closed that establishment, he would soon be opening the wholesome Carousel ice cream parlor. “I lost the crazy heat in my head,” the new and improved Michael Cohen told Hecht, “even though I seen enough dirty crooked double-crosses to keep me mad for a hundred years.” For the sake of the book, Hecht certainly hoped the new Michael/Mickey wasn’t real: “Who wants to hear about a toothless tiger?” Then again, perhaps Mickey hadn’t reformed permanently, which might make for a fabulous twist ending.⁵⁸

“How to handle my biographic dynamite?” Hecht wondered. His years as a newspaperman had taught him all too well the have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too approach to this kind of story. “You hold your subject up to scorn

while titillating the reader with the details of his sadism, lechery and horrid misdeeds. . . . You identified your gangster as a vicious, rat-blooded character unworthy of human consideration, and then went on to consider every fascinating quirk of his being.” It would be the safest approach, but Hecht couldn’t summon any moral indignation about underworld criminals. “Unlike historical or political figures, they break laws on only a small scale,” he reasoned. “They do not betray trusts, bankrupt widows and orphans, or invent hydrogen bombs—and drop them.”⁵⁹

On the other hand, Hecht had no desire to be like the mob shysters he had watched tug a jury’s heartstrings with sob stories about “extenuating circumstances”—a beloved wife and a hungry child to feed, a rough upbringing on the wrong side of the tracks. “I have an unquestionable record as an honest man,” Hecht wrote. “Having written many books as an honest man, I do not suddenly want to seem to be the mouthpiece of a criminal. And, perhaps, to have always been that.”⁶⁰

At this point Cohen had at last emerged from the tub, and Hecht’s musings were interrupted by a thumping sound that had started up in the bathroom:

The banging comes from Mickey emptying a quart of talcum powder over his naked person. Possibly the powder gets stuck and the can has to be banged against the wall. The banging ends and there is a flash of mine powdered host in the bedroom gloom. He looks like one of the Living Statues in the old Ringling Brothers Circus.

Mickey now busies himself for 30 minutes flicking the powder off his skin with a large Turkish towel. The sound effect is that of a busy shooting gallery. I curse quietly for I feel ill at ease with slow dressers, male or female. With Narcissus, two is a crowd. But Mickey is not a man to be hurried. Also there is the fact that he *is* hurrying.

The towel barrage over, Mickey appears in the bedroom. He is nude and oyster white, except for a pair of green silk socks firmly stretched by maroon garters. He darts to the cupboard, removes a fedora hat and puts it on. There are twenty-two boxed hats on the shelves. He then darts back in the bathroom.

Mickey’s apartment is so small that it is almost impossible to walk swiftly in it without bumping into the walls. But Mickey manages to sprint from wall to wall without collision.

The towel flicking starts again. Sorties in and out of the bedroom ensue. Mickey crosses the twelve-foot by fourteen-foot chamber at top speed some dozen times—as far as I can make out for no reason. He remains in an

identical state of nudity. The only thing I can figure is that he is caroming in and out of the bedroom in order to remove the powder from his body by air friction.

I ordinarily do not watch a man at his toilette so attentively. But this is one I am going to write about. And there is in Mickey's odd, nude activity in his darkening bedroom much information about the man. You put down all his aimless, compulsive movement as a mild sort of lunacy and let it go at that. But it is no lunacy. It is Mickey caught up in a mood so deep, tossed around on memories so violent, high-diving into day-dreams so vivid, that he has not the slightest awareness of darting around for an hour in a darkening room, naked and with a hat on.⁶¹

Cohen was an unknown quantity—a jack-in-the-box that the old crime reporter did not completely understand.

Nor was Hecht even sure of his own point of view. "A thing baffles me which may well be baffling the reader," he confessed. "It is—what do I think of Mickey? And what do I feel about him and his infatuation with violence and lawlessness?" Other than "outlandish fellows like the Marquis de Sade," it was typical in such matters for a writer to adopt the traditional view of society. And if Hecht was not altogether in sympathy with the law-abiding public, then what alternative did he offer?⁶²

Six years later, Nelson Algren would conclude his contentious introduction to Hecht's first novel by observing: "It wasn't splendor that was lacking in Hecht, it wasn't gas he ran out of, and it surely wasn't brass. It was belief. For he came, too young, to a time when, like Dorn, he had to ask himself, 'What the hell am I talking about?' And heard no answer at all."⁶³

Conclusion

Hecht developed elegant theories to explain Mickey Cohen. He likened the gangster to a *gilgul*, a Kabbalistic incarnation of a soul in transition. In one passage of his most complete manuscript, Hecht described the gangster stuck in a kind of purgatory, unable to complete the spiritual journey of reform.⁶⁴ Hecht's wife, Rose, however, had a simpler explanation: Cohen was no damn good. Apparently the tension between husband and wife escalated during the summer of 1958, because in August, Rose's sister, Minna Emch, wrote: "I do hope the 'problems' settle down to something that will allow you to stay in California for the present if that is what you want."⁶⁵ When Rose oversaw the archiving of her late husband's papers decades later, she inserted a typed, one-page record of her objections: "Notes on what I think is a fallacy in Hecht's reasoning in the Mickey Cohen manuscript."

She conceded that various government officials and law enforcement of-

ficers were on the take. But it seemed a false logic to therefore label all politics as criminal, or everyone else who is “tarred by the same brush of being in politics.” That, she said, “is a criminal’s kind of reasoning, for purposes of self-justification.”

But for an author to borrow this pattern when starting from the objective (vantage point) of the criminal’s psychology . . . makes the author seem dangerously infected by his character’s point of view. I’ll admit I think, as his wife, that it is unbecoming for Ben to rail at society like England’s “angry young men,” and when he says he was “always like that,” I merely think it was less unbecoming in his youth, but not more sane.⁶⁶

In September 1958, the appearance of the first installment of a four-part *Saturday Evening Post* series on Cohen somewhat settled the debate over character. Hecht and Cohen had agreed to a fifty-fifty split on the biography, but Cohen had gone behind Hecht’s back to do the series for the *Post*, with its three million subscribers.⁶⁷ Journalist Dean Jennings’s stories themselves imparted further revelations of betrayal, revealing that Cohen had been going behind his friend’s back for months, selling over \$100,000 in shares for a nonexistent movie that Hecht was supposed to write.⁶⁸ The *Saturday Evening Post* billed the series as “a revealing clinical study of a shameful American paradox,” and Jennings’s main thrust was that Cohen had manipulated the press and public, turning celebrity into a jackpot.

The fiasco of the book and movie served as the central drama of Cohen’s sensational, star-studded trial for tax evasion in 1961, which, after forty-one days and testimony from 194 witnesses, landed the mobster in Alcatraz. Sidney Zion and other authors have offered different explanations for why Hecht dropped his own book after the *Saturday Evening Post* stories appeared.⁶⁹ None give any weight to the influence that Rose might have had, nor do they take into consideration two other factors that may have been important—Hecht’s pride, and the pall that the whole episode cast upon the prospective book. Jennings may have stopped short of openly deriding Hecht, but his narrative had Cohen playing all the reporters and media interests as pawns, leading up to his bamboozling of the biggest, most hardboiled reporter of them all. For the climax of the *Post* series, Jennings suggested that all of Cohen’s publicity-making put the mobster in a position to leverage the reputation of the tough old Chicago newsman and screenwriting legend to rake in his own personal gold mine.

Hecht had failed to see the hustle because he had been more consumed with his own ruminations than he had been with simply being a journalist. His drafts contain much reporting on Cohen and the underworld, as well as research on outlaws past and present, but mostly the pages are packed with

the author's own insights into what a criminal represents: "As he was in the tribal civilization of thirty thousand years ago, so he is in the civilization of oil interests, hydrogen bombs, the disintegration of human thought into political jabberwock, and the attending prospect of global annihilation."⁷⁰ Hecht's views on society and politics were colored by his enduring anger at the Roosevelt administration and the rest of the free world for turning its back on the Jewish people. In such a deeply corrupt modern world, he admired what he considered to be the primitive purity of the lawbreakers, whom he found more honest than the lawmakers.

This underscores a crowning irony of Hecht's literary journalism. For "*Front Page*-era" reporters like him, objectivity did not offer a pathway to truth. Rather, a penetrating cynicism, accrued from years of covering crime and corruption, was supposed to enable them to cut through all lies and subterfuge. In this case, however, as Rose had suggested, it was Hecht's cynicism that had blinded him to Cohen's swindle.

The Cohen project was the last stage in a journey for Hecht that reflected the broader evolution of twentieth century American literature—tensions that played out between the subjective and the objective, between introspection and realism. After *One Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago*, Hecht had shifted focus to the individual and his isolation, rendering characters like Erik Dorn: publishing tycoons, theater producers, crooked attorneys and mobsters, Don Juans, and sociopaths who spiraled into their own narcissism. In these novels and movies, he had always used personal experience as grist. But when he began writing in the first person as a memoirist, he wove in real facts and characters overtly, while not abandoning creative license. The Cohen drafts represent a final amalgamation, wherein he combined this first-person approach with street reporting and research.

In his essay heralding New Journalism, Wolfe offered a nuanced argument for what was truly new about it. For starters, he credited friend and colleague Jimmy Breslin with "a revolutionary discovery":

He made the discovery that it was feasible for a columnist to leave the building, go outside and do reporting on his own, actual legwork. Breslin would go up to the city editor and ask what stories and assignments were coming, choose one, go out, leave the building, cover the story as a reporter, and write about it in his column. . . . Well—all right! Say what you will! There it was, a short story, complete with symbolism, in fact, and yet true-life, as they say, about something that happened today, and you could pick it up on the newsstand by 11 tonight for a dime.⁷¹

There is no acknowledgment here of Hecht's innovations some forty years previously, though in fairness, Wolfe does emphasize the difference between

realistic fiction and actual journalism.⁷² Hecht's columns tend to blur the distinction. Likewise, while Wolfe credited the New Journalists with unprecedented experimentation with language and literary techniques—character development, mood setting, and dialogue—it is worth remembering Hecht's "comedies, dialogues, homilies, one-act tragedies, storiettes, sepia panels, word-etchings, satires, tone-poems, fugues, bourreess—something different every day."

Wolfe also credited the New Journalists with reporting that was "more intense, more detailed, and certainly more time-consuming than anything newspaper or magazine writers, including investigative reporters, were accustomed to."⁷³ His point is that the New Journalists were the first to go deep with their reporting in order to write like novelists, but in an appendix to his essay, he does eventually acknowledge the work done by A.J. Liebling, James Agee, George Orwell, John Hersey, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Ross, and other magazine writers of the previous decade. "A new journalism was in the works during the 1950s, and it might have grown out of the *New Yorker* or *True* or both, except for one thing: during the 1950s the novel was burning its last bright flame as the holy of holies," he writes.⁷⁴ Indeed, if there was anything truly new about the New Journalism, it may have been in the sheer ambition and volume of quality work produced within a few short years. But this all reflected a great and inevitable sea change, a turning of the literary and cultural tides that Hecht, for one, had long anticipated.

If there was nothing pioneering about New Journalism, however, cannot the same be said about Hecht's work from 1921? Literary journalism had existed since at least the days of Charles Dickens, who had begun writing for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1834.⁷⁵ But there had been no notion of objectivity in Dickens's day, and Hecht's column reflected a keener self-awareness than the work of Dickens or other literary journalists, like Mark Twain or Stephen Crane, possessed. This seems particularly obvious when one contrasts Hecht's columns with his simultaneous work on *Erik Dorn*. With the consciousness of a modern storyteller, Hecht was grappling with issues of subjectivity versus objectivity and introspection versus realism, probing into questions that would not have been conceivable before industrialization and the advent of mass media.

Hecht's contributions to literary journalism offer a richer understanding of modern literature, but they are hardly the only reason for his importance. His work for stage and the movies cannot be ignored, and it is precisely because he was such a protean creative force that he offers such an interesting case with which to test the canons and literary standards of the twentieth century. Moreover, beyond issues of style, approach, and even medium, there

is the essential matter of content—the question of what a writer *has to say*. In his abject cynicism, Hecht may have misjudged Cohen, but the memoirs and drafts of that unpublished manuscript contain a lifetime's worth of insights into human nature, society, and politics that remain as relevant today as when Hecht wrote them. Scholars, critics, and indeed all book lovers, owe it to themselves to read him.

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Notes

1. Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (New York: Primus Books, 1985), 2.
2. Richard Corliss, *Talking Pictures: Screenwriters in the American Cinema, 1927–1973* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 1974), 5.
3. Robert Schmuhl, “History, Fantasy, Memory: Ben Hecht and a Chicago Hanging,” *Illinois Historical Journal* 83 (Autumn 1990): 147.
4. Douglas Fetherling, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen, 1977), 16–17.
5. *Ibid.*, 17, 191.
6. “Ben Hecht, 70, Dies at His Home Here,” *New York Times*, April 19, 1964, 1, 84; Ben Hecht, *A Guide for the Bedevilled* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944), 62–64; *Child of the Century*, 65, 70; William MacAdams, *Ben Hecht: The Man Behind the Legend* (New York: Scribner, 1988), 11; Fetherling, *Five Lives*, 3; Gilad E. Troy, *Ben Hecht: From Literary Gadfly to Political Activist* (Bachelor of Arts thesis, Harvard University, 1982), 1; Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 73; Ben Hecht, *Gaily, Gaily* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), “Greeting,” unpaginated; *Guide for the Bedevilled*, 66. There is little agreement about whether Hecht was born in 1893 or 1894. MacAdams and the Newberry Library web page biography both report 1893, but Fetherling and most other biographical sources, perhaps relying on the reports that he was seventy years old at the time of his death, say he was born

the following year. Hecht himself is not entirely consistent: In *Child of the Century* and *Gaily, Gaily* he writes that he was sixteen when he joined the *Journal* in the summer of 1910, but in *Guide for the Bedevilled* he says that he was seventeen. William MacAdams's source for Hecht's birth date is a letter from Peter Hecht, Ben's brother, which states that Ben was born February 28, 1893, "as I figure it." However, it is worth noting Peter Hecht's uncertainty: In what appears to be a previous letter, he writes that Ben was born in 1892, "almost five years to my birth in 1897." The 1893 date comes from an undated letter that appears to be a subsequent correction, in which Peter Hecht adds that Ben was born five years and nine months before him. Ben Hecht Papers, Newberry Library Collection, hereafter referred to as BHNL, MacAdams collection, folder 141, Peter Hecht, page one of a twelve-page letter; page one of an eight-page letter. Both letters are undated.

7. Ben Hecht, *A Thousand and One Afternoons in Chicago* (New York: Covici Friede, 1927), Henry Justin Smith, preface, unpaginated.

8. Hecht, *A Thousand and One Afternoons*, Henry Justin Smith's preface; "Fog Patterns," 27; "The Sybarite," 60–63; "Waterfront Fancies," 68–71; "Fantastic Lollipops," 97–100; "Pandora's Box," 273; "Ripples," 265–8.

9. Ibid, "The Tattooer," 242–43.

10. Norman Sims, *The Chicago Style of Journalism* (PhD dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1979), 31–34, 41; Fetherling, *Five Lives*, 29–30; Larzer Ziff, *The American 1890s: Life and Times of a Lost Generation* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 157–161.

11. Hecht, "Grass Figures," in *One Thousand and One Afternoons*, 285–89.

12. For cogent analyses of the evolution of "objectivity" during the 1920s, see Michael Schudson, "Objectivity Becomes Ideology: Journalism After World War I," in *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 121–59; James Carey, *A Critical Reader* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 137–41, 162–63, 192–94.

13. Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 149.

14. Ibid, 122–28. See, for example, Hecht's mentor, H.L. Mencken, on the nature of the mob and the machinations of politicians in H.L. Mencken, *Notes on Democracy* (New York: Knopf, 1926), 15–23, 55; on democracy as "an incomparably idiotic" fraud, 209, 211. He uses his signature phrase "stirring up the animals," for example, in H.L. Mencken, *My Life as Author and Editor* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 1081–82. See also Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), 65.

15. Hecht, *One Thousand and One Afternoons*, 285. On the new lack of confidence in the knowability of the truth, see David Hollinger, "The Knower and the Artificer," *American Quarterly* 39 1 (Spring 1987): 37–55. On how the knowability of truth ties to journalistic "objectivity," see Carey, *Carey Critical Reader*, 162–64.

16. Ben Hecht, *Erik Dorn: A Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 19.

17. "Erik Dorn," *Vanity Fair*, November 1921, scrapbooks, vol. 1: reviews, 1921–28, box 103, BHNL.

18. Hecht, *Erik Dorn*, 380.

19. Hecht, *Erik Dorn*, xiii, 9.

20. Fetherling, *Five Lives*, 35–40.

21. Actress Helen Hayes, who was MacArthur's wife, recalled that Tennessee Williams had once told her: "Your Charlie and Ben Hecht made it possible for me to write my plays. They paved the way for me. They took the corsets off American theater." Carol Lawson, "Theater Hall of Fame Gets 10 New Members," *New York Times*, May 10, 1983.

22. George W. Hilton, introduction to *The Front Page: From Theater to Reality*, George W. Hilton, ed. (Hanover, NH: Smith & Kraus, 2002), 1.

23. Hecht makes the claim regarding inventing the gangster movie in *Child of the Century*, 479. On *Underworld* as the movie that created the gangster genre, see Carlos Clarens, *Crime Movies: From Griffith to The Godfather and Beyond* (New York: Norton, 1980), 15, 31–32, 34–38, 42–47, 51–53; Eugene Rosow, *Born to Lose: The Gangster Film in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 124. On *Scarface* as the gangster film to end all gangster films, see Clarens, *Crime Movies*, 82–83.

24. Andrew Sarris, "The Sex Comedy Without Sex," *American Film* 3 (March 1978), 8, 14; MacAdams, *Man Behind the Legend*, 7; Jeffrey Brown Martin, *Ben Hecht, Hollywood Screenwriter*, Studies in Cinema 27 (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985).

25. Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 488–9; MacAdams, *Man Behind the Legend*, 7, 199–201.

26. Pauline Kael, "Bonnie and Clyde," *New Yorker*, October 21, 1967, 166–67.

27. Hecht, *A Child of the Century*, 517.

28. Many books and articles recount Hecht's rescue efforts in partnership with Peter Bergson, a.k.a. Hillel Kook, and the activists collectively known as the Bergson Group. See Sarah E. Peck, "The Campaign for an American Response to the Holocaust, 1943–1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 2 (April 1980): 367–400; Monty Noam Penkower, "In Dramatic Dissent: The Bergson Boys," *American Jewish History* LXX, no. 3 (March 1981): 281–309; Gilad E. Troy, *Ben Hecht: From Literary Gadfly to Political Activist* (bachelor of arts thesis, Harvard University, 1982); David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); Louis Rapoport, *Shake Heaven and Earth: Peter Bergson and the Struggle to Rescue the Jews of Europe* (New York: Gefen Publishing House, 1999); David S. Wyman and Rafael Medoff, *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America, and the Holocaust* (New York: The New Press, 2002); and Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *The "Bergson Boys" and the Origins of Contemporary Zionist Militancy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2005).

29. Ben Hecht, "Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine," *New York Herald Tribune*, May 15, 1947, 17. *Chicago Daily News*, May 15 1947, 13. Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 617. Historian Rafael Medoff writes that the advertisement ran once in the *Herald Tribune* and twice in the *New York Post*. In his autobiography, Hecht reports that it ran in some fifteen newspapers and was reprinted as a news story in South America and Europe.

30. C.V.R. Thompson, "Bernadotte Was an Ass, Hecht Says," *Daily Express*, September 25, 1948, 1. "Hecht's Films Under Ban," *New York Times*, October 14, 1948. Thomas F. Brady, "Britain Objects," *New York Times*, October 24, 1948. Letters to Hecht from Peter Bergson, 1941–1952, 1962, incoming correspondence, 1914–1979, box 55, folder 1069b, BHNH. Gil Troy, *From Literary Gadfly to Political Activist*, 118.

31. See Ben Hecht, "Champion in Chains," *Esquire*, October 1942, 36, 168–89. After he "became a Jew in 1939," Hecht had originally signed on with Peter Bergson's Committee for a Jewish Army to campaign for a fighting force that would join the war against the Nazis. From that point on, the image of the tough, fighting Jew featured prominently in all his propaganda. The Zionist Max Nordau had introduced "Muscular Judaism" as early as the Second Zionist Congress of 1898, an idea that resonated because it supported the goal of Jewish nationalism as a rebirth of body and spirit. The *muskeldjuden* ("muscle Jew"), or the "new Jew," broke free from the anti-Semitic stereotype of the scrawny, weak, and inferior Jew. Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*, Routledge Jewish Studies Series (London: Routledge, 2007), 1–2. For the purpose of this study, Jack Lule's definition of "myth" will suffice. He explains it as "a sacred societal story that draws from archetypal figures and forms to offer exemplary models for human life." Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: Guilford, 2001), 21–25.

32. Hecht, *Gaily, Gaily*, 197.

33. MacAdams, *Man Behind the Legend*, 255. Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 607.

34. MacAdams, *Man Behind the Legend*, 255, 260–61. Foreword by Mike Wallace and Introduction and Ben Hecht, Television Performer by Bret Primack in idem, adapt. and ed., *The Ben Hecht Show: Impolitic Observations from the Freest Thinker of 1950s Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993), xi–xii, 1–4, 5–17, and throughout.

35. Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 631. Fetherling, *Five Lives*, 148.

36. MacAdams, *Man Behind the Legend*, 255. Fetherling, *Five Lives*, 157.

37. Hecht, *Child of the Century*, 359.

38. Edward Alexander, *Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 53. Leslie A. Fiedler, "The Jew in the American Novel," in *The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler*, vol. 2 (New York: Stein and Day, 1971). Because of *A Jew in Love*, Howe characterizes Hecht as "the first to attack Jewish group existence from a standpoint close to fashionable Bohemian anti-Semitism."

39. Ben Hecht, *Broken Necks: And Other Stories* (Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Company, 1924).

40. Saul Bellow, "The One Thousand and One Afternoons of Ben Hecht," review of *A Child of the Century*, *New York Times*, June 13, 1954.

41. Mark Shechner, *After the Revolution: Studies in the Contemporary Jewish-American Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 16, 42.

42. Marc Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight: Wolfe, Thompson, Didion, and the New Journalism Revolution* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 1–34.

43. Austin C. Wehrwein, "Hecht Attacks Algren Preface," *New York Times*, November 21, 1963.

44. Nelson Algren, "Erik Dorn: A Thousand and One Afternoons in Nada," introduction to *Erik Dorn*, Ben Hecht (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), x.

45. Wehrwein, "Hecht Attacks Algren Preface."

46. Ibid, xiii, xvii.

47. Letter from Margaret Cousins, Hecht's editor at Doubleday for *Gaily, Gaily*, to Stephen Fuller, a.k.a. William MacAdams, February 4, 1976, p. 2 of 3, folder 378, MacAdams Collection.

48. Tom Wolfe, Introduction, *The New Journalism* ed. Wolfe and E.W. Johnson (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

49. Ben Hecht, *Gaily, Gaily* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963).

50. Fetherling, *Five Lives*, 157.

51. Ibid, 167.

52. Weingarten, *Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight*, 228.

53. Sidney Zion, "On Ben Hecht," preface to Hecht, "The Incomplete Life of Mickey Cohen," *Scanlan's Monthly*, March 1970, 56.

54. Henry Raymont, "Scanlan's, a Monthly Magazine, Promises to 'Vilify' Institutions," *New York Times*, February 25, 1970. Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight*, 228–35.

55. Hunter S. Thompson, "The Kentucky Derby Is Decadent and Depraved," *Scanlan's*, June 1970. Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight*, 235. Weingarten is quoting from a letter to Thompson from Bill Cardoso, who was editor of the *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine*.

56. Walter Winchell, On Broadway column, *Humboldt Standard* (Humboldt, CA), May 31, 1957, 4. "Bandsman With Welk Turns Cinema Villain," in Movieland Events column, *Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1957. "Cohen Takes Manuscript to Author," *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1957, 34.

57. Hecht, "About Me, First," 2, folders 216, 219.

58. Hecht, "About Me, First," 1, 2, 13, folders 216, 219. United Press International, "One-time Mobster Takes Up New Life in Greenhouse," *Salina Journal* (Salina, KS), July 30, 1956, 19.

59. Hecht, "About Me, First," 3, folders 216, 219.

60. Hecht, "Author Confessions," 2–3, folders, 216, 222.

61. Hecht, "The Incomplete Life of Mickey Cohen," *Scanlan's*, 62.

62. Hecht, "Author Confessions," 1, folders 216, 222.

63. Nelson Algren, "Thousand and One Afternoons in Nada," introduction to *Erik Dorn*, xvii.

64. Hecht, "Night Club Gilgul" in "About Me, First," 68–72A, folder 216; "The Incomplete Life of Mickey Cohen," *Scanlan's*, 75–76.

65. Letter from Minna Emch to Rose Hecht, August 13, 1958, folder 2228.

66. Rose Hecht, "Notes on what I think is a fallacy in Hecht's reasoning in the Mickey Cohen manuscript," in "Cohen, Mickey, n.d., 1951–1976," subject files, 1919–1981, box 77, 2341.

67. United Press International, "Hecht Discovers Little Interest in Life of Cohen," *Terre Haute Star* (Terre Haute, IN), May 18, 1961, 33. Three million subscribers: Tere Tereba, *Mickey Cohen*, 238.

68. Dean Jennings, "The Private Life of a Hood, Conclusion," *Saturday Evening Post*, October 11, 1958, 118.

69. Sidney Zion, "On Ben Hecht," preface to Hecht, "The Incomplete Life of Mickey Cohen," in *Scanlan's*, 56–7.

70. Hecht, "The Incomplete Life of Mickey Cohen," *Scanlan's*, 58.

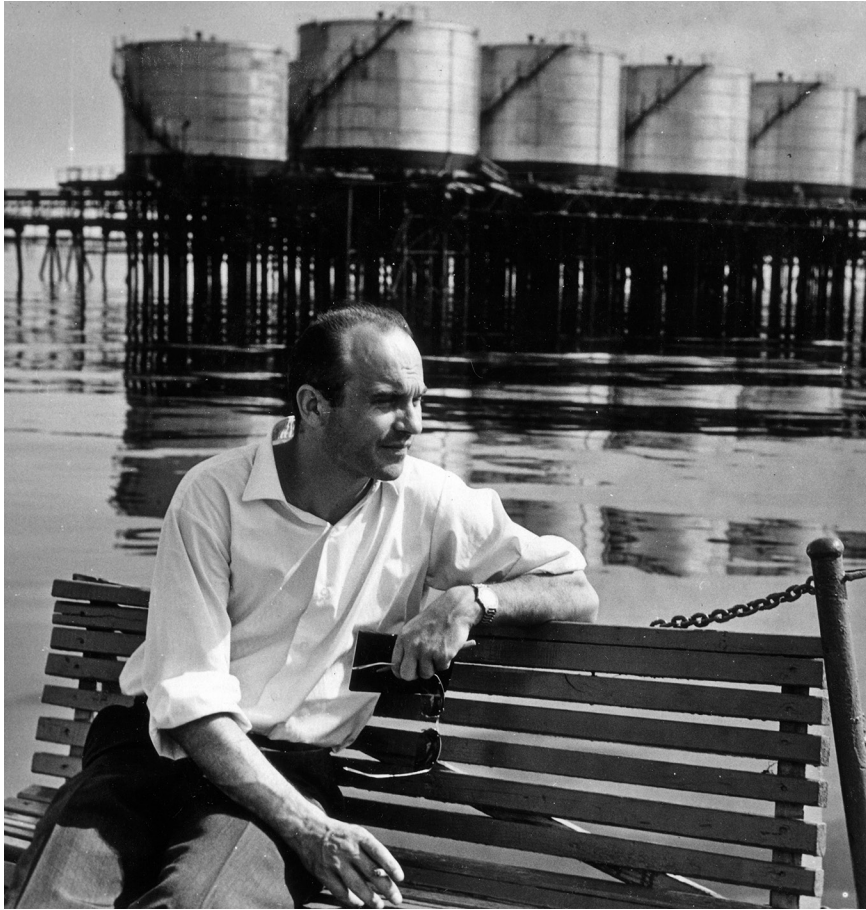
71. *The New Journalism*, 12–14.

72. *The New Journalism*, 42, 46. Wolfe argues that many who question whether the New Journalism is really new often offer names of writers who did this decades, even centuries ago. But upon closer inspection they fall into four categories: 1) their work isn't really nonfiction at all, such as Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison, and Sir Richard Steele in the "Sir Roger de Coverldey Papers"; 2) they are traditional essayists who have done very little reporting, such as Murray Kempton, I.F. Stone, and James Baldwin; 3) they are autobiographers, such as Thomas De Quincey (*Confessions of an Opium Eater*), Mark Twain (*Life on the Mississippi*), and George Orwell (*Homage to Catalonia*); or 4) they are what Wolfe calls "Literary Gentleman with a Seat on the Bandstand," writers who don't seem to have much use for a reporter's notebook and carry on a tradition that spans from William Hazlitt to modern writers such as D.H. Lawrence and the "socially conscious" nonfiction writers of the 1930s such as John Dos Passos, and even James Agee.

73. On New Journalism reporting and literary experimentation, see Wolfe, "The Birth of New Journalism," 35, 37–8, 43–5; and *New Journalism*, 11, 14–22.

74. Wolfe, *New Journalism*, 46.

75. Ruth F. Glancy, *Student Companion to Charles Dickens* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 5; Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990), 174–76. Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 41, 45. Wolfe notes that some scholars credit the birth of the realist novel to eighteenth-century writers Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. To cover his bases, Wolfe also credits the contributions of Dickens's *Sketches by Boz*, Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*, Stephen Crane's vignettes about the Bowery, John Reed's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*, and a few others.



Ryszard Kapuściński in Azerbaijan, 1967. Courtesy the Estate of Ryszard Kapuściński.

The Hermeneutic Relation between Reporter and Ancient Historian in Ryszard Kapuściński's *Travels with Herodotus*

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Abstract: This article focuses on Ryszard Kapuściński's book *Travels with Herodotus*, published in Poland in 2004 and translated into English in 2008. The main thesis analyses the hermeneutic relation between two protagonists, Kapuściński the reporter and Herodotus the historian. The paper shows how Kapuściński used quotations from *The Histories* in his autobiographical narration to create a certain vision of the journalistic profession. It also shows a journalistic way of understanding sources and the role of reporters who describe events and then face the task of writing history. The article also shows why Kapuściński took Herodotus's *The Histories* with him during many of his journeys, how the book "witnesses" his own traveling experience, and how it becomes yet another interlocutor of the text—a mirror for the author and his reflections about the world. Kapuściński's reading technique can be compared with hermeneutic theory of interpretation, which presents reading of literary texts as a process of understanding ourselves.

In a lecture delivered at Collège de France on October 19, 1978, Roland Barthes claimed that any event in life could lead either to interpretative commentary or to purely narrative storytelling.¹ He connected two kinds of writing with two categories: metaphor, which answers questions typical for the essay, for example, What is it? and What does it mean?; and metonymy, which uses questions essential for plot constructions, for example, What is the background of the episode I recount? Barthes's remark is a good starting point to analyze the structure of *Travels with Herodotus*,² where elements of the essay are connected with elements of action and plot. Interspersed as they may seem, events presented by Herodotus's and Kapuściński's respective

adventures inspire one another. Interpretation of Herodotus's *The Histories*³ becomes for the reporter a primary tool to understand his own professional life. Kapuściński in *Travels*, one of his last books, published in Poland three years before his death in 2007, summarized his understanding of the reporter's mission and his philosophy of history with the help of Herodotus's text. Hidden in the book was one of his inspirations: hermeneutics.

I begin this discussion of hermeneutics in *Travels* by quoting poststructuralist Barthes because his remark shows the intertextual construction of the book. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that Barthes's concept of crisis of authorship—derived from the definition of literature as a game of languages where the “I” of the writer is absent⁴—is not adequate to Kapuściński's philosophy of reading and writing. It is particularly important to remember that Kapuściński in the 1980s and 1990s became much more interested in philosophy. He read Barthes and Richard Rorty, along with Wilhelm Dilthey and Paul Ricoeur. Many quotations of these authors can be found in his intellectual diary, the six volumes of *Lapidaria*,⁵ which, surprisingly, has still not been translated into English. *Lapidaria* demonstrated an important paradox in Kapuściński's philosophical views. He was inspired by the new poststructural and postmodern thought, especially by the idea of fragment (as epistemological and literary “form”), but never agreed with the idea of the “death of the author.” In his books one can find a permanent presence of a strong, self-aware Cartesian Self.⁶ That is why forms of his late work seem poststructural but the narrator who tells the story is not “written by the language.”⁷ The aim of this study is to show how in *Travels with Herodotus* he discovered that hermeneutics could provide an answer to the question: What does it mean to be a writer, a journalist, and a reader? For Kapuściński the process of reading was inseparable from writing and understanding.

Most of Kapuściński's work is, to a degree, autobiographical. *Travels with Herodotus* highlights the autobiographical through a curious juxtaposition of two narratives—by Kapuściński and by Herodotus. The link does not lead to a conflict of discourses, but to their interactive coexistence. The intertextual concept behind the book is unique to Kapuściński's writings, although it has been used by other journalists before and since. A similar idea of traveling with the companion from another time is present in the books of William Dalrymple,⁸ Tony Horwitz,⁹ and Geert Mak.¹⁰ For those writers and journalists the “ancestor” they chose—Marco Polo (Dalrymple), James Cook (Horwitz), and John Steinbeck (Mak)—is someone to be followed over the decades or centuries to gauge how the world has changed. In Kapuściński's book the time construction and narrative situation are different. He searches

his past life to find important episodes in his professional biography and then juxtaposes them with Herodotus's stories.

To demonstrate the difference in perspectives, compare Kapuściński's book with Dalrymple's *In Xanadu: A Quest*. In 1986, Dalrymple decides to follow the footsteps of Marco Polo via Polo's book *The Travels*. He starts in Jerusalem and then goes through Syria, Turkey, the Soviet Union, and China. He perceives his journey through the eyes of Polo's text, not only searching the places he sees but also considering what Marco Polo thinks about these towns and cities. The main difference between the two narratives lies in the intertextual strategy of quoting the writer-ancestor: while nearly absent in Dalrymple's reportage, it plays a crucial role in Kapuściński's book. The other difference is hidden in the composition of the texts. While Dalrymple decides to describe his journey in linear structure, Kapuściński constantly uses retrospection. Finally, the comparison shows the difference in the writer's motivation. Dalrymple, at the time a young student of Trinity College, Cambridge, seems to have fun during his travels, trying to add to his knowledge through direct observation. His studies of books—Polo is but one of many resources he uses—make *Xanadu* both adventurous and erudite. In Kapuściński's narrative we hear the voice of the "old reporter" recollecting his professional life and reading Herodotus to inspire himself in the search for understanding the Other—the role of travel and writing. For him it is enough to use only one resource, the Herodotus narrative, and go deep inside the text to create an intellectual and psychological portrait of his authority. The impression is that the reader is hearing one conversation between two masters.

That is why we can observe in *Travels* the influence of old genres, namely, the conversation with the dead, the personal document, the interview with an important figure, and bearing witness to the present.¹¹ Kapuściński plays a surprising game in this respect. His primary interlocutor, Herodotus—though never directly addressed in the dialogue—is a member of the ancient world, and *The Histories* simultaneously witnesses Kapuściński's own journeys and becomes yet another interlocutor of the text. Although there are two main narrators-protagonists (Herodotus and Kapuściński), the image of Kapuściński dominates the book. His autobiography appears directly (in memories and in all elements of reconstructed biography of the reporter), and indirectly (in reflections, analyses, and interpretations of Herodotus's work). In many respects, the historian seems to be Kapuściński's alter ego, a mirror in which the reporter not so much watches himself as is watched by the reader. That is why the role of the other text in understanding oneself—the crucial idea of hermeneutics—is deeply present in *Travels*.

Reconstructing Herodotus

Let us then have a look at Herodotus and the way he appears in *Travels*. It is surprising just how much of the book is given over to the historical accounts of Herodotus—not only the narrative sections quoted from *The Histories* but also fragments Kapuściński wrote in his attempt to concisely paraphrase the text. Thus, with almost half of the book being somehow related to Herodotus, it could be argued that *Travels* seems, in large degree, to have been coauthored by the Greek historian.

A comparison may prove useful here between the picture of Herodotus that is revealed in his own *The Histories* and the image offered by the Polish reporter. The Greek rarely writes about himself. His narrative mainly concentrates on recounting stories, as well as describing customs, religions, and peoples he meets. There is, of course, a lot of information on topography and the countries explored. Herodotus appears to be not only the father of history, as Cicero would have it, but also a sociologist, ethnographer, and geographer. On the interdisciplinary character of his interests, Seweryn Hammer writes, “[Herodotus] is interested in the lives of people, in climate, soil types and in natural produce. For ethnography he created a system, discussing nations, languages, religions, and cultures. In fact, the list of Persian peoples he offers in Book 7 became the basis for subsequent geographical and ethnographic explorations of the ancient East.”¹²

In *Travels with Herodotus*, the Greek historian’s image is filtered through the personality and interests of the author. Kapuściński remains only partially faithful to the picture that is revealed in *The Histories*. Most of all, he leaves his own imprint on the figure of his master. The reporter paints a realistic portrait of the historian (paying attention to credibility), but adds a few authorial touches. This style of reading, according to the categorization proposed by Michał Głowiński, is *expressive* because its narration strongly aims at individual reconstruction of the identity of the author of the text.¹³ Still, we can also notice elements of *instrumental style*: it happens now and again that Kapuściński the reader quotes Herodotus to discuss his writing techniques as a paradigm he perceives as relevant for both historians and journalists.

When looking at these crucial aspects of the subjectively reconstructed Herodotus, it is worth noticing what information we receive about the Polish reporter who narrates the story. The writer’s personal interests extend to the selection of quotes from Herodotus. The use of quotes is motivated by a need to make the reader interested in what fascinated the author himself.

In certain places, another demand seems to be a key factor. Kapuściński frequently presents Herodotus’s text as if it were contemporary crime fiction, selecting shocking, dramatic moments and not avoiding scenes of blood

and gore. A person being impaled or the rotting body of the dying queen Feretime is shown with matter-of-fact precision. The brutality of the material may originate in the spirit of ancient times, but the fact that it is used so explicitly highlights its transgressive aspect. Thus, the violent character affects the reader of *Travels* much more than it could affect contemporary readers of *The Histories*, where its intensity wavers within the long, complicated narrative. Still, Kapuściński's motivation behind this strategy may be completely different. The brutality is not necessarily an advertising trick, drawing the reader's attention. It is, instead, an example of the author's genuine interest in the sufferings of ancient people. Herodotus, as Kapuściński remarks at some point, treats the material with the indifference of somebody who is well used to it. The reporter, in turn, reacts to the scenes, observing them with awe. The empathy of the observer, of the sympathetic listener, is at work again.

Another dimension of the subjectively constructed portrait of Herodotus is the use Kapuściński makes of his own imagination as an interpretative tool for the ancient book, its style, and for the historian's working methods of travel and observation. It is visible in the passage describing Babylon being besieged by Darius the Great. The reporter first offers a quote from the historian and then adds: "Let us imagine this scene."¹⁴ The fragment following such a statement is not always a pure product of imagination. Quite often, as in the case of this passage, such comment is only a symptom of change in the speaking voice. Authorial narration takes over to reconstruct the events in a condensed, shorter version. It is easy to notice how much Kapuściński's imagination relies on his own extensive knowledge. The symptomatic suggestion quoted above is followed by a detailed passage:

Let us imagine this scene. The world's largest army has arrived at the gates of Babylon. It has made camp around the city, which is encircled by massive walls of clay brick. The city wall is several meters high and so wide that a wagon drawn by four horses all in a row can be driven along its top. . . . It will be twelve hundred more years before gunpowder makes its appearance in this part of the world. Firearms won't be invented for another two thousand years. . . . So the Babylonians feel invincible, able to behave with impunity—nothing can happen to them.¹⁵

I will return to the motif of imagination as a narrative regulator, but here I would like to stress that an example of such authorial interpretation can be also found in numerous fragments that aim at reconstruction of Herodotus's journalistic talents and his methods of collecting information. The historian is precise and laconic, using fragments of the stories he has heard but rarely revealing much about the circumstances in which he did so. Let us then have a look at how Kapuściński discusses the historian's workshop:

For now, people gather in the evenings at the long, communal table, by the fire, beneath the old tree. Better if the sea is nearby. They eat, drink wine, talk. Tales are woven into those conversations, endlessly varied stories. If a visitor, a traveller, happens by, they will invite him to join them. He will sit and listen. In the morning, he will be on his way. In the next place he comes to, he will be similarly welcomed. The scenario of these ancient evenings repeats itself. If the traveller has a good memory—and Herodotus must have had a phenomenal one—he will over time amass a great many stories. That was one of the sources upon which our Greek drew.¹⁶

This representative passage shows how the reporter's imagination adds (on the basis of his knowledge) to the content of Herodotus's. The added material, otherwise absent, is thus more interesting, more actively arousing, as if presenting a detective's work. The writer is puzzled with the places of indeterminacy in the ancient text and consequently tries to solve mysteries through acts of imagination.

Another aspect of the subjective input of the portrait of Herodotus is the independence with which the reporter manifests his understanding of the historian's work and identity. This seems a surprising element in the face of Kapuściński's earlier works, in which intertextuality was dominant (for example, in *Imperium*, where he shares with readers his knowledge about a given issue he acquired from his reading of numerous materials). In *Travels*, he is very much antibibliographic. Still, it is worth stressing that it is only an apparent independence. In fact, Kapuściński is well prepared to write about Herodotus. In an interview he mentions thorough research:

Before I settled down to work, I had accumulated a serious research basis of 140 books. A dozen or so were about Herodotus himself (although little information about him exists). They were more hypothetical than factual. I did not want to write another book about the same thing. I felt no need for that. So I thought, let's go another way, let's go back to my reporter's work. This was something I had never talked about before in a book.¹⁷

Thus, the intertextual aspect of *Travels* is limited to *The Histories*—the ancient work is the only source used. All comment comes from the author, who uses knowledge and empathy as primary reference points. He offers an *ad fontes* reading (though he does not read Herodotus in the original), tries to go as directly as possible to the ancient historian. He is clearly aware that a figure from more than 2,000 years ago is impossible to be seen in any objective way. Instead of looking for professional tools, he follows intuitively his own assumptions, hypotheses, and imagination. The effect makes specific impressions. On the one hand, we are surprised at the certainty with which Kapuściński talks about his intuitive observations on Herodotus. On the

other, the authorial tone of certainty is subdued by interrogative structures that dominate on a syntactic level. An example of the first technique—which represents a kind of reconstructed narration—can be found in the passage quoted above, in which Herodotus moves from table to table and listens to stories of the locals. The poetics of interrogation—inquisitive narration of questions—is also a common strategy in the book, for instance, in this comment Kapuściński offers after the concise quote from *The Histories* that mentions women strangled by besieged Babylonians in need of food:

Our Greek says nothing more about this mass execution. Whose decision was it? That of the Popular Assembly? Of the Municipal Government? Of the Committee for the Defence of Babylon? Was there some discussion of the matter? Did anyone protest? Who decided on the method of execution—that these women would be strangled? Were there other suggestions? That they be pierced by spears, for example? Or cut down with swords? Or burned on pyres? Or thrown into the Euphrates, which coursed through the city?

There are more questions still. Could the women, who had been waiting in their homes for the men to return from the meeting during which sentence was pronounced upon them, discern something in their men's faces? Indecision? Shame? Pain? Madness? The little girls of course suspected nothing. But the older ones? Wouldn't instinct tell them something? Did all the men observe the agreed silence? Didn't conscience strike any of them? Did none of them experience an attack of hysteria? Run screaming through the streets?¹⁸

We may also notice that these interrogative passages strongly dramatize the material presented by Herodotus. Facts offered by the historian are reworked in a way that adds new tragedy, escalates fears that must have overwhelmed the people in such terrifying circumstances. Thus, Kapuściński completes the gaps left by historical account, which typically concentrates on major conflicts, royal affairs, and large-scale processes. In other words, the reporter presents the experience of the individual common man—unimportant to Herodotus but of immense interest to modern historians.

Hermeneutic Relation

The undermining of Kapuściński's authorial tone of certainty is a characteristic feature of the text. The cascades of questions are a symptom of a visibly hermeneutic attitude, which is essentially based on the desire to understand and on the close interpretation of the text. Kapuściński's writing and reading techniques thus reveal some influence of Ricoeur. Kapuściński follows the thinker by making a deliberate effort to interpret not only Herodotus's work but also himself. "Reflection is not so much a justification of science and duty

as a reappropriation of our effort to exist; epistemology is only a part of this broader task: we have to recover the act of existing, the positing of the self, in all the density of its works,”¹⁹ Ricoeur comments on the issue. In this way, the interpretation of *The Histories* has a clearly autobiographical character. It reveals the identity of the reporter-reader; and it leads to self-understanding through the interpretative effort and regular accumulation of knowledge about other works and writers.

Kapuściński’s contact with Ricoeur’s work is confirmed in *Lapidaria*. In volume six, we find a direct quote on multiple interpretative levels present in the text.²⁰ Elsewhere in the same volume, two somehow encyclopedic paragraphs are devoted to hermeneutics:

Hermeneutics—a method of interpreting texts and the world; discussed by Vico, Schleiermacher, Weber, Dilthey, and others. Both Weber and Dilthey talk about understanding as *verstehen*, putting yourself in the shoes of others. Recently the same problem has been addressed by, e.g. Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Hermeneutics originates in Protestantism, which pays great attention to appropriate reading of the Bible. Schleiermacher suggests multiple consecutive readings, while Dilthey extends hermeneutic procedures onto the interpretation of all human behaviours and creations.²¹

I do not want to dwell too much on such comments on hermeneutics (though this passage shows, for instance, the reporter’s strong tendency toward concise and risky generalization), but I believe we may also easily assume that *Travels with Herodotus* does offer a deliberate reference to the hermeneutic approach. The technique seems more convincing if we realize that the writing of *Travels* is mentioned in *Lapidarium VI*. Moreover, a few pages later there’s an excerpt from the interview Edwin Benedyk conducted with the author himself. It could be also true that Kapuściński started to become interested in hermeneutics while working on *Travels with Herodotus*. Thus, the approach could perhaps have some affinities with its content.

Hermeneutics is contextually relevant to *Travels* as it also touches upon a problem Kapuściński repeatedly deals with in most of his work. Historical distance between us and most creations of culture is—in hermeneutic approach and in much of the reporter’s writing—neutralized neither by biographic recreation of authorial intention (biographism) nor the structure of the work (structuralism), but by the interpretation aimed at internalizing the text, breaking down the foreignness that is inherent in the temporal distance. Any other method would involve, as Katarzyna Rosner claims, an assumption that “all creations of antiquity bear witness to the fact that it does not have

anything to tell us.”²² Hermeneutics, in turn, makes us believe that every text is alive and will speak to us and play its primary cultural role by becoming a tool for the understanding of ourselves. Kapuściński seems to follow a similar interpretative approach. The autobiographical effects of such affinities follow suit.

In his specific *interview* with the historian, the reporter does not aim at fake Objectivity; he is clearly subjective when he openly and insistently communicates his admiration of both the work and life of the Greek. This could perhaps be seen as a flaw, an emotional disadvantage. Constant praise that fills the book in order to create a similar admiration in the readers may rather appear to increase their skepticism and distance. While the uncritical worship of Herodotus is indeed quite surprising in Kapuściński's work, the origin of such an attitude lies in the tools he chooses for interpretation of *The Histories*—in the bracketing of bibliography. And we should bear in mind that other commentators see Herodotus in a dramatically different way. Polish historian Zygmunt Kubiak doubts his reliability, and in places clearly rejects Herodotus's relation as untrue: “If we are to trust Herodotus, money was invented by the Lydians,” he writes. Elsewhere in the same text he openly disproves the statistics about the battle of Marathon: “When Herodotus claims there were sixty four hundred killed among the invaders and a hundred and ninety-two Athenians, I definitely do not believe him.”²³ Kapuściński is of a different mind—he seems to believe Herodotus, for the most part. Seweryn Hammer, another contemporary historian, comments that Herodotus was more of a writer than a historian because, simply, there was at the time no genuine historiographical tradition available to him to which he could refer. He remained, Hammer continues, under the influence of the Ionic novella with its dominant elements of folktale, fable, epigram, and puzzle. Herodotus followed the example of a logograph, Hectaeus of Miletus, the author of *Περίοδος γῆς* (World Survey), widely recognized as a piece of pseudo-historical writing. And although we know Herodotus went much further than his master, we have to remember that he based his work on Hectaeus's data and followed his style. And that style, as Hammer proves, was itself close to the style of folktale or Homer's *Odyssey*,²⁴ where entertainment was as important as knowledge. Even in antiquity this mode of writing generated a great deal of heated debate. Aristotle called Herodotus an uncritical storyteller, and similar, though less objective, pleas were offered by Plutarch and Aristophanes.

Why then does Kapuściński put so much confidence in Herodotus and find in him what others seem to miss? As the reporter himself puts it in the closing part of *Travels*, in our meeting with history we stand in darkness, surrounded by light. The light does not disperse darkness, but surrounds it—it

is external to the lack of knowledge. The writer casts light into darkness, which nevertheless remains impenetrable. The distant past cannot be uncovered—only a passing glimpse at it can be achieved through the workings of our imagination, through hypotheses, studying the remains of the past, and talking or writing about it. This seems to be the dominant historiosophical aspect of *Travels with Herodotus*. The choice of a particular rhetoric mode—suggesting certainty or doubt—is less relevant. Be it one or the other, the choice seems to be that of the narrative strategy. The past is inaccessible, unknown; only fragments are to be seen and described.

Kapuściński reacts to this perceptive predicament with a surprising degree of optimism. He seems to believe that if darkness cannot be dispersed, we shall concentrate our attention on the light itself—on our imaginative powers, which dictate to us how the traces could lead to a full picture of a person, to a complete presentation of events. Through such an attitude, history becomes a material of creation. It resembles art, not science. There is more in it of a hunter's expedition and a poet's creative fantasy than of a concrete account offered by a diligent archivist.

Kapuściński's historiosophical point of view seems to be similar to concepts of Hayden White, who stresses the role of interpretation and storytelling in historiography:

I realize that in characterizing historical discourse as interpretation and historical interpretation as narrativization, I am taking a position in a debate over the nature of historical knowledge that sets narrative in opposition to theory in the manner of an opposition between a thought that remains for the most part literary and even mythical and one that is or aspires to be scientific. . . . And narrative has always been and continues to be the predominant mode of historical writing. . . . The theory of historical discourse must address the question of the function of narrativity in the production of the historical text.²⁵

Affinities between the picture of Herodotus we receive and the author's working methods seem equally clear, especially to an avid reader. It is not only because Kapuściński projects onto Herodotus his own assumptions about the reporter's work or the actual sense of traveling. Similar values—such as possessing an antitotalitarian, democratic attitude—also link the two figures. Writing about oneself when writing about somebody else is even more visible if we juxtapose passages from *Autoportret reportera* (A Reporter's Self-portrait), a collection of interviews with the author, not translated into English) and *Travels with Herodotus*. In one interview, Kapuściński comments on his experiences: "When traveling, Odysseus is always welcome in any place in the world. The reason is that in those times—and in many communities of the

Third World until now—people did not distinguish those who came from the outside from those who were possible gods or their emissaries.”²⁶ We can find a similar example in *Travels with Herodotus*: “Herodotus’s travels would not have been possible without the institution of the proxenos, . . . a type of a consul. One had to demonstrate genuine hospitality to a new arrival, because one could never be certain whether this wanderer asking for food and a roof over his head was merely a man, or in fact a god who had assumed human form.”²⁷

Kapuściński hides his face behind Herodotus, or perhaps he uses the ancient figure as a medium. Thus, Herodotus becomes Kapuściński’s double, a shade and mirror that had been accompanying him in his farthest travels. In some sense, he cannot dispose of him, but the ghost brings him genuine pleasure. Herodotus is not a romantic double—a phantasm indicating a neurotic chasm, or fears, or emotions of its original ‘I.’ He is kind to and friendly with his twin brother. Kapuściński says, “We wandered together for years. And although one travels best alone, I do not think we disturbed each other.”²⁸

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Confronting the (Un)Reality of Pranksterdom: Tom Wolfe and *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*

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Abstract: In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe attempts to document and represent Ken Kesey and his Merry Band of Pranksters, a group of Californian, acid-taking “Day-Glo crazies,” with their own language and system of reasoning. Kesey and company prove remarkably difficult subjects for Wolfe, for their near-perpetual drug use drastically alters their collective perception of the world around them. Additionally, and most ironically, their quest to carve out a new reality—a new way of being in American culture—becomes an endeavor in escapism as they consistently reify their experiences, their very approach to life, with performance, allegory, and symbolism. This essay examines Wolfe’s documentary method in *Acid Test*, particularly the means by which he effectively ascertains and represents the reality of subjects engrossed in unreality. Drawing from earlier models of documentary literature—most notably *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*—as well as the aesthetic and humanist principles of the high modernists, he employs a host of literary devices and narrative perspectives to illuminate the real and the human in a haystack of allegory and abstraction (one often marked by the Pranksters’ identification with superhuman alter egos). Wolfe’s juxtaposition of Prankster perception with journalistic observation affords the reader the requisite number of perspectives to understand and even identify with the documentary subjects while cutting through the allegorical haze they create. In this he accomplishes his primary goal: to effect not simply understanding in his readership but, more important, identification with the humanity of the subjects being documented.

In *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, Tom Wolfe takes on a formidable challenge: to document and represent Ken Kesey and his Merry Band of Pranksters—a group of Californian, acid-taking, “Day-Glo crazies” with their own language and system of reasoning—in such a way as to effect not simply understanding in his readership. More important, Wolfe seeks to demonstrate the cultural significance of such a complex and nuanced subculture to a readership far removed from their customs, discourse, and general milieu. Thus, as in his first book, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, a collection of what would later be called “New Journalism,” Wolfe must help his readers grasp and value—and in some ways identify with—marginalized subjects, that is, individuals on the forefront of the burgeoning counterculture in America. This is no easy task, as these subjects maintain an existence of perpetual fantasy, abstraction, and spectacle. This critique highlights the means by which Wolfe successfully navigates the exceptional challenges levied by Kesey and his followers. Specifically, it examines Wolfe’s method of working within and against the collective perspective of Kesey and the Pranksters, investigating their history, ethos, *mise en scène*, and ontology from myriad (often competing) points of view, ultimately juxtaposing Prankster artifice and delusion with the stuff of empirical reality and narrative realism to forge a more complete and faithful representation of their actuality.

To realize his narrative/journalistic ambitions, Wolfe establishes two fundamental objectives. Above all, he endeavors to demonstrate that much of the ethos and ideology driving his subjects’ brand of consciousness expansion—and to a greater degree, their entire approach to existence so far as the time documented is concerned—is in line with more general, mainstream American values and ideals.¹ In short, much like his approach to representing race-car legend Junior Johnson and twenty-something music mogul Phil Spector in *Streamline Baby*, Wolfe observes that many of the ostensibly strange and deviant beliefs and actions of this founding facet of the counterculture are actually in line with those often associated with the postwar, middle-class American Dream. The difference for Kesey and the Merry Band of Pranksters is that they, in their own words, are exceedingly “out front” about what drives them. That is to say, their professed lack of pretension, “hang-ups,” or adherence to middle-class morality creates only an impression of complete and total deviance from American values. Certainly they are not interested in some of the more obvious elements of this brand of the American Dream: the nuclear family, the house in the suburbs, and the two cars in the garage. That said, Wolfe shows us that some of the Pranksters’ most cherished principles, such as individualism, freedom, and mobility are also defining constituents of the contemporaneous notion of mainstream American ideals.² Therefore, his

is an endeavor in lessening the ontological divide between reader and subject. Of course, this is a hard sell—an audacious enterprise made even more so by the book's esoterically provocative title, as well as the impediments imposed by the very subjects he seeks to humanize.

To accomplish such an undertaking, Wolfe must take on a second, more difficult challenge. Immersed in the fledgling consciousness expansion movement, and therefore in the near-ceaseless throes of a hallucinogenic episode, Wolfe's subjects appear mired in a milieu of unreality. Not only do the psychedelic properties of their sundry array of narcotics (the favorite, of course, being LSD) extensively alter their perceptions of the world around them. Additionally, and most ironically, their quest to carve out a new reality—a new way of being in American culture—is in essence an endeavor in escapism. They, often through Wolfe's free indirect discourse,³ consistently reify their experiences, their very approach to life, with performance, allegory, and symbolism. Most visible of such exercises is the never-ending, seemingly aimless movie they are making, a work of artifice that becomes interchangeable with the Pranksters' actuality. Thus when the harsh realities of life, such as an unplanned pregnancy, motorcycle gang rape, or serious legal troubles intrude upon the "current fantasy" of Prankster existence, not one member of the group, Kesey especially, seems fit to address it with a real solution.⁴ Wolfe's task therefore becomes exponentially more difficult, for as a journalist he must ascertain and represent the reality of a subject engrossed in unreality, and he must find the real and the human in a haystack of allegory and abstraction, one often marked by the Pranksters' identification with superhuman alter egos. Only then can he access and communicate Kesey and the Pranksters, allowing a largely mainstream, "unhip" readership to understand, and to a great extent identify with, a gaggle of acid-taking hippies running amok in the northern California countryside.

Early in his foray into Pranksterdom, Wolfe learns that traditional journalistic approaches will not work in communicating the human actuality of those, Kesey in particular, who have already begun to see written language as an archaic mode of representation. This poses a significant problem for Wolfe, as his medium is, in fact, the written word—"*And you couldn't put it into words.*"⁵ Konas, too, observes that "Wolfe can only take language so far to reify these people. Kesey's aims are so cosmic, his LSD trips so experiential, that words can only approximate his reality."⁶ Wolfe's response is to implement a documentary method that circumvents the limitations of traditional literary forms, principally in the name of subverting the Otherness of Kesey and the Pranksters. Wolfe and New Journalists of his ilk, most notably Hunter S. Thompson, eschew singular, traditional modes. They combine myriad

literary forms, including prose, journalism, poetry, and a host of avant-garde modernist devices such as parataxis, collage, and bricolage in an effort to cultivate a new language. The aim is to transcend the limitations of the aesthetic and journalistic conventions of their day, more effectively accessing human actuality and thus negating the Otherness of their documentary subjects.

This does not mean that Wolfe foregoes the realism inherent to journalism (or literary journalism), for it is only via a commitment to realism that he can break through the illusory miasma effected by his subjects. Carl A. Bredahl argues as much when he observes that unlike Kesey, Wolfe does not lose himself in abstraction. He remains firmly footed in the physical world, and is thus able to communicate the actuality of subjects who seem dedicated to effacing such actuality.⁷ Wolfe's success lies in his ability to "focus on physical objects that sparkle with life"—evidence of his commitment to the amalgam of "structure" and "exuberance."⁸ That said, Wolfe's imaginative approach to the palpable here and now is compounded by his incursions into the fantastic world of allegory and abstraction of his subjects. Put another way, he proves adept at infiltrating the consciousness of those seekers of consciousness expansion, and his journo-documentary method is one that juxtaposes the accurate-yet-stylistic reporting that Bredahl observes with the altered and abstracted perspectives of Kesey and the Pranksters, which the reader experiences through Wolfe's narrative movement in and out of his subjects' consciousness. So while Wolfe must often favor realism to counter the unreality of Pranksterdom, he offsets the limitations of this realism by effectively assuming the voices and vantage points of his subjects. He affords his readers multiple channels of engagement, or as T.V. Reed wrote of another work of literary journalism, "several versions or angles of vision on a given object, character, or narrated scene."⁹ Wolfe ultimately filters the experiences of Kesey and company through his own subjectivity, one that on several occasions reveals an admiration for/identification with his subjects.¹⁰ This is important, as Wolfe, from the very beginning of *Acid Test*, lets readers know that his "blue silk blazer" and "shiny low-cut black shoes"—compared to the "Indian headbands, donkey beads, temple bells, amulets, mandalas, god's eyes, fluorescent vests, unicorn horns [and] Errol Flynn dueling shirts" of the San Francisco acid scene—make *him* the Other in the world he's chosen to document. As McKeen writes, it is as if to say, "I am as different from these people as they are from you."¹¹ Thus, if Wolfe can come to understand and regard Kesey and company, he can consequently lessen the divide between reader and subject.

Thus if it is Wolfe's mission to communicate the value, dignity, and cultural importance of his heroes, to convey each character's vision (and its inherent merit and significance) to a postwar populace largely conditioned

to reject (or at least be wary of) notions, behaviors, and cultural elements beyond the limits of the stifling social conservatism forged in the 1950s, he must expose the contrivances of collective Prankster identity. Only then can he implement his method for accessing the actuality of his subjects, replacing the allegorically superhuman identities they've constructed for themselves with the real humanity they attempt to abdicate.

Living the (Current) Fantasy

Throughout *Acid Test*, we see that Kesey and the Merry Pranksters exist in a near-constant state of performance—from their initial experiments with LSD at Perry Lane in 1963, where on one evening Kesey “dragged a piano out of his house and they all set about axing the hell out of it and burning it up,” to the “Acid Test Graduation” in Haight-Ashbury three years later.¹² It is in the early stages of their famed cross-country bus trip, the crux of Prankster mythology, that such theatricality becomes most visible. For starters, the members “took on new names and used them.” And as Wolfe notes, “They were all now characters in their own movies or *The Big Movie*.”¹³ These are not merely aliases; they are alternate identities, not unlike those cultivated by the comic book superheroes with whom the Pranksters expressly identify: Captain Marvel, Captain America, and the Flash, to name a few.¹⁴ Such artifice coincides with the Prankster notion of leading a “secret life,” one made possible by the drugs themselves. While the Pranksters are cognizant of the euphorically transformative effects of the many drugs at their disposal, the “befuddled citizens” whom they encounter on the journey “could only see the outward manifestations of the incredible stuff going on inside their skulls.”¹⁵

Wolfe is keen to emphasize the central role of performance in the collective Prankster identity, and it is Kesey, of course, who stands out as the unmistakable star of the traveling show. Despite assuming the role of “non-navigator,” a self-proclaimed guide rather than controlling leader, Kesey orchestrates, by direct mandate or more subtle means of manipulation, nearly each facet of the Prankster experience: from who is allowed to take acid to who is directing the movie at a particular juncture of the bus trip. This element of control is an important part of Kesey's theatrical nature and manifests in, among other places, the religious reverence, iconography, and vernacular implemented by and cast upon Kesey and his teachings. In much of Wolfe's text, the Biblical parallels are obvious. Kesey is a Christ figure, a teacher leading his disciples across great distances and through strangely profound experiences, preaching novel ways of looking at existence, and even pulling off a miracle or two (for example, keeping the Hell's Angels in line).¹⁶

This dynamic, largely fueled by Kesey's irresistible (if not brazen) charm,

even prompts members of an established religious order, the Unitarian Church, to refer to him as the “Prophet Kesey.”¹⁷ As would be expected, Kesey wholly denies such identification. Were he to not, his would be an endeavor in renewal or reclamation, rather than creating something new and unique. “We’re not on a Christ Trip,” he declares. “That’s been done, and it doesn’t work.”¹⁸ Despite this adamant denial, Wolfe cannot help but repeatedly point out the religious (often Judeo-Christian) parallels in the Prankster quest. And this is largely due to the fact that Kesey plays the role so well. For Wolfe, the religious implications of Pranksterdom begin with the group’s focus on “the experience.” He observes, “none of the great founded religions, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, none of them began with a philosophical framework or even a main idea.”¹⁹ Rather, like consciousness expansion itself, each “began with an overwhelming *new experience*.”²⁰ Thus, while Kesey’s trip might not be definitively Christian, Wolfe sees in his leadership the makings of a prophet or, at the very least, a man who plays the part so well he eventually believes himself to be one. For it is the “*provocateur* Kesey” who “prophesied” the death of the UC Berkeley student movement against the war.²¹ And it is Kesey, in only an *ostensibly* failed prediction that the Beatles would travel from their 1965 concert at the Cow Palace in Los Angeles to an after-party at his residence in La Honda, who foresees the band’s co-opting of the Pranksters’ journey “Furthur” in the *Magical Mystery Tour* a few years later.²²

Wolfe’s seamless transitions between journalistic observation and the myriad (often coalescing) perspectives of his subjects can at times obscure the guiding hand of the writer in the establishment of these religious attributions. That is to say, the melding of so many identities in Wolfe’s brand of immersed, literary journalism—Wolfe’s (as both journalist *and* participant-observer), other narrators, and subjects—makes it difficult to see that Kesey the prophet is nearly as much a product of Wolfe as he is of Kesey, the Pranksters, and the Unitarians.²³ Jack Schafer also observes this element, noting that while “Wolfe finds in the Pranksters the germ of a mid-century religious awakening,” the prophet-disciple relationship between Kesey and the Pranksters “could be judged a matter of a writer’s Ph.D. overpowering a simpler tale about a group of founding stoners.”²⁴ That said, guidance and invention are two very different things, and Wolfe’s use of words like “prophet” and “miracle” are taken directly from the discourse of Pranksterdom. It is Kesey himself who, upon arriving at the 1965 Unitarian Church conference in Asilomar, California, declares, “[W]e’re going to try to work a miracle in seven days.”²⁵ And it is Kesey, positioned on a balcony high above the masses at the 1966 San Francisco Trips Festival, who scrawls in great red letters upon

the wall, "Anybody Who Knows He Is God Go Up on Stage."²⁶ Thus, when Wolfe writes assertions such as, "Ever since Asilomar, Kesey has been deep into the religion thing," the reader can trust that his is an *observation*, not a loose interpretation.²⁷ And it is on the heels of this very observation that we find the principle flaw in the religious character of Prankster existence.

Wolfe notes Kesey's engrossment in the "religion thing" while revealing a private moment between Kesey and Mountain Girl, a Prankster with whom the former is having an extramarital affair. As Kesey pontificates on his latest vision of Prankster existence ("Miracles—Control—*Now*—The Movie"), we find Mountain Girl unable to concentrate on the "great waves" of words. "Her mind keeps rolling and spinning over another set of data, always the same. Like—the eternal desperate calculation. In short, Mountain Girl is pregnant."²⁸ In this moment, amid Kesey's sermonizing on "very deep and far out stuff," we find the central conflict in the narrative: the intrusion of reality upon Prankster escapism.

Mountain Girl's pregnancy is a significant development; it is an unplanned conception with a married man, the wife of whom is the matriarch of her immediate social circle.²⁹ She is living in a commune, perpetually high on psychedelic drugs, with no real income and no immediate means of providing for her unborn child. Yet the gravity of her situation is belied by the rather nonchalant, matter-of-fact way in which Wolfe breaks the news. Really, the exploration of Mountain Girl's condition goes no further than the quote above. Her pregnancy is mentioned only twice more in the book, once on the following page, and then briefly referenced again nearly a hundred pages later; this is about as many times as her (and Kesey's) daughter, Sunshine, is mentioned in subsequent chapters.

Wolfe's ostensible trivialization of Mountain Girl's pregnancy effectively reflects the disconnection between the collective Prankster mindset and the goings-on of the world around them. For all of their desires to expand their consciousness through hallucinogens, multimedia experiments, free-association dialogues, and other such activities, Kesey and his Merry Band of Pranksters only succeed in isolating themselves from the "real world" (and potentially the reader). Thus when the palpable, often harsh developments of actuality infringe upon the "current fantasy," we find the Pranksters retreating further into the fantasy, often to the point of delusion. Even Mountain Girl, in this moment of real-life crisis, cannot "hardly help but marvel at the current fantasy."³⁰

This existential disconnect is emphasized in the Acid Tests themselves.³¹ In the book's title chapter, Ken Babbs, the Prankster who assumes leadership while Kesey is on the lam in Mexico, asserts that the idea behind these gatherings is to "learn how to function on acid."³² The implication here is that

these communal experiments will teach those involved how to successfully engage in consciousness expansion in the “straight” world. In other words, the Pranksters seek a method for leading functional and relatively productive lives while continuing to take acid. The irony of this idea is that the structure of the Acid Tests only serves to further isolate its participants from the world they seek to navigate. Kesey’s initial notion of the tests explicitly conveys such disengagement. He envisions a multimedia burlesque comprising “lights, movies, [and] videotapes.”³³ And among the many projectors, “speakers, microphones, tape machines, live, replay, variable lag,” and strobe lights, participants “could take LSD or speed or smoke grass and lie back and experience what they would, *enclosed and submerged* in a planet of lights and sounds such as the universe never knew.”³⁴ This vision echoes a consistent paradox (or perhaps contradiction) in the Prankster mindset: the confrontation of reality with unreality. And while the actual Acid Tests are nowhere near as grand or sophisticated as Kesey’s aforementioned conception, they nonetheless serve to separate their participants from the world outside the walls of their venues, which include the Fillmore West, San Francisco’s Longshoremen’s Hall, and L.A.’s Troupers Club.³⁵ The culmination of the Acid Tests is fantasy, not reality. Wolfe sees this clearly, hence their identification with the magic of motion pictures, specifically “Cinerama,” by which “[a] man could become—for a while, at least—any other person, and could take part in any conceivable adventure, real or imaginary.”³⁶ In essence, the experience is designed to be “indistinguishable from reality itself.” So, like the bus trip, the Acid Tests are only “an allegory of life,” not life incarnate.

Of course, most experiences conceived by Kesey and the Pranksters in *Acid Test* adhere to this disconnect. Wolfe’s task is therefore significantly more complicated than that of your average documentarian or journalist. He must cut through not simply simulacra, but also the pervasive allegory and delusions that Kesey and the Pranksters have positioned as actuality.³⁷ In essence, they buy into and become lost in the myth of their own creation, and it is against this descent into artifice that Wolfe must show what Prankster existence really looks like. The reporter quickly recognizes the limitations of the traditional journalistic approach in an acid scene where “no one is going to put it into words for you.”³⁸ Wolfe implements such convention in his first encounter with Kesey while visiting him in prison. There is an implicit metaphor in this encounter wherein the two communicate via telephone while only a few feet across from one another, separated by the thick, soundproof glass of the visitation area. While Kesey and Wolfe are in close physical proximity, “imaginatively they are miles apart.”³⁹ Because so much of Prankster existence resists linguistic representation, Kesey seeks a new art form—a new

language—one that cannot be adequately represented by the stuff of convention. Wolfe, in turn—on the heels of this initial failure with Kesey—makes it his mission to reveal the ostensibly ineffable “other world” of the Pranksters.⁴⁰

Cutting through the Haze

Wolfe’s narrative technique for making clear the opaque abstraction that is Prankster existence becomes the juxtaposition and blending of his own journalistic and subjective voices with the voices and perspectives of both his subjects and other writers who’ve helped in his research. What is more, Wolfe was privy to the forty-plus hours of film footage shot by the Pranksters during their cross-country bus trip (an invaluable documentary resource in itself). The host of recorded interviews, footage, and documentary materials did more than help Wolfe assemble a cohesive narrative from a mountain of fragments.⁴¹ It provided him with the material by which he could effectively cultivate distinct and accurate narrative voices. These, along with the many literary styles—from journalistic prose to rhyming poetry, ballads, and formally avant-garde arrangements on par with e.e. cummings and Gertrude Stein—provide the reader with multiple ways of seeing. Ultimately, Wolfe succeeds in subverting Prankster unreality via the collocation of their perspectives with his (and others’) journalistic observations and narrative interpretations.

Wolfe’s approach to representing Pranksterdom is the means by which the writer can impose order (and thus clarity) on a milieu seemingly devoid of any structure whatsoever—something Kesey and the Pranksters will never be able to do with the miles of film and audiotape they’ve recorded. Such becomes clearest in Wolfe’s ability to implement a representational form that effectively communicates the effects of an LSD trip to a readership largely unfamiliar with the actual effects of the drug. Put another way, Wolfe has successfully interpreted Kesey and his followers, who have themselves developed a means of interpreting the world based upon the use of drugs with which an overwhelming majority of Americans had no experience whatsoever.⁴² Consequently there is an intrinsic cognitive disconnect between the reader and these proponents of consciousness expansion. The former will approach Wolfe’s coverage of the latter with the rationality inherent in the act of engaging a written text. But consciousness expansion is rooted in the irrational. In a sense, it attempts to counter the methodology of deductive reasoning ingrained in the minds of modern man. To more clearly illustrate this idea, Wolfe turns to another author who experimented with hallucinogenic drugs, Aldous Huxley. As Wolfe notes, Huxley’s book *The Doors of Perception* positions “ordinary perception” or rational thought as the product of centuries of detrimental conditioning:

In ordinary perception, the senses send an overwhelming flood of information to the brain, which the brain then filters down to a trickle it can manage for the purpose of survival in a highly competitive world. Man has become so rational, so utilitarian, that the trickle becomes most pale and thin. It is efficient for survival, but it screens out the most wondrous part of man's potential experience without his even knowing it.⁴³

Consciousness expansion attempts to offset these limitations. Drugs open the doors of perception and return to modern man the ability to "experience the rich and sparkling flood of the senses fully," something only known to his "Primitive" ancestors and childhood self. For Huxley, this is no less than a rediscovery of man's "divine birthright."

As this state and the experiences it yields transcends rational, utilitarian thought, Wolfe must engage the problem of representation through both stylistic and philosophical means. First, he "adapts his writing to his milieu," constructing a form to match content, "subverting his language" and "dosing his prose."⁴⁴ In *Acid Test* this means developing an expressionistic form that emulates the experience of an LSD trip. To do this, Wolfe employs a barrage of familiar modernist devices, including rapidly shifting points of view, abstruse (ostensibly nonsensical) interior monologues, and non-linear word organization—all in an effort to effectively represent the thoughts and feelings of people on such powerful hallucinogenic drugs.

But mere style would not be enough to do this. Wolfe understood that in order to truly express the Prankster mindset, he would have to take acid himself. The fundamental disconnect between the "straight world" and Kesey and his followers is that "the Pranksters' unique practices . . . derived from the LSD experience and [were] incomprehensible without it."⁴⁵ Wolfe's first attempt to write something on Kesey and the Pranksters, a three-part series of articles published in *New York* in January and February of 1967, reflects this idea. As Weingarten notes, they were thorough pieces of investigative reporting, but they were also "written with a reporter's detachment that came no closer to explaining the Prankster's reality than the early press coverage Wolfe dismissed as hopelessly stodgy."⁴⁶ To access the "metaphysical aspect of the story," Wolfe would have to take the acid plunge.

At La Honda, Wolfe refused Kesey's offer of LSD, but he eventually understood that he could not fully access the actuality of his subjects without partaking in their defining ritual. In 1967 he traveled to Buffalo, New York, to meet a friend with a means of acquiring acid. There he dropped 124 milligrams and had, what seemed like at the time, "a phenomenal insight, a breakthrough."⁴⁷ Actually, the experience was not entirely profound awareness and epiphany. The beginning of Wolfe's trip was quite terrifying. He

states, "At first I thought I was having a gigantic heart attack—I felt like my heart was outside my body with these big veins."⁴⁸ Despite this horrific facet of his first (and only) LSD trip, Wolfe would walk away from the experience with a degree of understanding unimaginable to him before.

One example of such insight comes during the description of one of the early Prankster experiments at Perry Lane. Here we are privy to an acid-fueled conversation between two Pranksters, George Walker and Sandy Lehmann-Haupt, on (what is to them) the profoundly fascinating topic of "intersubjectivity." In this moment, Sandy has a staggering revelation: "[H]e knows precisely what Walker is thinking."⁴⁹ It is not enough that Wolfe simply *tell* his reader of this development; he must *show* us by effectively bringing about the marriage of form and content. In other words, he must reveal what intersubjectivity *looks like* with words. He does this comprehensively, beginning on the outside of the conversation—with description and dialogue (the aforementioned journalistic observation)—and ending inside the shared consciousness of the Pranksters (the multiple, soon-to-be-singular perspectives of his subjects). The moment of discovery for Sandy and George is initiated with third-person narration, wherein we find that Sandy "and George Walker are up in the big tree in front of the house, straddling a limb." Wolfe refers to both men by name and third-person pronouns—and marks their dialogue with quotation marks—until the notion of intersubjectivity is introduced. Then, suddenly, the narration (and thus the reader) moves inside the minds of *all* of the Pranksters:

"You paint the cobwebs," Sandy says, "and I'll paint the leaves behind them."

"Too much!" says George, because, of course, he knows—all of *us* sliding in and out of these combinations of mutual consciousness, intersubjectivity, going out to the backhouse, near the creek with tape recorders and starting to *rap*—a form of free association conversation, like a jazz conversation, or even a monologue, with everyone, or whoever, catching hold of words, symbols, ideas, sounds, and winging them back and forth beyond . . . the walls of conventional logic. . . . One of us finds a bunch of wooden chessmen.⁵⁰

From here we are presented with a continued exposition of meandering interior monologue and conversations, never really knowing who's thinking or speaking at a given moment. But this is precisely the point. At the moment when the Pranksters discover intersubjectivity, so do we, the readers. And the narration shifts from the journalistic third person (the use of names and "he") to an immersed, rapidly shifting, first-person account in which all speakers and thinkers become "us."

By purposely blurring the lines between interior monologue and dia-

ing focused on the tangible world, Wolfe can make connections that Kesey cannot. Whereas the Pranksters spend so much time creating *allegories* of life, Wolfe focuses on the stuff of *here and now*. He takes very seriously the implications and significances of the palpable world, for it is in that world where we discover the human condition. This is why Kesey cannot grasp the seriousness of Mountain Girl's pregnancy. Wolfe, on the other hand, moves fluidly between Prankster consciousness (or perhaps false consciousness) and the stuff of indexical reality.

In the midst of the Pranksters' self-imposed myopia, Wolfe effects clarity. We see as much when the group takes Furthur to the Deep South. While walking through the French Quarter of New Orleans, Kesey and the Pranksters are able to charm the police officers who come to inspect the exotic strangers donning "red and white striped shirts and Day-Glo stuff."⁵³ This becomes "comic relief" for the Pranksters as they "talked sweet" to these potentially dangerous figures of austere authority who ultimately "skedaddle in a herd of new Ford cruisers." They come away from this encounter with an intensified sense of confidence and accomplishment, "like they all owned the place." Through the current fantasy, they have seemingly subverted the social paradigm that says 1960s cops in the Deep South harass Northern intruders.

Wolfe masterfully juxtaposes this scene with another encounter, one that strips Kesey and company of this newly cultivated buoyancy. The group soon leaves the French Quarter and travels to a nearby lake where they drop acid, blast Martha and the Vandellas and Shirley Ellis from the speakers mounted on the bus, and head into the water to cool off. Initially, and quite intentionally, the writer paints the moment as an idyllic scene, noting the spaciousness of the park, the muscular builds of the Prankster men as they slip on their swimming trunks, and the "nice trees" and "endless nice water" before them.⁵⁴ This seems a fitting celebration and reward for their aforementioned victory over social mores. We soon learn, however, that the Pranksters have unwittingly ventured into "a segregated beach, for Negroes only." While Kesey and his followers might have been able to momentarily escape the oppressive heat (literally and figuratively), they cannot escape the racial climate of the Southern United States in the 1960s—a climate made all the more volatile and ironic by the fact that these white outsiders are blasting black music. Hence the menacing reception Prankster Zonker (Steve Lambrecht) receives from a group of wading African American men into which he swims. With a head full of acid, Zonker in this moment is only able to see the world in shades of orange, but this is absolutely no time to be colorblind. The unwelcoming men call Zonker and his companions a "[l]otta fucking trash" just before threatening to "cut [his] little balls off."⁵⁵

Thankfully, Zonker remains intact, though in an instant, a much larger group of African American beachgoers has gathered around the bus “doing dirty rock dances and the dirty boogie” to a Jimmy Smith record.⁵⁶ The symbolic implications of this detail are not lost upon the reader as the black music, co-opted by white America (and these white interlopers) is being reclaimed. All of this becomes a “horrible bummer” for Kesey and the Pranksters as the threat of violence looms. It quickly dissipates, however, when the cops arrive to disperse the crowd and shoo away the “white crazies.” Up until this point, the trip Furthur has been largely defined by Prankster provocation of the police—their systematic attempts to “break up the Cop Movie,” that is, disrupt police procedure. Here, though, they stay on the bus, happy to “go with the Cop Movie and get their movie out of there.”⁵⁷ So, in a sudden and significant shift, the Pranksters have found themselves willing participants in this most iconic paradigm of 1960s Southern America: white cops and white citizens on one side, and African Americans on the other. Thus the abstract and idealized world of the current fantasy, in Wolfe’s hands, has given way to the harsh realities of 1960s American culture.

These juxtapositions afford the reader the requisite number of perspectives to understand and at times even identify with the documentary subjects while cutting through the allegorical haze they create. Here we see clearly the complexity of Wolfe’s endeavor: the escapist ethos Wolfe confronts positions being human as an obstacle, something to get around or move beyond. If left unmitigated, such could only enhance the divide between reader and subject. Indeed, so much of the Prankster ethos trivializes what it means to be human. Such is revealed in the near-constant fantasizing of becoming superheroes—metahumans who can transcend the “lag” of earthy existence and go where no earthbound creature has gone before. Ultimately, humanity becomes a “predicament” to Kesey, something to overcome despite the fact that much of the calamity that becomes his existence requires several complex, often laborious human abilities, like editing the film, sorting out legal troubles, dealing with a child born out of wedlock, and confronting the ever-present paranoid delusions that envelop Kesey while a fugitive in Mexico.

When superheroes and delusional paranoia converge late in the text, the extent of Kesey’s fantasizing becomes very apparent. After secretly crossing the border from Mexico back into the United States, Kesey begins to plan his final performance, the grandest prank in history. He envisions a “monster trips festival,” the biggest Acid Test in San Francisco’s “largest” hall, Winterland. Of course, the promotion of such an event promises to solicit the attention of police, much to Kesey’s delight. Really, their attendance is an “integral part of the fantasy.”⁵⁸ And just at midnight, at the height of the “hideous bacchanal,”

Kesey is to appear on stage, disguised as Captain America. He will rip off his mask, revealing not simply his face, but also his vision for moving “beyond acid”—the unnamed next step in the consciousness expansion movement. Then as the police converge upon the stage, the fugitive Kesey just beyond their collective grasp, Captain America will ascend a rope hanging from the roof, climb through a trap door, and escape via a waiting helicopter.

Clearly, Kesey does not escape “into the California ozone.”⁵⁹ He is captured by federal agents in an anticlimactic chase on foot, which Wolfe reveals but a few pages after the escape fantasy. There is no epic struggle, no near-getaway. There is only a flustered and befuddled Kesey who cannot outrun the nameless agents in their “Shiny Black FBI Shoes.”⁶⁰ Rundown and apprehended, he is no Captain America and certainly no Flash; he is but a “poor petered-out schmuck” with ripped pants about to be taken to jail.⁶¹

Through the juxtaposition of epic fantasy and the strange, though sometimes deceptively mundane, reality of Prankster existence, Wolfe succeeds in not simply illuminating this particular failing of Kesey’s. More important, throughout *Acid Test* he ruptures the sphere of abstraction, allegory, and fantasy that his subjects have placed in the way of his journo-documentary ambition. With this barrier felled, Wolfe’s work realizes its paramount goal of communicating the relevance of its subjects to a readership largely apt to relegate ostensible deviants to a position of Other. We ultimately come to see Kesey and the Merry Band of Pranksters not merely as “California Day-Glo crazies” or—on the other side of the ontological spectrum—metahuman pioneers cutting a trail to an impossibly enlightened realm of existence. Rather, Wolfe shows us the actuality of real—though extraordinary—people: flawed-yet-earnest American dreamers with whom, on some level, we can identify.

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Notes

1. Weingarten observes that Wolfe's work in the 1960s was seen by many as "an important forum for voices and cultural trends that had not been given their proper due in the mainstream media": Marc Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 100.

2. What is more, we see that Kesey and the Pranksters, in their reverence for the "technological superheroics of the jet, TV, atomic subs, ultrasonics" and so on, embrace contemporaneous, space-age American culture, complementing what Wolfe notes as the prevailing myth of 1960s America in his nonfiction work *The Right Stuff*: a new civilization founded upon "the incalculable power" of science and technology, "not of nature, as archaic magic had been": Tom Wolfe, *The Right Stuff* (New York: Picador, 1979), 97.

3. This is Wolfe's method of narrating through the voice and perspective of his subject, seamlessly making the transition between their consciousness and his own.

4. The "current fantasy" is the central tenet of the Prankster ethos by which members are to attempt to live in, be totally conscious of, and savor the absolute present without reminiscence or anticipation. As Kesey sees it, people suffer from "all sorts of lags. One, the most basic, is the sensory lag, the lag between the time your senses receive something and you are able to react": This is the central predicament facing Kesey—and the thing LSD promises to overcome. "We are all of us doomed to spend our lives watching a *movie* of our lives—we are always acting on what has just finished happening": Tom Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (New York: Picador, 1968), 129. Italics in original.

5. Ibid., italics in original.

6. Gary Konas, "Traveling 'Further' with Tom Wolfe's Heroes," *Journal of Popular Culture* 28, no. 3 (1994): 190.

7. Carl A. Bredahl, "An Exploration of Power: Tom Wolfe's Acid Test," *Critique* 23, no.2 (1982): 67–84.

8. Ibid., 68.

9. T.V. Reed, "Unimagined Existence and the Fiction of the Real: Postmodernist Realism in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*," *Representations* 24 (1988): 164. Reed positions James Agee and Walker Evans's work as a response to the limitations of any single literary form to adequately represent "the real." He notes that while "representational systems are always inadequate," *Famous Men*, in its merger of profound realism and aestheticism, comes closer to delivering the representation of reality than any prior attempt. He also posits that the "ossified" representational categories and practices of its time (or any time, for that matter) need to be subverted and ultimately shattered if one is to successfully "capture the real" (159, 161). Thus, like Wolfe, Agee implements myriad representational approaches, from realism to cubism, supplementing the inadequacies of singular aesthetic or discursive forms that provide but one such version or angle.

10. In addition to complimenting the physical appearances of Kesey, his wife, Faye, and several Pranksters, Wolfe openly describes the ways in which he becomes temporarily seduced by the aura and energy surrounding Kesey and his followers—

the “mysto steam” that begins “rising in [his] head” (16).

11. William McKeen, *Tom Wolfe* (New York: Twayne, 1987), 62.

12. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 48. Perry Lane, what Wolfe describes as “Stanford’s bohemian quarter,” was a thriving artists’ colony in Menlo Park, California, largely made up of graduates of Stanford’s graduate creative writing program—like Kesey. In 1962, Kesey wrote *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* while residing in his Perry Lane cottage. The Acid Test Graduation was a ceremony wherein Kesey, the Pranksters, and a few other members of the “inner circle” officially acknowledged the limitations of LSD and consequent need to “move beyond” acid to another form of consciousness expansion.

13. *Ibid.*, 69. These are terms Wolfe uses to describe both individual and collective consciousness.

14. Examples of such names are “dis-MOUNT” (Sandy Lehmann-Haupt), “Mal Function” (Mike Hagen), and “Gretchin Fetchin, the Slime Queen” (Paula Sundstren).

15. *Ibid.*

16. Despite the notorious motorcycle gang’s penchant for violence and mayhem, Kesey and company consistently demonstrate their ability to interact with the Angels sans catastrophe. There is one notable exception to this observation, an apparent gang rape carried out by the Angels at a party thrown in their honor at Kesey’s rural La Honda compound. Wolfe’s handling of this event is ambiguous, as it is unclear to what extent and until what point (if at all) the victim willfully participates in the act. Such ambiguity is also present in Thompson’s portrayal of the incident in *Hell’s Angels: A Strange and Terrible Saga* (New York: Random House, 1966). Thompson was present at the party and provided Wolfe with tape recordings from the event to assist in his research: Jann S. Wenner and Corey Seymour, eds., *Gonzo: The Life of Hunter S. Thompson* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007), 142.

17. In chapter fourteen, “A Miracle in Seven Days,” Kesey and the Pranksters are invited to speak at the 1965 Unitarian Church conference. The group proves quite alluring to the younger factions of the conference, many of which position Kesey’s teachings as prophetic.

18. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 172.

19. *Ibid.*, 113.

20. Italics in original.

21. *Ibid.*, 319.

22. After an early exit from the concert, the Pranksters attempt to conjure the presence of the group at their La Honda headquarters by simply posting a sign at the entrance reading, “The Merry Pranksters Welcome the Beatles.” Of course, the Beatles never show. However, Kesey does not see this as a failure, for just two years later, the Beatles embarked on their own psychedelic bus trip, the “Magical Mystery Tour”—a scripted and filmed appendage to their album of the same name. In no uncertain terms, Wolfe notes Kesey’s belief that he and the Pranksters directly inspired this development. It should also be noted that “Further” is the name of the

Pranksters' bus. Originally, the word, *Further*, was painted above the windshield and then changed to "*Furthur*" during the famed cross-country trip. Here I use the term as both a reference to the actual bus and the trip itself.

23. Wolfe is not the only storyteller in *Acid Test*. At points throughout the narrative, he implements verbatim recitations of letters, notes, and recordings from other writers, such as Thompson, author Larry McMurtry, and *Los Angeles Free Press* contributor Clair Brush—as well as, of course, Kesey and the Pranksters.

24. Jack Schafer, "The Tripster in Wolfe's clothing: Jack Schafer on Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and the Underappreciated Art of Dissecting Cultural Trends," *Columbia Journalism Review* 44, no. 6 (2006): 55–6.

25. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 165.

26. *Ibid.*, 234.

27. *Ibid.*, 177.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Kesey was married to Norma "Faye" Kesey, with whom he had three children. In 1966, Carolyn "Mountain Girl" Adams gave birth to his fourth child, Sunshine. Fifteen years later, Adams married Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead.

30. *Ibid.*

31. The Acid Tests are a series of LSD-fueled parties conceived and put on by Kesey and the Pranksters. The events feature a multimedia blitz of projected movies, sounds, lights (strobos and black lights), and music (usually provided by the Grateful Dead).

32. *Ibid.*, 241.

33. *Ibid.*, 206.

34. *Ibid.*, italics added.

35. The advertising slogan for these events, "Can you pass the Acid Test?" does seem to support the notion that the tests are designed to, in fact, help people "function on acid"—the idea being that if one can hold it together during the overwhelming barrage of lights, images, and sounds of the Acid Tests, then dealing with the "real" world while on acid will pose no problem whatsoever. However, the construction of an artificial or virtual reality is simply that—a construct.

36. *Ibid.*, 208. Wolfe borrows this quote from *Childhood's End*, Arthur C. Clarke's science-fiction novel.

37. Both the Pranksters and Wolfe use "allegory" and "allegory of life" throughout the text to signify the ideas and practices of the group.

38. *Ibid.*, 140.

39. Bredahl, 70.

40. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 52. Further complicating Wolfe's endeavor is Kesey's consistent (and often convincing) rhetoric regarding the demise of writing—what was, to him, "old-fashioned and artificial" (91). Regarding conventional journalism, Wolfe does not disagree. In observing coverage of the *Furthur* trip, he notes, "The local press, including some of the hipper, smaller sheets, gave it a go, but nobody really comprehended what was going on, except that it was a party" (*ibid.*).

41. In addition to the comprehensive interviews conducted with Kesey and the Pranksters, Wolfe had access to “Kesey’s extensive archive—diaries, photographs, [and] correspondence” (Weingarten, 111).

42. The established idea that “the 1960s were the heyday of illegal drug use” may be more myth than reality. According to a 1969 Gallup poll, “only 4% of American adults said they had tried marijuana,” Jennifer Robinson, “Decades of Drug Use: Data From the ’60s and ’70s,” Gallup, July 2, 2002, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/6331/decades-drug-use-data-from-60s-70s.aspx>. What’s more, “According to the first National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, in 1972, five per cent of Americans, almost all of them under the age of 18, had used psychedelics”: Jeremy Travis, “Rise in Hallucinogen Use,” NCJRS.gov, October 1997, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles/166607.txt>.

43. Quoted in Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 40.

44. Weingarten, 112.

45. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 125. This very valid point lends credence to Konas’s assertion that Wolfe, as good a writer as he is, “can only take language so far to reify these people.” In other words, unless all of his readers take or had taken acid prior to tackling *Acid Test*, Wolfe’s “words can only approximate [their] reality.”

46. Weingarten, 107.

47. Dorothy McInnis Scura, *Conversations with Tom Wolfe* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 212.

48. Ibid.

49. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 53.

50. Ibid., italics in original.

51. Weingarten, 112. In *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, Hunter S. Thompson would follow suit, proving himself even more adept at using written language to express the hallucinogenic drug experience. Unlike Wolfe, Thompson was an avid drug taker and could thus draw upon his innumerable experiences with LSD, mescaline, and a host of other drugs.

52. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 42.

53. Wolfe, *Acid Test*, 79.

54. Ibid., 80.

55. Ibid., 80–1.

56. Ibid., 81.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., 328.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 330.

61. Ibid., 331.



Literary journalist Michael Norman, Washington Square, Greenwich Village, New York City

Scholar-Practitioner Q & A . . .

An Interview with Michael Norman

David Abrahamson

Northwestern University, United States

Born in 1947 in New York City, Michael Norman joined the Marines after high school. His service in Vietnam in the late 1960s provided the basis for his first book, *These Good Men: Friendships Forged from War*,¹ a memoir published to critical acclaim in 1989—which one critic called “as solid a document as readers will find describing the human debris of war, and the strength of character of its survivors.”²

Attending Rutgers University on the G.I. Bill and graduating with a degree in English, Norman then worked for a selection of newspapers, including the *New York Times*. As a reporter and columnist on the paper’s national, foreign, and metropolitan desks, he inaugurated a number of columns, including *A Sense of Place*, a monthly exploration of the dislocations of modern life in one suburban town; *Lessons*, a national column on education; and *Our Towns*, a twice-weekly column on life outside New York City. In addition, his long-form journalism has appeared in various national publications, including the *New York Times Magazine*, the *Washington Post Magazine* and *GQ*.

His second book, coauthored with his wife, Dr. Elizabeth Norman, *Tears in the Darkness: The Story of the Bataan Death March and Its Aftermath* (Farar, Straus and Giroux, 2009),³ was a work of narrative nonfiction selected by the editors of the *New York Times Magazine* as one of the best 100 nonfiction books ever published. As I noted at the time,

Michael and Elizabeth Norman have taken a historical event, the American defeat and its horrific aftermath in the Philippines at the start of World War II in 1942 and turned it into a spell-binding exploration of the human spirit. At the center of the tale, of course, is the Bataan Death March. But after ten years of incredibly detailed research on both sides of the Pacific,

the authors are able to render its full reality from a variety of individual perspectives: American, Japanese and Filipino. The result is a revelation—not merely a narrative of courage, sacrifice, cruelty and suffering, but also, ultimately, of the redemptive power of reflection and forgiveness. It may also be the most moving book ever written about those dark April days almost seven decades ago and men who experienced them.⁴

Norman joined the faculty of the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute at New York University in the early 1990s, where he is a tenured professor of narrative journalism in the institute's literary reportage program. He is currently cowriting a book about New York City's Bellevue Hospital. It will be a narrative exploration of the institution, and in support of the effort he and his coauthor/wife have been appointed visiting professors of research in the hospital's department of emergency medicine.

Having long shared an ardent interest in the nature of narrative, the text below is a transcript of a conversation on the subject conducted via e-mail over a number of weeks in spring 2015. Full disclosure: Michael and I are former colleagues from the mid-1990s at NYU. It is also probably safe to say we are good friends.

David Abrahamson: Our colleague Lisa Phillips has argued that literary journalism permits and perhaps privileges the first-person point of view. She wrote:

While traditional newsroom practices generally require journalists to refer to themselves in the third person, in many works of literary journalism the 'I' is part of the narrative—as gonzo, hometown boy/girl come home, memoirist with a reportorial itch to scratch and various other personae. Whether it is the *first-person major* where the 'I' is at the center of the story or the *first-person minor* where an observer 'I' intrudes minimally on the narrative, the first person is a force to be reckoned with in literary journalism studies and teaching practices. Its use can foster transparency of method and clarity of mission, and yet the first person, with its overt subjectivity, can also interfere with the traditional journalistic goal of seeking the truth and reporting it.⁵

Lisa has asked if the current digital age is fostering a first-person renaissance. Or is the predominance of the "I" a scourge of click-baiting egoism and reader voyeurism? What does the first person enable, and what does it shut down? How do we practice, teach, and critique first-person journalism?

Michael Norman: You are raising the hairs on the back of my narrative neck, which I reckon makes it perfect for our conversation. There is one major point missing from Lisa's overture. When you talk about the first-person singular as a purveyor of story, you automatically raise the single most impor-

tant and most difficult task for any writer—creating a persona that will do the work you must do. And what complicates this is that if the first-person-singular persona is not a fully realized three-dimensional character, you have failed. Yes, I know all about the partially realized first-person narrator as an agent to deliver the story, but that becomes a crutch unless you can find the diction, near-perfect diction, to give the speaking voice a personality.

What, after all, is the place of imaginative reflection in rigorously researched nonfiction narrative? Can the writer be accurate, render scene in all its detail, recreate the experience of the subject or event on the page and, at the same time, slip away from the narrative at tactical spots to express awe, wonder, contempt, disgust, confusion, fear, sadness, even memory. Which is to say: Can you create a nonfiction persona so real and so versatile that he can simultaneously deliver a story nearly perfect in its detail and context and at the same time give the reader a third dimension, creating the illusion of being there but not being there? And without ever using the first person? To put it in a phrase: Can you put flesh and bones on a nonfiction persona without losing the very neutrality that gives your work its authority and credibility in the first place? In other words, if you cannot measure the position and velocity of an object at the same time without effecting the object, then why not make uncertainty a quality of the text?

Abrahamson: I am impressed by the evolution of your thinking about narrator. You have it exactly right—or more correctly, the essence of the challenge exactly right. You have backed into a definition of what must be one of the central challenges of long-form nonfiction. I liked the way you slyly drew a parallel to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. Upon reflection, I wonder if one aspect of the challenge is also a bit of Schrödinger's cat?

Norman: I think Schrödinger might be a bit off point. He's really: the more you look, the more you see—which, in turn, could be less, depending on your expectations. Try to translate that into a journalistic maxim! Heisenberg, as I read it, was proven right, but the lesson literary types take away is flawed. To transpose from physics, we are the tool that does the measuring, and, as Heisenberg discovered, we cannot possibly account for all the possibilities of the object. This is doubly true in human relations, as Stephen Crane discovered—witness his search for psychological truth. Completely accurate observation is impossible, and what we are left with is perceptions, impressions, analogs, and referents. We can never really "say" anything to be this or that. Thus our famous shibboleths—truth, objectivity, fairness, as states of achievement—are simply impossible because they defy the laws of nature. The question is: Can we render, recreate, what we have seen and experienced for the reader? Of course we can. I just want to throw off that old, hoary, af-

fected coat of the impartial observer. I don't want to tell; I want to incant. I want to invoke the myths, then set them afire.

Abrahamson: No small ambition there! I liked your explication of the Heisenberg parallel. One additional tangent that also might find support in his uncertainty principle is that there may be limits to what as journalists we can ever know: position or momentum, location or velocity; only one of each pair, never both.

I'd like us to retrace our steps and return to a consideration of how perhaps Schrödinger might apply. In one oversimplified interpretation—I'm told there are a half-dozen "official" ones—Schrödinger's cat is neither alive nor dead until the observer opens the box. Its quantum state remains unresolved until observed. I suspect the thought experiment can work both at the reporting level and, if one ponders the contemporary effects of the media, at the societal level as well. Nudged by a distant memory, I looked up a citation from Schrödinger: Understanding indeterminacy, he wrote, "prevents us from so naively accepting as valid a 'blurred model' for representing reality. In itself, it would not embody anything unclear or contradictory." And then his killer line: "There is a difference between a shaky or out-of-focus photograph and a snapshot of clouds and fog banks."⁶

Norman: Why do we have to open the box? Suppose we thought of the cat in the box as a single object. Its chief property is its uncertainty. For us, then, we must render uncertainty. To open the box is to engage in the object and destroy (change) the uncertainty. Like Schrödinger's agent who opened the box, we are put in the position of determining the truth, but in doing so we have lost the uncertainty. And uncertainty works for us, for writers. It allows us to consider several "truths" instead of thinking of the world in terms of fixed values, a series of certainties. As you know, I'm writing a book about Bellevue Hospital in New York, which means I am dealing with life and death, the two "truths" that moved writers such as Camus to see the world as a mystery, a cruel one perhaps, but a mystery nonetheless. The question I am asking myself is this: Absent the first person—which I confess to often thinking of as a loathsome device—can I deliver both the story of the cat and the box as well as the observer's considerations in opening it? Or does narrative—nonfiction narrative—require more celibacy?

Abrahamson: Perhaps. Most certainly you can try. But I suppose that my point in introducing Schrödinger into our conversation was to suggest that there must be parts, large parts, of reality that will always elude the journalist attempting long-form nonfiction. And many of those aspects of reality the journalist uncovers have—like Erwin's tabby—no true existence until the box is opened. Now I suggest we move from quantum mechanics to the writing

machinery. Let's talk about structure. You once told me that with your Bellevue book you were going to hew to Dante, taking the readers by the hand, leading them through the hospital and letting them discover it in much the same way you did. That sounds like a blend of both the chronological and geographical. Any unique ingredients?

Norman: Since our last exchange, I've had to remind myself of a basic ingredient I discovered working on our last book, *Tears in the Darkness*: Persona is the nucleus of structure. You can come up with all the matrices and architectonics you like. You can diagram, chart, outline till the cat uncurls for breakfast. But if you have not worked out the voice and stance of the persona first, your structure will collapse, a pile of bricks. Persona dictates structure. Here's an example from the struggle we had finding a structure for a big book on Bellevue Hospital. We want to write an inside account or inside look at what happens in America's oldest continuously operating hospital. Yes, I mentioned Dante as model, also Chaucer and Boccaccio. But the guided tour seemed both hidebound and clichéd. So we gave it up, sort of.

Our problem was that the same thing happens in Bellevue every day. Therefore, we lose one of the two elements that narrativists use—time. All narrative writers have to reconcile time and space, moving across time and through space. Technically, a piece of writing without a time in it is not narrative. Narrative depends on the unfolding of events, the passage of time. We looked for timelines, but none made any sense because as in all hospitals, time only matters when you're writing about budgets or strategic planning. Everything else is a series of repetitions: the weekly heart operation, the daily drunk wracked by delirium tremens, the cancer patient receiving the poison they call chemotherapy. Same, same, same. So that left us only with the notion of space, moving across space. Space changes as you move from venue to venue. Maybe the writer is hopscotching between scenes, between encounters in the different services, whatever. The point is that space has to substitute for the powerful momentum of time, the thing that drives narrative forward.

Then we thought: Okay, we'll use space and characters to fuel the narrative. With characters you can create a series of encounters. Simple enough, until your ambition grows and you decide you want to make the famous hospital itself a character as well. How the hell do you do that? History will get you started, but this is supposed to be a story of the present. So we worked ourselves into a Gordian knot. Okay, we said, let's try one solution at a time. To create the hospital as a character—and we spent months trailing engineers, plumbers, masons, carpenters, and so forth—we envisioned ourselves, amorphously at first, as weightless observers, floating outside the hospital, peering into various windows, reporting what we see. Come, Reader, we'll take you by

the hand and fly around peering and eavesdropping. Well, the basic idea was fine: a kind of travelogue of Bellevue in which we stop to meet, watch, and talk with characters. But the nonsense of floating around fell apart as soon as I tried to create a persona to effect it. Also, we didn't want to use the limited first-person plural. We did not want to be interloper characters, this born of my conviction that the best narrative takes place when the writer gets the hell out of the way between the reader and story.

Anyway, that weak notion—floating in the ether—got me thinking about persona in general. The more I thought about it, the more I realized we had to work that out first. Once we did, the structure would become obvious to us. It seemed logical to me that we should return to basic third-person persona. At first I thought, fine, we should just settle for that. Then I started to see a number of variations in the third person. For instance, the writer could give an unnamed, unrealized third person not only a distinct voice but license to step back and reflect on the various characters and situations being written about. In other words, using the third person as I've described it was in fact taking technique directly from the American and French impressionist painters. It had not occurred to me that the third person could be so supple and malleable and full-throated. (I discovered this after taking an advanced narrative class to the Metropolitan Museum of Art; for their oral final, I asked that they explicate the narrative in Van Gogh's *Shoes*.) So we had a persona, a way to deliver story and impression, an invisible chronicler and interpreter rolled into one. And that opened a whole range of structural possibilities.

Abrahamson: That seems like a lot of horsepower to pack into a single persona, enabling it to have a considered set of opinions—indeed, judgments—about both the actors and action taking place. “Full-throated” is certainly the correct adjective. However, let's set this aside for a moment, promising to return, and instead pursue what I hope will be an illuminating tangent. You have always been agile in your approach to pedagogy, and herding a group of your students to the Met to look at fine art is an excellent example. But once you had them standing in front of Van Gogh's *Shoes* and asked them to expound the narrative they found therein, what was their response? Is it possible for you to sum up the answers they shared with you?

Norman: My aim was to demonstrate to the class that narrative is a form of expression that transcends the page. It is like Sartre's notion of consciousness, or more precisely, his notion of existential absence. Which is to say narrative is everywhere. So I allowed them a few moments of hermeneutic recitation to talk about the “story” the shoes might represent. You didn't have to know either the provenance of the painting or the trials and tribulations of Van Gogh. Old shoes, worn shoes, no money, shoes as an object of want, the

shoes of a workingman, fine art as a form of work—you get the idea. I really didn't care what "story" they discovered in the painting. What I wanted them to tell me was how Van Gogh, the narrativist, created his story. Color, brushstrokes, texture of the paint, the rule of thirds, vanishing points, foreground, background, position on the canvas. In other words, I wanted them to explicate the technique of a visual narrative just as they had done with a printed one, identify the painting's artistic devices, how its effect mimicked the effect we try to achieve. Meaning is always augmented with music, the sweet music of a perfect sentence, or for the painter, the vision, the image, the perfect line and well-chosen palate. My aim was to force them to think obliquely, to understand that technique, craftsmanship, artistic choices, and above all a clear idea of what one wants to depict or say, is the aim of every artist in every medium. I didn't tape any of the oral finals—though I wish I had because many were wonderful—so I can't provide you with an example, but from the above our fellow teachers can imagine the deliverable, which was really to encourage them to look deeper, to see story as multilayered, with a palate of moods and tones and a syntax that can be wielded like a painter's brush.

Still, this was the endgame, the capstone, the cherry on the whipped cream, the last swirl of icing on the top tier, and it was voluntary. In the same course I required student teams to deliver grammar lessons every week. Poe—and others, I'm sure—said that grammar was the logic of language. When I introduced this notion at the beginning of the semester, I was sure the response would be a collective "ugh." I was wrong. They liked the grammar and quickly came to see that it was one of the tools they must master. I used Edward D. Johnson's *The Handbook of Good English*,⁷ available as a gratis PDF. This semester we used Lynn Truss's *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*.⁸ I loved her chatty, smart, and irreverent voice, and so did the students. And lo and behold, they learned the power of the comma, the dash, that pesky semicolon. I wound that class tight, making them write biweekly 500-word "Lessons Learned" papers. I ruthlessly interrupted when they either tried to recap the story or interpret it instead of taking the book apart, chapter by chapter, section by section, and identifying the kind of "work" the writer was doing on every page. To return to your question, the museum trip was then a way to take the wraps off, so to speak, and let them think of narrative as a creative exercise as well as a mechanical one. It was also a ploy. I confess to taking writer acolytes into a temple of fine art in order to advance the notion that nonfiction, a piece of literary journalism, can be as deeply penetrating, as emotive, as soul moving as a Renoir or a Degas.

Abrahamson: Yes, it was a ploy, and perhaps also a conceit. But no matter: If nothing else, you certainly modeled the sort of courageous behavior—

heading off happily into the unknown, ignoring convention, breaking every frame you could find—that any student who aspires to literary nonfiction must learn. In a phrase I heard once, to be comfortable being uncomfortable.

We have explicated *persona* to a fare-thee-well, but if you don't mind, perhaps we could explore two related concepts: narrator and voice. Both, of course, are derived from *persona*, but perhaps can stand as topics on their own. Let's take on the idea of narrator first. Shamelessly appropriating your fine art schema, one might argue that the narrator in Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808* is outraged, the narrator in Edvard Munch's *The Scream* is overwhelmed, and the narrator in El Greco's *View of Toledo* has a deep sense of foreboding.

A few questions: How does the writer choose the narrator? How can the choice be tested?

Norman: I use the term *persona* rather than narrator, but, with apologies to M.H. Abrams, I reckon those two constructs are the same. Let me use my own struggle with my current work-in-progress about Bellevue Hospital to answer your question. First, good writers reach a point in their careers where, more than just wearing different hats, they can create different narrators. More like pulling on different skins. My favorite example is J.D. Salinger. The "Catcher" is a meticulous construction: all adolescent indifference and angst. And it's created, as are all personae, by diction. Look at Salinger's narrators in his *Nine Stories*. Very different. So one chooses one's narrator—one creates one's speaking construct—after you decide the overall theme and message that emerge from your research, reading, and reporting.

In my case the narrator must do two jobs: he has to guide (think of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Dante, Virgil) the reader through the hospital, letting the reader watch his encounters with doctors, patients, police, carpenters, and on and on. And he has to explain and reflect on what he sees. Since I have a co-author writing the book, I thought about using the royal "we" here and there, making us interlopers in the world of the hospital; limited second person, you could call it. But that stance seemed too artificial and contrived.

My second requirement was a narrator who delivers the story in an incantatory tone. The OED definition of incantation is very close to my purpose: "The use of a formula of words spoken or chanted to produce a magical effect; the utterance of a spell or charm; more widely, The use of magical ceremonies or arts; magic, sorcery, enchantment." My coauthor and I will be writing about nothing less than the human condition, and we will be doing it through an existential lens. So, big hospital, big theme, big issues require a narrator who can tell a simple story, who can explain complex scientific concepts, who can look deep into the heart and soul and invoke the mysteries it

finds there. An example, the attack from the first chapter from the working draft:

In the late summer and early fall, when the soft evening sun turns the leaves of the Weeping Beeches and London Planes in the small park at the corner of 26th Street and 1st Avenue on Manhattan's East Side golden green, Bellevue looks almost beautiful.

The little park is framed by a black six-foot wrought-iron fence, an antique enclosure that gives the verdant square a Victorian look. Just beyond the trees and fence are the oldest of the edifices on the hospital's two-block campus, a T-shaped pavilion and an eight-story administration building, their red-brick facades turning crimson in the yellow light. A stone's throw across the park, the newest of the buildings, a colossal cube of glass, gleams like a block-long mirror, reflecting the blue of the sky and the yellow taxis, red tour busses and ghost-gray delivery trucks that rush and rumble north up busy 1st Avenue.

And while all this may seem surface, the first impression of a passing glance, Bellevue, even in a blink, always arrests the imagination. Behind the black iron fence and green trees, behind the giant glass panels and Flemish-bond brick facades, is a world of woe, a surfeit of suffering. Sometimes the mysterious art and careful science of those who practice medicine there chases the affliction away, and sometimes, when ignorance and error are attending, or when the illness or injury is simply beyond remedy, the "patient"—What better word captures the endurance of the afflicted?—the patient becomes a "mortality," a name on a death certificate, a case study for the Monday morning conference.

You can see an elevated diction here. We wanted that first chapter to say to the reader—without actually saying it—this is going to be a big look at a famous institution and, along the way, a look at what makes us human. I'm also sure you can see the influence that impressionist painting has had on personae I use. Look, together we could write volumes on how to create narrators from the comic to the sublime. But the narrator's stance and telling must be perfectly suited to your subject. I always remind myself that I'm saying more to the reader, much more, than is contained in those sentences. I suppose the best way to describe my approach is to remember what Wayne Booth said about the "implied author": the picture of the author the reader constructs in her mind as her eyes glide across those sentences, as those words, the diction, reverberates in her ears.

Abrahamson: You remind me that I often find it necessary to explain to my literary journalism students the difference between author and narrator. They are, *a priori*, the author of their work, but they must consciously decide

on, and then create, the most appropriate narrator for the piece they have set out to write. And I often fall back on the “voice in the reader’s ear” trope. To your excerpt: It is both lovely and convincing. It reminds me a little of the structure that Robert Frost raised to perfection—which indelibly altered the way I think about the role of storytelling in journalism.

Which leads us to one final topic: Taking Janet Murray’s *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*⁹ as our starting point, have you any thoughts about the future of literary journalism? Let’s stipulate the brave new digital world and assume that the nature of reading will change, at least to the extent that it will be consumed in digital rather than ink-on-paper form. Thinking ahead a decade or two, might this change the nature of writing?

Norman: Well, you sent me scrambling to two old pathetic collections of Frost’s work that I’d not cracked open since undergrad days. I’ve ordered the four collections that represent his narrative work—*North of Boston* (1914), *Mountain Interval* (1916), *New Hampshire* (1923), and *West-running Brook* (1928)—to get a better sense of the structure you are talking about. And, of course, as I was getting ready to reshelve those two moldering collections, I had to read “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” from the *New Hampshire* volume, which is eponymous with the name Frost. In that one small poem you see a strong persona, you get a story, the language is incantatory yet direct, and the message existential (“promises to keep . . . and miles to go before I sleep”).

As to Janet Murray, I confess I’ve not yet gotten to *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, though I’ve read a number of reviews and discussions it prompted. I hate setting anyone up as a straw woman, so I won’t take on her points secondhand. But we can explicate a few of the issues she raises, especially the one you suggest: Will new platforms change the essential nature of writing?

Let’s skip past the obvious: texts, blog posts, tweets, e-mail—some of the most illiterate writing I’ve ever encountered. Let’s even skip the dithering, truncated, poorly reported, trend-chasing, self-reflective confessionals, and disquisitions I read on nine out of ten websites. And while we’re at it, let’s toss all the calumny and gratuitous vituperative in many readers’ “comments.”

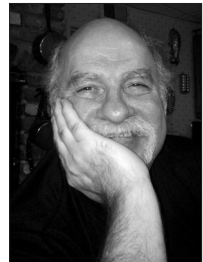
So when you say “writing,” I’m going to assume you mean narrative, argument, essay, and so on. And let me narrow this last part of our exchange to the notion of interactive composition. Since I’m working with a cowriter, I suppose you could argue I’m practicing interactive narrative. But that’s a tease. Beth, my cowriter, and I long ago knew that you cannot, should not, blend two personas in one piece or book. A persona is a construct, and it must be singular in its tone, diction, and modes of expression. One speaks with one

voice—politicians notwithstanding—and one writes with one voice. As I've said, that voice can change depending on the subject, theme, and aim of the book. The relationship is between one reader and one persona (or implied author, if you like).

When the first storytellers stood before the fire in the cave, they did so alone. Sure, someone in the corner of the cave may have jumped up during the story to say, "Agnon, you forgot that the woolly mammoth almost got away from us when we ran after him in the swamp grass." "Oh, right," Agnon acknowledged before continuing, "So after we passed through the swamp grass. . . ." Is that interactive? A story is a product of one mind. Yes, narrative is the diurnal currency that all of us use to convey our experience to one another, but a book should have a consistent voice, a stable tone, a lone sensibility. That's what centuries of readers have come to expect. Can you name a masterpiece that was the product of interactive narrative, passing the story back and forth, back and forth.

When Gauguin visited Van Gogh at Arles, he may have advised him on technique, but he did not paint parts of Vincent's canvas for him. The collaborative arts of filmmaking, drama, and so forth aside, our culture thinks of art, fine art, of which literature is a part, as a singular accomplishment, one that embodies the genius and talent of the artist sitting alone with the work.

David Abrahamson is a professor of journalism at Northwestern University's Medill School and secretary of IALJS. His latest book is The Routledge Handbook of Magazine Research: The Future of the Magazine Form, which he co-edited with Marcia R. Prior-Miller.



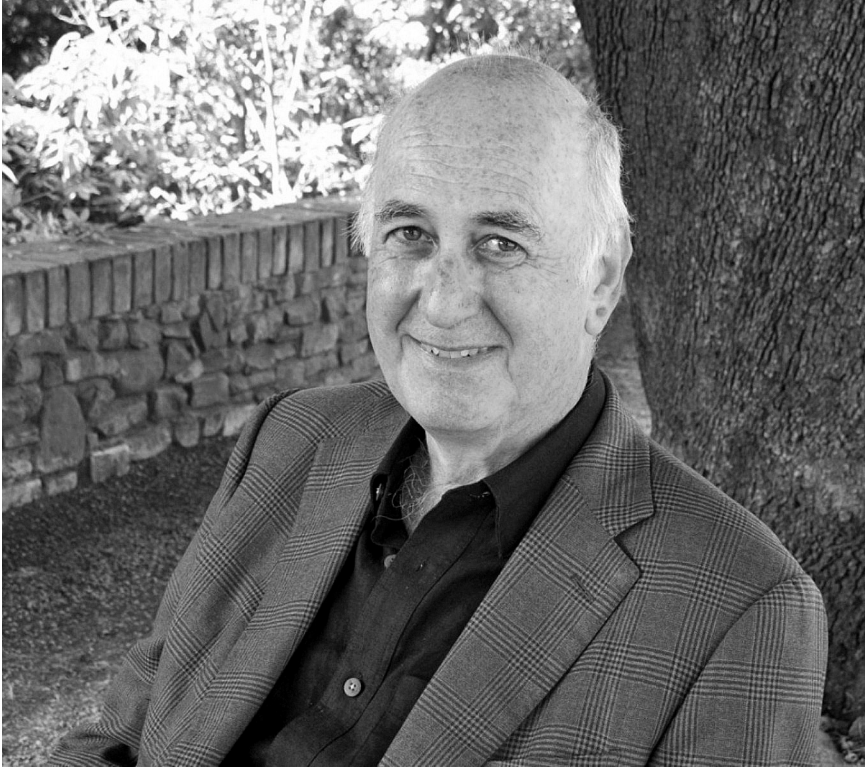
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Book reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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Phillip Lopate
Photograph by Sally Gall

A Eminent Essayist Shows and Tells

To Show and to Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction

by Phillip Lopate. New York: Free Press, 2013. Paperback, 225 pp., \$16

Portrait Inside My Head: Essays

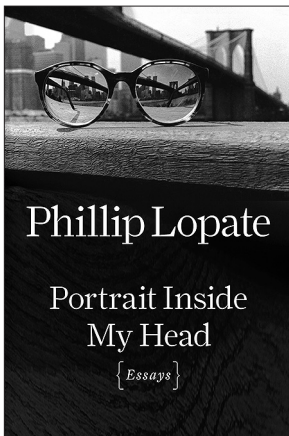
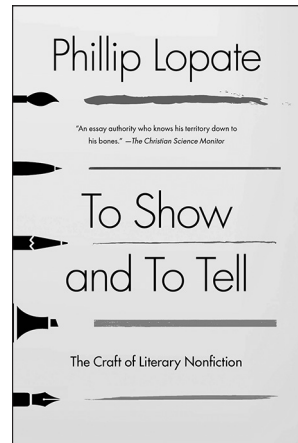
by Phillip Lopate. New York: Free Press 2013. Hardcover, 289 pp., \$26

Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts, University at Albany, SUNY, United States

Phillip Lopate is one of our finest personal essayists, well known for his anthology *The Art of the Personal Essay* (1994). Now the director of the graduate nonfiction program at Columbia University has distilled the wisdom of his forty-some years spent as a writer and professor into an essential guide. He focuses particularly on the personal essay and memoir, but his insights could also apply to literary journalism. In fact, this slim work is loaded with insights that will help any student looking to master the genre, besides simply being an engaging read.

The chapter on research and personal writing, for example, succinctly offers some of this universal advice. “Good personal writing,” Lopate asserts, requires the writer “to go beyond the self’s quandaries, through research or contextualization, to bring back news of the larger world (25).” Research can help writers avoid endless “self-cannibalization” of their life stories: “[Y]ou may find your memory can only take you so far; you need to go back to the old neighborhood and walk around, or talk to old-timers, or read up on local history, or pore through genealogical archives, housing deeds, census records (116).” Furthermore, he writes, research can also pique a broader curiosity that “helps you break out of claustrophobic self-absorption and come to understand that you are not the only one who has passed down this road (116).”

Other chapters offer wisdom on the ethics of writing about others [“Never write to settle scores (84)”] and the importance of honoring fact [“Making things up, bending the facts, throws off my attempt to get as close as possible to the shape underlying experience or to the psychology that flows from the precisely real (81)”, among other topics. Lopate’s tone throughout is that of a trusted teacher/confidant, with a distinctive



voice, wry sense of humor, and utmost honesty. *To Show and to Tell* is also enriched by Lopate's deep knowledge of literature. Indeed, the second half discusses at length several of his literary heroes: Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, James Baldwin, Edward Hoagland, and . . . Ralph Waldo Emerson. The choice of the latter may surprise some, but in the chapter entitled "How I Became an Emersonian," Lopate details convincingly how reading the Sage of Concord's 1,800-page *Selected Journals* made him a believer. He demonstrates how Emerson's journals "are the lost ark of American literature, the equivalent for literary nonfiction of *Moby Dick* in fiction or *Leaves of Grass* in poetry (164–65)." While some might disagree that Emerson is the "American Montaigne" (another of Lopate's heroes), the discussion inspires consideration of the role of writers' journals. Certainly they can be a repository of reflections that are "organic and improvisational" yet are still connected by a thrilling web of thought.

That seamless thread, linking seemingly disparate topics, is a hallmark of the sort of personal literary nonfiction writing (for example, essay and memoir) that Lopate particularly admires and practices so effectively himself. He cites Montaigne as the quintessential example of this sort of exploration, which when skillfully done can make an essay sing as "an open-ended adventure, an invitation to doubt and self-surprise" (107) rather than simply an argument that tries to persuade through a series of logical proofs. The same might be said for some of literary journalism's classic works, such as Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* or James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, although Lopate would disagree with the latter (see below).

A final, extensive bibliography forms a rough canon of exemplary works in literary nonfiction, such as classic autobiographies and memoirs (for example, Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, and Ulysses S. Grant's *Memoirs*). Later memoirs cited include Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and *American Hunger*, Agnes Smedley's *Daughter of Earth*, and Mary McCarthy's *Memoirs of a Catholic Girlhood*. Among many essayists included are E.B. White, Virginia Woolf, and George Orwell. Loren Eiseley, Oliver Sacks, and John McPhee are found in the "nature, science, medicine, and the environment" category (apparently as examples of literary nonfiction writers). *To Show and to Tell* offers much for the aspiring writer of literary nonfiction as well as for anyone who enjoys reading the genre.

Lopate himself continues to demonstrate his mastery of the form in his fourth and newest collection of personal essays, *Portrait Inside My Head*. His style is consistently conversational and engaging as he traverses the varied terrain of his Brooklyn childhood, marriage and family life, sibling rivalry, reflections on Virginia Woolf's opinion that filmmakers should keep their hands off literature, why he is still a baseball fan after all these years, and many other topics. He invariably impresses with the wide range of his observations, keenly reported, original, and sometimes delightfully sardonic, as in his description of growing up:

. . . on the border of Bedford-Stuyvesant, a notoriously rough neighborhood over whose turf two mighty street gangs, the Bishops and the Chaplains, rumbled. . . . I would be shaken down by roving bands of kids when I strayed beyond the streets where I was recognized. . . . The curious thing was that sometimes they would let me pass, if I said the right thing, pressed the right button, sounded neither too fearful

nor too flippant, but sufficiently respectful; they would laugh and say, "We was just playing with you," and let me by. Other times they took every penny I had. It didn't have to be a violent encounter if you played it right: more like a loan to a neighbor you knew would never be paid back.

Getting robbed was a straightforward transaction, almost preferable to the teasing, ominous game of "What you lookin' at" (24)?

In another selection, "James Agee: Nobility Overload," Lopate candidly lays out a provocative, alternate view. The celebrated literary journalist, he writes, was:

a prime candidate for literary sainthood: handsome, tortured good looks, a cross between Montgomery Clift and Robert Ryan; body-punishing habits (alcohol, cigarettes, work jags, insomnia), a rebellious streak, many loves, obsession with integrity, and an early death. He belongs to that bruised, vulnerable, too-good-for-this-world post club of actors, writers, and rock stars whose authenticity was vouchsafed by premature passing (253).

Lopate's beef with Agee centers around one of the main reasons for the writer's canonization, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which he terms "one of the most unread and unreadable classics, which educated people would rather compliment than endure" (255). Lopate confesses that he only managed to get through it on the third try, because he was forced to do so by a reviewing assignment. But the book's "thick fog of lyrical rhetoric, and its total lack of forward momentum" (255) were a hindrance. He has much more to say about *Famous Men*, ultimately finding more value in Agee's film criticism and his "beautiful, heartbreaking novel" (254), *A Death in the Family*. Lopate's is a fresh and witty take, enriched by his willingness to come clean and reveal his own prejudices and perspectives. In this essay and in the rest, including, of course, those that deal frankly with the details of his own marriages and fatherhood, he shows us the riches to be mined by reading appreciatively—and creating—literary nonfiction of this more personal vein. Together, *To Show and To Tell: The Craft of Literary Nonfiction* and *Portrait Inside My Head: Essays* demonstrate that Phillip Lopate should be celebrated as one of "Those who can, teach!"

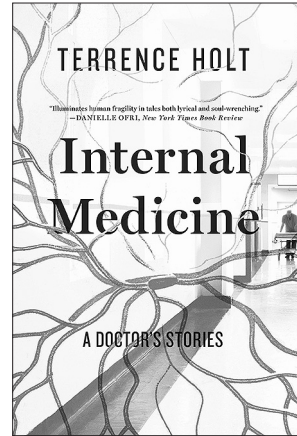
The Formation of a Physician

Internal Medicine: A Doctor's Stories

by Terrence Holt. New York: Liveright, 2014. Hardcover, 288 pp., \$24.95

Reviewed by Isabelle Meuret, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

Advances in science and steady progress in medicine have paradoxically led to remarkable technological developments in health care, but also to a dehumanizing process induced by the increasingly sophisticated mechanical and chemical treatment of patients. Life prospects have been extended, medication improved, suffering relieved, and yet a doctor's task remains a difficult balancing act between a careful experimentation with science and a tactful practice of the art of medicine. Humane qualities are required to handle human beings with care. Patients move about in cruel and inscrutable environments, hence the importance of their relationship with the medical staff whose empathy and guidance are paramount to understanding hospital life. Physicians are taught to lend a compassionate ear to those who suffer, yet rarely do we have a chance to listen to what a doctor has to say about his experience.



Terrence Holt, author of the acclaimed *In the Valley of Kings* (2009), is now telling stories in which his talents—as both a writer and a doctor—powerfully dovetail. In *Internal Medicine* Holt is “recreating experience as parable” in an effort to make sense of what is “not narratable” (2). Finding the words to express the overwhelming complexity of this extraordinary nerve center—the hospital—where ordinary people converge to give birth and, in this case, encounter death, is a daunting task. To convey meaning to the magnitude of that reality is impossible through journalism—patients “aren’t facts” (4)—hence, Holt’s little arrangements with that reality. He stipulates that the first-person narrator, the internal-medicine resident, is not exactly himself (these are indeed “a” doctor’s stories); that his characters are not “based upon specific individuals” (4); and that they are composite personas. These honest admissions should make the reader aware that Holt may not have produced a piece of literary journalism—which probably was not his intention—albeit one based on true facts of life and death. Holt insists he wants “to give a truthful account of residency” (4). The stories only partly document that reality. For ethical reasons he will not expose the pain of his patients.

Although not pure nonfiction, *Internal Medicine* is of considerable interest in its exploration of “the process of becoming a doctor” (3). The transformative experience that diseases inevitably have on patients also has an impact on those whose job it is

to alleviate their sufferings. This is why Holt confesses he has “watched the narrator of these pieces evolve into someone else,” namely, Dr. Harper (4). “It is impossible for the physician,” French philosopher and physician Georges Canguilhem explains in *The Normal and the Pathological* (1991), “starting from the accounts of sick men, to understand the experience lived by the sick man, for what sick men express in ordinary concepts is not directly their experience but their interpretation of an experience for which they have been deprived of adequate concepts” (115). Indeed, Holt is striving to join the edges of knowledge and experience, stitching them up with sensitive yarns in the well-known tradition of Montaigne (learn to die, tame death). My concern, though, is that the abundance of aesthetic devices leads to a sublimation of, and possible estrangement from, the dying subjects who exist in the author’s reminisced images, rather than through their own words.

This should not obscure the fact that Holt gives precedence to the doctor-patient relationship in the nine heartrending stories that constitute *Internal Medicine*. Health-care providers are surrounded by high-tech devices and make use of a jargon arcane to the common reader, and one hopes this unwelcoming milieu of quantitative data does not deprive medical staff of their humanistic qualities. The brutality of some is unnerving, while compassion and integrity trigger others into action despite the vulnerability of patients and the inevitability of death. Parables teach a message, and Holt is honest in his rendition of the inner conflicts and dilemmas with which doctors struggle. The hospital becomes an Artaudian theatre of cruelty, where language becomes insufficient not because of the violence of the place but, rather, because of the powerlessness of learned minds before withering bodies. Arguing with a dying patient and keeping her alive until the next morning (“A Sign of Weakness”), issuing an irrevocable sentence to an amnesiac (“Giving Bad News”), finding the right words in the face of adversity (“Orphan”), or dealing with inconvenient truths and admitting one’s mistake (“When I Was Wrong”) are some of the quandaries presented in the harrowing stories of *Internal Medicine*.

Through the many chaotic situations Dr. Harper finds himself in, we get the measure of the grueling and exacting tasks at hand. Coming to terms with patients and colleagues to reach the right decisions, and overcoming one’s emotions—be they disgust, shame, fear, or anger—are unusual aspects from which Holt lifts the veil. He strikes a sensitive chord with readers by referring to the Kierkegaardian mask in two stories, “Sign of Weakness” and “The Surgical Mask,” and confirms his intent “to be faithful to the inner life of medicine” (5). While in the former story the patient is “unreachable,” determined to resist the doctor’s order, the mask is off, and we are presented with what a corpse truly is, “dead, a body, given over to gravity and decay” (27). In the latter case, the doctor concedes he “had learned not to remember faces” (171), but the mask only makes the horror more hauntingly visible. The painting offered by the dying woman becomes a precious conduit to sustain the doctor in a process of self-revelation. In accordance with Kierkegaard’s precepts, “it would resolve, and finally reveal that face now hidden in the undying darkness of the grave” (197). Transparent to himself, he will not deceive others and thereby reduce the disconnection between doctor and patient.

Literary references are many throughout the volume, as if Holt were obsessed with elevating the daily spectacle of hospital life to some transcendental experience, in an attempt to give meaning to and help us come to terms with the inescapable finiteness of our existences. While they do make sense in some stories—the Dostoyevskian “Grand Inquisitor” raises important questions about human suffering and doctors’ responsibilities; the “Orphan” introduces us to Ariel, a biblical and Shakespearean character; and the paintings of the woman behind “The Surgical Mask” are a throwback to Constable and Reynolds—others are disturbing. Feeling a doctor’s anger in “The Grand Inquisitor” provides an emotional release, as we realize that doctors may be fallible or even frauds. As for the “Orphan” story, Sylvia Plath’s “suicidal” *Ariel* comes to mind, knowing that the young patient Dr. Harper has to treat “was already dead” on admission. Eventually, she shares more similarities with the poet’s “Lady Lazarus.”

But conflating traumatic images of a saint-like patient, surrounded by a terrifying “halo”—“four large bolts . . . into the patient’s skull, gripping the head rigidly in place like a Christmas tree in its stand” (99)—casts a devastatingly harsh light on suffering. Holt does not spare us any detail, and I find the final tableau unnecessarily gruesome, unless we have to see “the patient’s hands quivering in the air fingers spread as if calling on the seas to part” (101) to really comprehend what *Internal Medicine* is about. Holt’s honesty does him great credit. Truth is often stranger than fiction, and obviously only a comprehensive representation of hospital reality can aspire to a glimmer of truth. Holt purports to unravel the mysteries that surround the hospital and to bring a qualitative appreciation of phenomena that are too often evaluated according to quantitative variations or numerical interpretations. Reading *Internal Medicine* is a humbling experience, an invitation to some soul-searching on the meaning of therapeutic treatment and on our mortality.

Particularly profound and illuminating is “Iron Maiden,” which takes the reader to uncharted territories, a psychiatric hospital as terrifying for interns as it is for ordinary mortals. The danger here lies in the fact that some are “capable of hiding, behind the fog and mirrors of madness, all manner of disease” (203). Deciding whether pathologies are physical or mental is a dilemma. But it is also a far cry from the decisions the medical staff need to take in some staggering situations. Attending to patients who either gorge on garbage or swallow needles, doctors wonder whether the problem might not be the body rather than the mind. “It’s the body that’s the problem,” says one doctor. “They feed it pain” (237). In other words, “[i]t is the body that makes us crazy: our inability to interpret our corporeality,” Holt writes. The revelations that our bodies do indeed matter and that a psychic self-mutilating patient is trying to “pin her own internal mystery” (241), are thought-provoking observations.

Holt’s *Internal Medicine* aims to introduce his readers to a world that is alternately extremely familiar and excruciatingly painful. Infused with anecdotes, either lived or reported by the author, the collection of stories illuminates the reality of hospitals and the fate of terminally ill patients. But most importantly, it reveals some essential truths about a doctor’s own apprehension of his vital duties as a medical practitioner. The author’s astute use of symbolism, his exceptional voice combining the factual jar-

gon of medicine with the emotion-induced language that transpires from his contacts with patients, the result of his immersion in hospital reality, might make *Internal Medicine* a good candidate for literary journalism. The detailed scene construction and the physically and psychologically elaborate characters substantiate this claim, the reader will find. But as previously said, such was not Holt's purpose—that is, to produce a journalistic piece. Both narrator and characters are indeed constructions. Holt's exquisite writing certainly prevails over reportorial accuracy; nevertheless, the reader is rewarded with copious truthful insights into the inner experience of *Internal Medicine*.

Red Pencil Revelations

Editors Talk about Editing: Insights for Readers, Writers and Publishers

by Susan L. Greenberg. New York: Peter Lang, 2015. Paperback, 217 pp., \$39.95

Reviewed by Kate McQueen, independent scholar, Champaign–Urbana, Illinois, United States

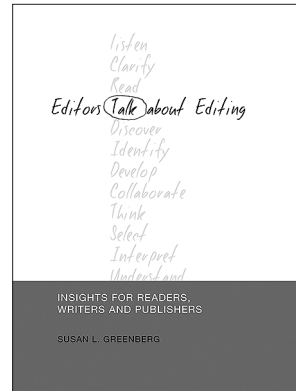
What does an editor do, exactly? In contrast to the writer, whose front-of-house glamour attracts the attention of readers, lay and scholarly alike, the editor has traditionally remained hidden. This invisibility is the marker of a trade well practiced. But in an age of expansive digital and self-publishing, the need for textual mediation outside the classical confines of the editorial office continues to grow, making an up-close look at the art and craft of editing long overdue.

If anyone is equipped to illuminate this elusive, behind-the-scenes business, it is Susan Greenberg. Currently a senior lecturer in the department of English and creative writing at University of Roehampton, London (and a founding member of IALJS), Greenberg has had long career as a writer, editor, teacher, and scholar that has put her on all sides of the red pen.

Editors Talk about Editing is a collection of thirteen interviews Greenberg conducted with people from a wide range of publications. These include staff members at large magazines (*Economist*, *New York*), from literary and academic publishing (*Nature*, *PeerJ*), from daily newspapers (*Baltimore Sun*), and at of online sources such as the Wikimedia Foundation and the *Atavist Magazine*. Greenberg also includes conversations with editorial practitioners who fall outside the traditional job description: an author, a literary agent, and a freelance book editor.

The book's success in presenting readers with a rich picture of this neglected field owes much to its interesting participant selection. The rest is due to Greenberg's strengths as an interviewer. Guided by a master list of questions—provided in the appendix—she remains conversational and responsive to each interviewee. The result is a detailed professional portrait of the individual editors, from their origins, through the nuts and bolts of their everyday practice, to deeper descriptions of their particular processes. Taken together, readers see a group of veteran practitioners, largely self-taught, whose creativity and enthusiasm for text disrupt the usual metaphors of editors as “gatekeepers,” “butchers,” or, following journalist Gene Fowler, “traffic cops of the arts.”

Greenberg's questions are designed to encourage self-analysis, and as such she is able to identify a handful of significant comparisons and themes. From her conver-



sations she outlines, for instance, a set of core editorial principles, and determines a shared desire to give more value to the practice. The book's structure also provides some helpful thematic herding. These thirteen interviews are organized into five parts. The first, "Identity," focuses on the editor's role in establishing a collective publication identity. The second part, "Attention," explores the way in which skilled editing contributes to a text. The third, "Legacy," considers the meaning of standards and judgments in an ever-evolving media landscape.

The last two, "Devolution" and "Digital," handle more urgent questions about the place of editing in the rapidly changing and increasingly digital publishing world. These latter interviews are particularly engrossing, as they tackle head-on the problem of developing viable future business models for publishing. It is encouraging to hear from Peter Binfield of *PeerJ* and Evan Ratliff of *Atavist*, cofounders and publishers of online publications who actively experiment with options beyond advertising and institutional support, such as tiered subscription or membership models. Still, one takeaway from Greenberg's conversations with Binfield, novelist Louise Doughty, and literary agent Carole Blake is that writers should brace themselves to absorb many of the financial and editorial responsibilities traditionally covered by publishers.

The subtitle lets us know that this book casts its net for a wide audience. Readers with a scholarly interest in editing will find *Editors Talk about Editing* a welcome reference for its original source material. Greenberg's working definition of the practice, and the thirteen responses to it, are also bound to be valuable. For teachers of journalism and writing, the bootstrapping methods by which these interviewees have learned their trade should provide useful material. How can college courses more effectively teach these editing skills, which, after all, are so vital to the art and craft of writing?

Finally, *Editors Talk about Editing* does what all good behind-the-scenes books do—it gives insight into best practices through entertaining examples and anecdotes. Any readers unfamiliar with the inner workings of publishing will thoroughly enjoy this opportunity to look behind the curtain.

Twenty Years, Twenty Stories

True Stories, Well Told: From the First Twenty Years of Creative Nonfiction Magazine
edited by Lee Gutkind and Hattie Fletcher. Pittsburgh: In Fact, 2014. Paperback,
342 pp., \$15.95

Reviewed by Brian Gabriel, Concordia University, Canada

The first issue of *Creative Nonfiction* was published in 1994, and to celebrate its twenty years the magazine's editors chose twenty of its best for this collection of essays, memoirs, and reporting. The magazine, published quarterly, is a small but influential outlet for many writers, and, like any book of this kind, it likely gave the editors pause in trying to choose which stories to include here. In many respects these writings provide a spectrum of "creative nonfiction," a genre that resists definition. "Does it matter?" Susan Orlean asks in her introduction to the book, urging the reader to forget about defining what "creative nonfiction" is and instead focus on writing that is so "vividly" told "that you feel you are experiencing the story with me" (7). Of course, she makes this point, too: "Everything in this is true." Thus, the reader takes for granted that the writers of these twenty stories have kept the truth end of the deal. And, as many of them demonstrate, they took great care to tell their stories with flair, care, and imagination. Some even pushed the boundaries of expected convention; many of the selections exhibit a lyrical, poetic sensibility. For example, in Meredith Hall's tale of self-exploration called "Without a Map," she writes, "The sun is warm. Behind me, I can hear the women and children talking and laughing as they eat and rest. Their voices rise in soft, floating prayers as I walk" (222).

Just as it might have been difficult for the editors to make choices about what to include in the collection, it is impossible for the reviewer to highlight all the essays worthy of comment. Overall, the book is a broad mix of writing styles and variety of subject matter, and, as the editors note, the genre itself is "flexible, allowing for plenty of experimentation in voice, style, subject matter, and structure" (12). One fascinating story, for example, tells of an author's struggle with the environmental pollution on her body while giving the reader a cautionary journalistic piece about industrial agriculture's effects on the gentlest of insects, the monarch butterfly. Another contends with a long-standing grudge against former American vice president Dick Cheney.

Memoir dominates, and, as in many memoirs, the writers tackle the life-changing, mostly sad events, in their lives that remain etched their memories. But not all



are sad, and one touching, short recollection (that made me smile) is about a father's happiest moment when he realizes that his little game of faux basketball with his children offers the best that life can give. Another, this time from a mother, is entitled "Rachel at Work." In it, she expresses the very nearly universal idea that every parent shares with every other parent: the hope that their children will be self-sustaining adults. In Jane Bernstein's case, her aspiration is to have her daughter learn how to make toast. Other parents write for seemingly cathartic purposes, as does Jim Kennedy in "End of the Line," his story of a father's helplessness in not being able to save his son. As Kennedy explained in an accompanying postscript, he found that he began writing one piece and ended up with another. "As the word count plummeted, the scope of the piece broadened and created surprises," he tells the reader (61).

Children also write about their parents. In Toi Derricotte's "Beds," she recalls a disturbing past that left emotional scars that never diminished. Derricotte speaks through the voice of a younger self, trying to make sense of an abusive father and trying to understand why those who are supposed to love us the most often inflict the most pain. By the end of the process of writing this down, she says, "I had worked myself around to a different way of seeing my past, and to a different relationship with my father. Rather than being his victim, I had made something that had a kind of truth, clarity, and beauty" (193).

Of all the stories, the one that stayed with me the longest is a doctor's tale by Paul Austin, which describes the effects of his choices on peoples' lives. In "Mrs. Kelly," Austin remembers how he told a patient, sitting in the ER with his wife, to go home, despite the apprehension in the wife's face. The man later died, and, as Austin explains, he soon looks for ways to rationalize his decision, which was neither wrong nor right. Down deep he knows made the wrong call despite the supportive words from those around him. Austin finally hopes Mrs. Kelly, the dead man's wife, can give him closure on this. He finally musters up the courage to call her and tries to explain and take responsibility for what happened. She will have none of it. The writer tells the reader that he must come to terms with "the memory of Mr. and Mrs. Kelly" that "is a source of sadness, still—a mild, dull ache in my chest. It feels like an echo, as if from a distance" (146). "Writing it wasn't therapeutic. Wasn't cathartic," Austin writes. "But it gave me the chance to safely spend time in that moment of being wrong" (146).

The final selection is also memoir and a history lesson about creative nonfiction. Lee Gutkind recalls his journey in trying to get *Creative Nonfiction* off the ground and why it needed to be launched. "Never did I intend to start a magazine or pioneer a literary movement—or any movement whatsoever," he writes (291). Gutkind recounts the culture wars enveloping New Journalism and literary journalism back in the 1960s and 1970s. In his view, the disputes never ended, even though the "gang that wouldn't write straight" had established the bona fides of literary nonfiction. As Gutkind tells it, his academic department would neither support nor acknowledge this kind of writing, so he took on the challenge to defend the "idea that you could be literary and journalistic at the same time, that *creative* and *nonfiction* can stand together as a concept and a practice" (309). According to Gutkind, his enemies lived

outside his university, notably major critics like James Wolcott being dismissive of the whole idea of creative nonfiction. In Gutkind's view, creative nonfiction has earned the respectability he long sought. "In the end," he writes, "it is our stories that define us to the world at large and to ourselves" (342). The stories here do just that.

Heroes on Deck

Inventing Baseball Heroes: Ty Cobb, Christy Mathewson, and the Sporting Press in America by Amber Roessner. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014. Hardcover, 227 pp., \$39.95

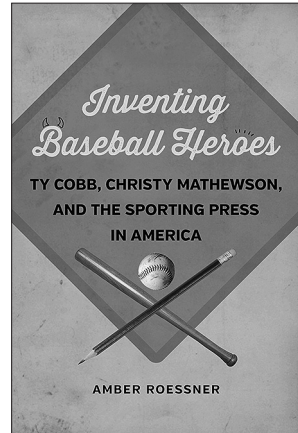
Reviewed by Patrick S. Washburn, Ohio University, United States

Americans have always had a penchant for creating heroes, some of whom have become celebrity figures forevermore with a small number achieving an almost mythic stature. Such persons as presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln come easily to mind, as do frontiersmen Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett.

Amber Roessner, an assistant professor of journalism at the University of Tennessee, has narrowed her examination of heroes to arguably the two most famous players in what was America's national sport, baseball, from 1900 to 1928. Pitcher Christy Mathewson played seventeen seasons, winning 373 games and having twelve consecutive twenty-win seasons; outfielder Ty Cobb, meanwhile, won twelve consecutive league batting titles in twenty-four seasons and still holds the record for the highest lifetime batting average (.367). Both were among the first five players inducted into the baseball Hall of Fame in 1936.

While both players have been researched extensively by historians in both popular and academic books, Roessner focuses on the way that newspaper and magazine sportswriters used what she calls hero-crafting to influence how Mathewson and Cobb were viewed by the public. "The term 'hero-crafting' suggests both a skill-based practice and an art or a trade," she writes. "Others have dubbed the process 'mythmaking' . . . [which] might mislead readers. 'Myth' . . . implies that a story is somehow untrue. But these heroic tales [of Mathewson and Cobb] were based in fact. The details were sometimes exaggerated by sportswriters for the sake of the narrative but often provided insight into greater cultural truths" (12). She notes that hero-crafting of baseball stars by sportswriters had begun in the latter half of the 1870s and was perfected by them by 1900.

Going hand in hand with hero-crafting was what became known as the gee-whiz school of journalism, which was particularly practiced by sportswriters. They used "rosy rhetoric" (2) to cover sports stars like celebrities. "Sports reporters touted their brute strength and speed as comparable to that of Greek warriors," Roessner notes. "They drafted heroic journeys complete with a story of separation, initiation, and return. They celebrated the physical prowess of athletes, along with their mental and moral attributes.



They applauded scientific play, comparing managers and team leaders to military tacticians and praised icons that played ‘clean’ ball and practiced good sportsmanship” (24).

However, as Roessner adroitly points out, Mathewson and Cobb proved that heroes came in all forms. While the former was not perfect—he sometimes smoked, drank, gambled, and swore—he frequently was called the “Christian Gentleman” by the press with sportswriter W.O. McGeehan labeling him “the incarnation of all those virtues with which we endow the ideal American” (153). On the other hand, Cobb played tough, hard-nosed baseball and was well known for sliding savagely into a base with his razor-sharp spikes held high. If an opponent was hurt, so be it. And on one occasion, he went into the stands at a game for a heckler who had lost one hand and several fingers in a printing press accident and beat him severely. Nevertheless, he was portrayed as a good example of the success that could come from determination and hard work, and was regarded as a “gentleman by instinct” (154). Thus, what was written about them had a similar moral: everyone could learn something valuable from them about how to succeed.

In discussing how gee-whiz journalism played a major role in making Mathewson and Cobb heroes, Roessner notes that sportswriters frequently utilized literary journalism techniques. While her book does not begin with a definition of what literary journalism was at the turn of the twentieth century, which may prove a detriment to some readers who are unfamiliar with it, she does mention its attributes at various points. These included: imaginative writing, “sentimental, optimistic tones and narrative structure” (23), similes, metaphors, epic heroic tales, humor, characterization, and dialogue that famed sportswriter Ring Lardner in 1914 called the “natural speech of the lowbrow” (115). Numerous examples of these techniques of literary writing by sportswriters appear throughout the book.

At first glance, Roessner does not seem to break new ground. The creation of heroes by sportswriters, using gee-whiz journalism, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, has been touched upon by other historians. However, what is important about her well-researched book is that it examines this form of sports journalism in far greater depth than anyone else. And equally important is that her book does a better job of explaining why this type of journalism occurred. In brief, the sportswriters traveled with the baseball teams, ate and drank and played cards with the players during the season, sometimes socialized with them during the off season, and in many cases ghost wrote articles and books with them. Both the players and the sportswriters depended upon each other in doing their respective jobs and succeeding in their careers. As a result of this book, scholars are provided the best in-depth look to date of how sportswriters did their jobs in the first three decades of the previous century. It is a sobering examination of what was basically a nonobjective, but highly interesting, form of journalism. Readers at the time couldn’t care less about the obvious problems this engendered. They simply loved what was written.

Thus, Roessner’s book is well worth reading about a bygone time in journalism and the important part that literary techniques played in it.

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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