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SUBMISSION INFORMATION

LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES invites submissions of original scholarly articles on literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, New Journalism, and the nonfiction novel, as well as literary and narrative nonfiction that emphasizes cultural revelation. The journal has an international focus and seeks submissions on the theory, history, and pedagogy of literary journalism throughout the world. All disciplinary approaches are welcome. Submissions should be informed with an awareness of the existing scholarship and should be between 5,000 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.

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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 . . .

The last time I taught Ted Conover's magazine cover story, "The Way of All Flesh," which was about the author's time spent working at a massive Nebraska slaughterhouse called Cargill Meat Solutions—don't you adore that name?—two anxious fourth-year undergraduate students intercepted me in the corridor as class was about to begin. Were they ill? No. Were they being called away? No. Did they have some urgent reporting or interviewing to do for another class? No. They had a confession to make. They had not completed the week's reading. In fact, they had hardly started the week's reading. Why? Because it was about cows being put to death in the service of human appetite and, being vegetarians, they were repulsed by the idea of reading the story.

The show went on without them, and the two students meekly sat through the discussion. I do not know exactly how much conscience should play a role in this circumstance, but they did miss a fine story. They could have compared and contrasted Conover's tale with Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle* to gauge how much more (or less) humane we have become in our treatment of cows over the past century plus. They may have come to the same conclusion as the writer, namely, that we are "a group of predators (a pack, you might say) presiding over the slaughter of vast herds far too numerous for us to eat ourselves. The genius and horror of humanity was our ability to send the spoils to anonymous others of our kind located states and continents away. . . . [Y]ou could see us as naked apes, as hominids killing cows; industrial slaughter is predation writ large."

Conover, as is well known, over many years has finely honed his ability to act as his reader's eyes. What struck me as different with "The Way of All Flesh," if compared to, say, the author's book, *Newjack*, about his time spent working as a jail guard at the Sing Sing correctional facility in Westchester County, New York, is the warmth and intimacy he is able to convey to the reader—even as the reader is quite aware, and made quite aware, that Conover is self-consciously aware that he is a character in the drama and is careful not to fall into the trap of making the story more about him than about how we treat the animals we eat and therefore about human nature in general.

Patrick Walters's lead article on Conover's immersion, "Ted Conover and the Origins of Immersion in Literary Journalism," explores this evolving methodology by focusing on three recent works in particular: the book,

Routes of Man (2010), plus "The Way of All Flesh" (*Harper's*, May 2013) and "Rolling Nowhere, Part 2" (*Outside*, July 2014). Walters contends that Conover's "'I' camera" has become more versatile in switching angles from the ethnographic to the journalistic to the intensely personal.

Thomas Schmidt's essay, "Pioneer of Style: How the *Washington Post* Adopted Literary Journalism," zeroes in on the radical transformation of the *Post*'s Style section, from a conservative container of innocuous gossip about powerful people in the capital to a hotbed of New Journalism experimentation. Editor Ben Bradlee and his handpicked senior staff both plucked and attracted talented writers teeming with voice and an understanding of the counterculture, and Schmidt captures the historical framework that allowed a "narrative news logic" to take hold of American newsrooms.

Andrew Griffiths brings us the story of British journalist George Warrington Steevens, who deftly and dutifully reported on the deeds of empire during the late nineteenth century using a kind of proto–new journalistic style. Although literary journalism tends to be seen as a tool that exposes wrongs and speaks truth to power from the left, Griffiths argues that we must see Steevens's work as a kind of literary journalism in the service of empire (much like Mélodie Simard-Houde argued from the francophone perspective, "French Reporters, Real and Fictional Transmitters of Colonial Ideology," in our previous issue, Vol. 8., No. 2, 76–89).

In our debut article for the section Teaching LJ, "The Ammo for the Canon," Brian Gabrial and Elyse Amend report their findings on whether or not there is a literary journalism canon and if indeed there is one, what it might look like. Beyond determining the existence of a canon, the authors endeavor to tease out other kinds of data from surveys filled out on a volunteer basis, over a period of years, 2012–2016, by members of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies: Are there geographic biases to the canon? Are there linguistic biases to the canon? Are there gender biases to the canon? (For a visual rendering that captures the canon, as constructed from the data, brilliantly and instantly, please see Anthony DeRado's illustration on page 82.) A few obvious data points include: the books *In Cold Blood* and *Hiroshima* loom large; and the authors Ted Conover, Joan Didion, Susan Orlean, George Orwell, Lillian Ross, Gay Talese, and Tom Wolfe are name-checked frequently. There will be various conclusions drawn from the results of this research, but my take on it is: my-my, our canon as currently constructed is awfully narrow, is it not?

Also in this issue, David Dowling's Digital LJ article, "Toward a New Aesthetic of Digital Literary Journalism: Charting the Fierce Evolution of the

'Supreme Nonfiction.'" somehow manages to connect the *New York Times*'s "Snow Fall," filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, the *Atavist*'s "Mastermind," *ekphrasis*, *Orange Is the New Black*, W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory*, Robert S. Boynton's concept of the "supreme nonfiction," Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the *Washington Post*'s "A New Age of Walls," Edward Steichen's *The Flatiron Building*, among other dots. Dowling perceives a major shift in digital presentation, spurred by intense competition for eyeballs in the journalism industry, along with those eyeballs definitively opting for mobile devices to receive their information. He argues that accelerated innovation since "Snow Fall" in 2012 has created a "leaner aesthetic marked by careful editorial selection and placement of multimedia elements prioritizing storytelling over displays of technological prowess." This is welcome news to those of us who study literary journalism and long-form writing. The piece is a real tour de force and mandatory reading for anyone following the revolution in digital literary journalism.

Miles and Roberta Maguire return with their annual Research Review, which captures in one place all of the books and papers we need to get caught up on. Finally, Kate McQueen interviews her former journalism instructor, Leon Dash, author of the famous *Washington Post* series, then book about the underclass in Washington, *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America*. McQueen and Dash increasingly focus on Dash's concept of immersion, which brings the conversation for this issue full circle.

Bill Reynolds

Ted Conover. Image by Phoebe Jones

Ted Conover and the Origins of Immersion in Literary Journalism

Patrick Walters
Kutztown University, United States

Abstract: This study explores the tension between memoir and journalism in the style of immersion journalism practiced by author Ted Conover, focusing on his newer work. The analysis looks at the way the role of "self" in his work has evolved and changed since his early writing. The paper focuses primarily on his most recent work—his exploration of roads in 2010's *The Routes of Man*, his immersion in the world of a USDA meat inspector in "The Way of All Flesh" in the May 2013 edition of *Harper's*, and his "Rolling Nowhere, Part 2" in *Outside* in July 2014. While focusing on those, the study analyzes the evolution from his earlier work, dating to the beginning of his career with *Rolling Nowhere*. The inquiry draws on scholarly analysis of immersion journalism, ethnography, and memoir, exploring the distinctions made by scholars in those areas—looking at how Conover navigates the spectrum of the respective approaches (journalism, ethnography, and memoir) in his own style. It uses other studies of literary journalism, comparable immersion work, and interviews with Conover. Ultimately, conclusions are drawn about how his latest work shows Conover has grown more comfortable including his "self" in his work, pushing the boundaries of memoir, and presenting his own story, but ultimately without sacrificing the primacy of the story of the subject itself. In doing this, the argument is made that Conover is essentially further redefining the genre.

Keywords: immersion – literary journalism – ethnography – participatory journalism – memoir

In the thirty-five years since Ted Conover transformed an undergraduate anthropology thesis into his first book, *Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails with America's Hoboes*,[1] he has been labeled many things: anthropologist and ethnographer[2]; participatory journalist[3]; "new, new journalist"[4]; and, simply, an adventurer.[5] His work can be seen through the lens of numerous disciplines, from anthropology to sociology to journalism. When assessed in the context of literary journalism, his work deserves analysis in terms of how it has marked an advancement of the concept we call "immersion." Conover has set a new standard for immersion journalism, as his approach has drawn from the work of his predecessors and further developed what has become one of the essential techniques of literary journalism. Conover draws on the story of his subject and that of his actual reporting experiences, a careful balance he refers to throughout his most recent book, *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep*,[6] in which he explains and reflects on the journalistic techniques he uses in his reporting and writing. In this piece, I will examine the way Conover navigates that balance between the story of the subjects and the details of his own personal narrative, as a human/journalist trying to get the story. Focusing on Conover's exploration of roads in *The Routes of Man: Travels in the Paved World*,[7] his immersion in the world of a USDA meat inspector in "The Way of All Flesh,"[8] and his far more personal tale, "Rolling Nowhere, Part 2,"[9] this analysis will explore how his "I" has evolved in this more recent work, and where he stands in the historical context of immersion journalism. The study will consider how he navigates the fuzzy border between journalism and memoir, forging his own brand of immersion with a delicate balance of the two, while mostly letting the subjects speak for themselves. The recent work demonstrates he has honed a more versatile "I," an interpretive camera able to zoom in or step back, a camera able to put his perspective right up front or in the background, as needed, to tell the story.

History I: Origins of the Term "Immersion"

When considering Conover's immersion journalism, it is important first to remember that immersion itself is a relatively recent term. It was in 1984, just three years after the first publication of *Rolling Nowhere*, that Norman Sims used the term in his introduction to *The Literary Journalists*. Sims wrote, "[L]iterary journalism demands immersion in complex, difficult subjects. The voice of the writer surfaces to show readers that an author is at work. Authority shows through."[10] Sims identifies "immersion" as a key element in literary journalism, referencing the work of John McPhee, and noting that, "In its simplest form, immersion means time spent on the job."[11] This modern definition focuses on the idea of the author's dogged reporting

as well as the "authority" and "voice" the reporting achieves in the work. It now seems appropriate that the beginning of Conover's career and the term "immersion" trace back to nearly the same time.

While the term "immersion" is a modern one, the foundational ideas behind it go back to some of the earliest American literary journalists. The principles of Conover's approach to exploring subcultures are visible in the words, more than a century ago, of Hutchins Hapgood, a writer for the *Commercial Advertiser* in New York. In 1905, Hapgood wrote of writers striving to know their subjects as well as novelists and playwrights know theirs: "Why should not these talented men, I said to myself, go directly to the lives of the people? . . . My idea would involve a method intensive rather than extensive—from within out, instead of from without, in." He speaks of getting closer to the subject, writing, "No, let us go to life as we find it lived about us. . . ."[12] In one of the first references to the concept, Hapgood hits on the essence of immersion as used by Conover: getting inside a world and writing as an outsider. One of Hapgood's contemporaries at the *Commercial Advertiser*, Abraham Cahan, said if a journalist wants to "influence real live men" then "you must first become a live man yourself."[13] Citing that interview, scholar Bruce J. Evensen observed that Cahan's approach in writing about the immigrant communities in New York involved using basic tactics of immersion, noting that "becoming a 'live man' meant immersion in the lives of the immigrant masses in their struggles to adapt themselves to America."[14] This "live man" approach is not only what Conover does literally when he crosses the border with illegal immigrants in *Coyotes*, but also a strategy he uses in all his work, no matter the specific subculture.

Conover's style of immersion also relies on in-depth interviewing as a means of becoming "immersed." In this way, he draws from the tactics that came with the rise of the *New Yorker* after 1925. At that time, Joseph Mitchell declared, "My whole idea of reporting—particularly reporting on conversation—is to talk to a man or a woman long enough under different circumstances . . . until, in effect, they reveal their inner selves."[15] Mitchell referred to the amount of time and the different circumstances this reporting required. While this development in immersion lacked a new label, it shows further development of the approach Conover uses today: going to the people and probing deeply with interviews once having cracked their world.

In his use of an authorial "I" perspective, Conover's work draws, too, from what Tom Wolfe identified in 1973 as "Saturation Reporting."[16] Wolfe wrote of how New Journalism was different from the work of essayists in terms of perspective and point of view—the use of the "I." Speaking of the new form versus autobiography, he wrote:

> It is the one form of nonfiction that has always had most of the powers of the novel. The technical problem of point of view is solved from the outset, because the autobiographer presents every scene from the same point of view, i.e., his own. In the best autobiographies this works perfectly because the protagonist—the author himself—was at the center of the action. He has not been a reporter; he has simply lived his story and presumably knows it in detail. . . .[17]

Wolfe distinguishes between this type of reporting and the work of an essayist using the vantage point of a "literary gentleman with a seat in the grandstand." Of this person, Wolfe argues, "He has usually not done nearly enough reporting, nor the right type of reporting, to use the devices the new genre depends on."[18] Wolfe sharpens the term, with its most specific definition to that point, when he describes "the kind of comprehensive reporting that enables one to portray scenes, extensive dialogue, status life and emotional life. . . ." He talks of journalists who "hope to get inside someone else's world and stay awhile."[19] This is closer to the essence of Conover's approach—the idea of getting inside someone else's world, not for the purpose of telling about his own experience alone, but in order to use that experience to shed light on that world—whether it's a world of meat inspectors, Mexican immigrants, or of something more nuanced like the cultural importance of roads around the world.

Thomas B. Connery notes these labels—Sims's "immersion," Wolfe's "saturation," and Barbara Lounsberry's related concept of "exhaustive research," the work needed to provide enough evidence for the author to be credible—and argues the tactic is key for much of literary journalism, but not all.[20] John Hartsock calls immersion "one of the defining characteristics" of the form.[21] Clearly, it has become a central focus in literary journalism, one with various approaches. In Conover's work, we see him using an approach that modernizes and builds on the concept, developing what can be considered the modern immersion style, with Conover acting as a new kind of "live man."

History II: Other Takes on Immersion

To study Conover's work, it is critical to consider approaches related to immersion, starting in the field of anthropology. Conover majored in anthropology at Amherst College and often refers to himself as an ethnographer.[22] In assessing ethnography, Jane Singer describes an approach where the "researcher goes to the data, rather than sitting in an office and collecting it."[23] She explores the journalist/ethnographer distinction when she writes:

> . . . ethnographers have a more overt and substantial role in the story they tell than journalists do. Though journalists increasingly acknowledge that "objectivity" is more rhetoric than reality, most Western journalism still

> posits a clear separation, a formal distance, between the observer—the reporter—and the participants or stakeholders in what is being reported. Ethnographers, on the other hand, rely on "participant observation," which acknowledges not only the presence of the researcher but also the subjectivity of what is seen, recorded, and communicated.[24]

James M. Tim Wallace argues that apprentice ethnographers "learn how to deal with culture shock, understand a new culture from the ethnographer's perspective, write about their experiences, and apply specific fieldwork techniques."[25] He notes the close relationship with journalism when he recalls one of his best students switching her major to journalism after field school.[26]

Ethnography often does not account for the writer's emotions. One scholar, Andrew Beatty, argues that ethnographers need to embrace their emotions more and that there should sometimes be more focus on narrative, but he also addresses the challenges:

> The transition from life-as-lived to life-as-written poses a difficulty that the historian does not have to face, because ethnographers—actually, not just imaginatively—are part of the story. How much a part is a moot point. Once we acknowledge the deep emplacement of emotions, their entanglement in stories, plots, and pasts involving significant others, we cannot rely on our own emotions for insights into the emotions of people living very different lives.[27]

Beatty notes an ethnographer is "bound . . . to fit cases to arguments."[28] An immersion journalist, however, is bound to let reporting show the story, a story based on a narrative. But Beatty also points out that, in ethnography, "[P]articipant observation, or at least the writing up, entailed a curious renunciation of the life around you, a kind of methodological asceticism."[29] Despite the overlap, the distinctions are clear: An ethnographer's goal is primarily to understand and interpret a culture, while a literary journalist must be focused, above all, on telling a story.

Anthropology also provides the context of "Be the Creature" style of immersion. This is work like that used in the *Be the Creature* wildlife series by Chris and Martin Kratt, where the goal is to blend in, so a world can be shown as if no outsider were there. Bill Reynolds has drawn the connection between this kind of approach and the work of Vancouver-based literary journalist John Vaillant, noting that when Vaillant arrived in Vancouver from the United States he found journalists not just wanting to be "*in* the story," but trying to "*be* the story in order to tell the story better, or more thoroughly, reflecting not verisimilitude, but reality."[30]

Similarly, there is the documentary approach of "Grizzly Man," in which Werner Herzog uses the footage of bear enthusiast Timothy Treadwell as he

attempted to live with grizzly bears in Alaska. These approaches are different from the immersion of literary journalism—they are attempts to *become* the subject rather than to report on it. Scholars such as Jon Tuttle,[31] Hartsock,[32] James Atlas,[33] and others have applied the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle to journalism—anything studied is altered by that observation—and all of these immersive approaches face that challenge.

In the journalistic arena, one oft-discussed immersive style is the "fly-on-the-wall" approach used by Lillian Ross in her famous profile of Ernest Hemingway in the *New Yorker*.[34] It is a form of immersion where the author is at times nearly invisible to the reader as the writer "meticulously describes carefully selected dialogue, action, and setting," an approach Ben Yagoda argues can be "deadly dull" but one that is "oddly exhilarating" in the hands of a master like Ross.[35] This variation involves the author selectively withdrawing from the scene—not revealing her viewpoint directly, but through what Ross described as her "choice" and "arrangement" of details.[36] More recently, a version of this approach was used by Adrian Nicole Leblanc in *Random Family: Love, Drugs, Trouble, and Coming of Age in the Bronx*, as she steps back nearly into invisibility and dispassionately relays the painful events in the lives of Jessica, Coco, and others in one tough Bronx neighborhood.[37]

At the opposite end of this spectrum lies the broad category of "participatory journalism," which would be included in what Yagoda classifies as "reporter at the forefront."[38] This can be where the writer's experience taking on a challenge becomes the story, à la George Plimpton getting a chance to suit up and train with the Detroit Lions—and ultimately play a few snaps in a preseason game—in *Paper Lion*.[39] This is a close relative of Conover's immersion, but closer to what author Robin Hemley would call "immersion memoir"[40]—such as A. J. Jacobs's *The Year of Living Biblically*, where the author attempts to actually live his life by following every rule in the Bible, literally.[41] "If your goal is an outward exploration of the world, then you're most likely an immersion journalist," Hemley writes. "If your goal is to explore yourself . . . then you're more of a memoirist, as interested in your own transformation as the rest of the world's."[42] The question returns to how much self needs to be included in a story. In *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep,* Conover makes a stricter distinction between immersion and memoir. While memoir is a "cousin" of immersion writing, he writes, memoirists "put themselves front and center, and the experience that is their essential material is most often one through which they passed in the course of living their lives—not one they imagined in order to understand life for somebody else."[43] Projects such as Jacobs's and others, he argues, "are typically inquisitive in an inward direction; their goal is not to learn about the Other."[44]

An assessment of immersion also must consider what the editors of *Harper's* magazine call "submersion journalism." Former editor Roger D. Hodge refers to the need here for "an experimental subject, an 'I' sufficiently armed with narrative powers both literary and historical, gifts of irony and indirection, and the soothing balms of description and implication, to go forth and find stories that might counteract the unhappy effects of our disorder."[45] He calls this the "radical first person," speaking of writers who "have braved the perils of the Bush Era and returned to tell their tales."[46] This immersion is different because of its intensely partisan "I" taking up a cause. Bill Wasik also refers to how "submersion journalism" often involves "undercover" reporting that involves "minor deception by the reporter."[47]

History III: Practitioners of Immersion, Its Antecedents, and Related Tactics

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, examples of what might be considered the early roots of immersion are evident in the work of Hapgood, Cahan, Jack London, and Stephen Crane. In these works, we see the authors delving into other worlds, but often those worlds are closely connected to their own. For example, Cahan shows this kind of early immersion in works such as "Can't Get Their Minds Ashore" and other pieces about immigrant life he wrote for the *Commercial Advertiser*. A Lithuanian who immigrated to America at age twenty-one, his voice is relatively detached describing a new wave of Jewish immigrants in Manhattan,[48] yet he is still writing about a world he already knows quite well. As a result, as he puts himself in this community and spends time in this world, he sometimes lacks a certain reportorial distance, despite the fact that he is not writing directly about his own experiences. His personal connection and his related sense of advocacy can be felt in the stories he tells, such as when he asks "What makes you so downhearted?" and "Why don't you go to eat? Are you not hungry?"[49] Bruce Evansen notes, "Cahan's empathy for the plight of the immigrant family is expressed in the details of a writer intimately familiar with his subject."[50] Hapgood, too, did work that could be considered early immersion, learning Yiddish in order to explore Bowery life. But Connery notes how Hapgood sometimes loses "control" as he "sentimentalizes" and "romanticizes" the lower-class characters, meaning he hasn't maintained that critical distance of modern immersion.[51]

Stephen Crane's "Experiment in Misery" also can be seen as early immersion. He uses his brief foray into the homeless world to make subjective assessments such as how one youth "felt that there no longer could be pleasure in life."[52] The approach was simple and the third-person references to the author would now be seen as antiquated, but it marked early immersion.

However, the approach was more simplistic than the immersion of Conover today, especially when considering the short amount of time Crane spent delving into this world—Crane spent parts of two days, while Conover typically spends months on his projects. Yagoda noted Crane's work was part of a journalistic "curiosity about the lives of the poor" at that time.[53] Similarly, Kevin Kerrane and Yagoda point to London's *The People of the Abyss* as another example. Spending seven weeks living in a slum in the East End of London in 1902, Jack London showed the world from the inside, writing "for the first time in my life the fear of the crowd smote me. It was like the fear of the sea; and the miserable multitudes, street upon street, seemed so many waves of a vast and malodorous sea, lapping about me and threatening to well up and over me."[54] Kerrane observes that London's use of a "dropout narrator," where the author moves in and out of the foreground of the story, inspired Conover and others as he used what "later new journalists would call 'immersion reporting'. . . ."[55] Similar work was done by Marvel Cooke ("The Bronx Slave Market")[56] and George Orwell ("The Spike")[57] as the form showed development later in the twentieth century. Cooke's immersion was classic undercover—disguising one's identity to reveal the true nature of something—an approach Conover mimicked in *Newjack*.[58] Kerrane points out that Orwell, who had once lived in poverty in France, was using a disguise here to build on the immersive model of *The People of the Abyss,* but that Orwell's work "dramatizes more than London's and editorializes less."[59] More focus on narrative and less editorializing marked a key development in the approach, something that Conover's work draws from today. While he addresses hot-button topics such as illegal immigration, incarceration, and income inequality around the world, the reader sees little blatant editorializing. Instead, Conover mostly steps back and lets subjects tell their own stories.

Modern immersion also owes a debt to John Steinbeck. Giles Fowler observes that both *The Grapes of Wrath* and the pamphlet on migrant farmers, *Their Blood Is Strong,* are built on techniques that can be categorized as immersion. Fowler writes that while Steinbeck gathered material for both, "part of his secret, it seems, was the use of total-immersion reporting in which he spent his days and weeks with the migrants, at times sharing the harshness of their lives."[60] William Howarth also explores this, looking into a question posed by Sims: "Why did John Steinbeck write *The Grapes of Wrath* as a novel, when he had a wealth of journalistic material?"[61] Of his reporting for the novel, Howarth writes how Steinbeck "cast himself increasingly as its witness or reporter, just giving an account of what passed before his eyes . . . "[62] This, along with James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*[63] a few years later, marked a continuation of this kind of reporting.

At the *New Yorker* in the 1930s, writers such as Joseph Mitchell and A. J. Liebling picked up the technique. Sims notes a major challenge with the approach: "How does a writer inject himself into the narrative without upsetting readers who are accustomed to impersonal newspaper prose?" Sims argues Agee threw himself into the foreground, while Liebling "portrayed himself as a secondary character along the margins of the storyline. . . ." Mitchell, Sims argues, "found another solution by merging himself with the characters of Mr. Flood and Joe Gould, and then writing about them in third person."[64] These writers each struggled with the central challenge of immersion, an area where Conover strikes a careful balance: How much of the author should be in the story?

Wolfe, Plimpton, Gay Talese, and other New Journalists took varied approaches to this question. Talese typically took the "fly-on-the-wall" approach, leading to his famous portraits of Frank Sinatra, Joe DiMaggio, and Floyd Patterson, as well as the comprehensive study, *The Bridge: The Building of Verrazano-Narrows Bridge*,[65] keeping himself out of the constructed scenes. Wolfe's method was different. He used his "saturation reporting" to try to figure out what made a man willing to sit atop a lit rocket for *The Right Stuff*.[66] He used a narrative approach and largely kept himself out of that narrative. In work like *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*,[67] however, he took a more extreme immersive approach. The personal voice is often *loud*, even if he does sometimes refer to his outsider status in a self-deprecating way. The big tent of the New Journalism, of course, also had room for Plimpton, who took ownership of the "participatory journalism" under which many classify Conover. Plimpton addressed the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle issues by *becoming* his subject. With *Paper Lion*, Plimpton used a version of immersion that veers closest to autobiography, the original use of the "I." McPhee has since used his own version of the technique, serving as the reader's tour guide into other worlds and cultures in pieces such as "The Pine Barrens,"[68] "Travels in Georgia,"[69] and many other stories. And Tracy Kidder has built on the technique further, using a fully immersed "I" to more deeply explore both common, well-known worlds such as a fifth-grade classroom in *Among Schoolchildren*[70] and more mysterious, complex worlds such as the realm of coding and computer engineering in *The Soul of a New Machine*.[71]

Conover's Approach to Immersion

In immersion journalism, the tension revolves around the balance between the author's story and *the* story—the perspective of the "I" and the distance it maintains from the subject. In some cases, a writer finds that putting himself in the story is the best way to center or ground it. In other cases, an editor

may want the author in the story to show the reader that there is something at stake for the writer—to give the reader a reason why he is writing it. Conover, in his work, uses first person to varying degrees and in varying amounts, depending on what is needed for him to tell that story.

Conover's work straddles the worlds of literary journalism, literature, and anthropology. Anthropologists have referenced his work. In "Coming Out to 'Hit the Road': Temporal, Spatial and Affective Mobilities of Taxi Drivers and Day Trippers in Kunming, China," for example, Beth E. Notar footnotes the fact that Conover wrote about Chinese driving clubs in *The Routes of Man* without discussing his exploration.[72] Andrew Beatty does not mention Conover, but suggests the writer's strength when he argues ethnographers need to embrace their emotions more and observes that narrative is beginning to return to ethnographic studies, which he deems a good thing.[73] These scholars may look to borrow from Conover a willingness to center their work around narrative and, sometimes, the author's emotional response.

In literature, Erik Skipper argues for a strong connection between Conover and Steinbeck. He notes how both "fend off political seduction by digging beneath the trenches." He writes, "They allow themselves a platform for objectivity that cannot be crippled by outside forces," focusing on the individual to lead a reader away from "preconceptions and prejudices."[74]

In literary journalism, Conover's work has been justly credited—if not sufficiently studied—for its role in the development of immersion. Bruce Gillespie, in calling *Rolling Nowhere* "an ethnography of railway hoboes," assesses the relationship between ethnography and literary journalism, saying ethnography's "founding principle was to try to understand social groups from the inside out, requiring a long-term commitment from the researcher who would embed himself or herself within a population and seek to earn its members' trust in order to study them."[75] Kerrane credits Conover for "social analyses . . . embedded in storytelling and in an open-hearted approach to his subjects."[76]

Robert S. Boynton also notes how Conover builds on the work of Wolfe and the New Journalists by using the immersive techniques to further investigate "subcultures in general, and impoverished subcultures in particular. . . ."[77] He describes how Conover's work explores "the fine lines separating 'us' from 'them,' and the elaborate rituals and markers . . . that we have developed to bolster such distinctions."[78] Boynton also emphasizes Conover as a bridge between the techniques of ethnography and literary journalism. As part of a Literary Reportage program at New York University, Boynton spoke of "an advanced reporting course based on the ethnographic methods of anthropologists—something we were able to accomplish when Ted Conover joined the faculty."[79]

Conover's work merits analysis of how it travels along what I would call a continuum from memoir to literary journalism. In a biography on his website, Conover showed awareness of the tension of self in his work. Referencing *The Routes of Man*, he wrote, "It's a book about roads, yes, but like my others it's also a book about me." He went on:

> I continue to admire writing where the writer has something at stake; where he doesn't just depend on experts but rather takes time to think and research and participate, thereby transforming himself into an expert; where his caring and urgency of the subject can transform the writing into something that matters, an act of witnessing."[80]

In contrast to a writer like LeBlanc, who used the first person so minimally in *Random Family,*[81] Conover embraces his first person. "But the first person is how *I* best tell a story," he told Boynton. "Because my persona is so often that of the 'witness,' *not* using the first person would make me feel like a left-handed person who was forced to use his right hand."[82] In *Rolling Nowhere*, he uses the "I" to show the fear of hoboes on a train car:

> Lightning flashed again through the window and lit up the car. Thunder must be following it, I thought, but the noise of the car being pulled over the tracks was like thunder itself, and if there was any outside, I couldn't hear it.
>
> I dozed fitfully, fearful that every time the train slowed it was because a report of my presence had finally caught up with the authorities. Flashes of lightning I imagined to be the flashlight beams of cops, or of a tramp who had been hiding in the next caboose down the train, and was sneaking over to knock me on the head and steal my traveler's checks.[83]

This shows Conover writing about his experiences in an autobiographical way, but doing so in an effort to use his immersive experience to convey the feeling of "the other." Later, he uses his first person to show that part of the story is his insecurity: "Yet a change had occurred. In part because my own desire was so strong, the jungles were becoming my home. For weeks I had been concerned with appearances: Did I look like a tramp? When tramps looked at me, would they see themselves? Those seemed the most important things."[84]

Here, his "I" is playing the role of journalist and ethnographer, but there is also a personal story the reader can identify with. Conover writes in *Immersion* that he initially started *Rolling Nowhere* as a third-person piece, but changed course after realizing that so much of the first-person part of the story was essential to the narrative.[85]

The personal narrative is similar in *Coyotes* and *Newjack.* In both, the primary goal is exploration of a subculture. But he is still there. In *Coyotes*, the personal story is minimal, and the "I" is primarily used as the vantage point of a white, American, law-abiding journalist. However, in *Newjack*, Conover uses much more of his personal "I." He makes a conscious decision to use the techniques of memoir in the chapter "My Heart Inside Out," showing how the job affected him as a parent of a one-year-old daughter and three-year-old son, and as a husband. This is evident in a section where he disciplines his son, who is threatening to wake up his sister:

> Something in me sort of snapped. All day long I was disrespected by criminals; I felt that home should be different. I ran up the stairs and picked him up by his pajama tops outside her door. "When I say no, you will listen!" I whispered angrily, giving him a spank, surprising myself.
>
> I had never done that before, and it surprised him, too. He burst into tears. This woke his sister. I was furious, and ordered her to go back to sleep. She didn't obey, either. The house filled with sobs. "Into your room," I ordered my son, and carried him bodily when he "refused to comply."[86]

Most of the first person Conover uses in *Newjack* is strictly for participatory purposes, but here the reader sees an emotional "I" affected by the experience.

Conover wears first person differently in *Whiteout: Lost in Aspen*. As he explores the different worlds of the resort town, he draws from his perspective growing up in Colorado. He uses traditional "immersive" approaches, working as a taxi driver, a newspaper reporter, and in other roles. But he also draws from his background growing up in Denver (using past experience with his subject, à la London and Cahan). That context is critical in the perspective he brings. However, his is not the "I" of straight memoir here; instead, he is applying the "I" of experience to his effort to explore a subculture. At one point, Conover uses the "I" of personal experience when he recounts a conversation with an old Colorado friend, as they observe celebrities in a ski lodge:

> A few months earlier, I remembered, I would have felt intimidated here. All these perfect people, all the beautiful smiles and taut bodies and right clothes: It could really wear on you, the kind of pressure the place exerted. But Tracey had helped me become less self-conscious. We grew up in Colorado, she reminded me. It's our place, we've been at it since we were kids. The fashions were superficial; these people would come and go, but we would last. It was the only snobbery available to us, the underdogs.[87]

Conover is using his background much more personally. It shows in the next chapter, too, as he explores John Denver in a way that only someone

who grew up in Colorado can. After working as an extra on the filming of a John Denver Christmas TV special, he writes, “We Coloradans, lacking our own strong regional identity, are susceptible to outside influences.” Recalling singing Denver’s songs in school growing up, he writes, “Here in Colorado we lack hillbillies, Appalachians, indigenous culture. What we have instead is John Denver.”[88]

As in *Newjack*, he focuses on the changes that result in himself. This use of true personal perspective culminates at the end, when he writes how a friend took him to an old standby Mexican restaurant in Denver late in his reporting, and he acts disappointed. She asks what has happened to him and he responds, “I knew immediately that Aspen had happened to me. . . . Experience had happened to me, temptation. I had been seduced, but it was always too simple to blame only the seductress. I said something about Aspen, and she said I ought to come home.[89]

Conover’s “I” in Recent Work I: *The Routes of Man*

Using his own perspective is critical to Conover. “It keeps me as a writer from wandering too far afield from the true meaning of something if at the end of the day I have to square it with my own experience,” he said in an author interview. “Where I part ways with a lot of people is how much I place myself in the story.”[90] In *The Routes of Man*, “The Way of All Flesh,” and “Rolling Nowhere, Part Two,” Conover tries on “I” in varied ways—and varying amounts. As he writes in *Immersion*, “Narrative persona in first-person nonfiction is thus another way of saying ‘choice of selves.’”[91]

In *The Routes of Man*, Conover tries on a slightly different first person. He immerses himself in a more divergent and concrete world (that of roads), and it takes him into a wide array of subcultures rather than one. Dealing with roads in Peru, East Africa, the West Bank, China, Nigeria, and the Himalayas, he must adapt his approach. He finds his approach tested as he investigates the lives of truckers and the spread of HIV in Kenya. After spending most of the chapter talking to male truckers, he talks to a group of women. Some of them have worked as prostitutes, and he finds his reportorial persona challenged as they seek to engage him personally:

> . . . I told them I was making a donation to the group, as it seemed very worthwhile. I started to put away my notebook and get ready to leave.
>
> “But what do you think?” Constance asked abruptly. None of the women, I noticed, were standing up. I sat back down.
>
> “What do I think about what?” I asked.
>
> “About our situation.”

> "Well, I think working to support a group like this is good, and paying close attention to your medicine and health is the right—"
>
> "No!" said Constance. "We mean, about our *situation*. . ."
>
> I was so thick. I thought I'd just been interviewing them about the work they used to do. "You mean," I said, "you're still hooking now?"
>
> She nodded.
>
> "All of you?"
>
> They all nodded.[92]

After some back and forth, Conover offers, "I guess it means you should do other work."[93] This challenged Conover's first person in ways it never was in other work, exposing his vulnerability, which he then uses to enlighten the reader.

In *The Routes of Man*, Conover mostly steps back and lets the people and the roads tell and show the story. But when he does engage more in a personal voice, it shows the cumulative effect of years of reporting, such as this interaction with a Palestinian waiter on the Arab side of East Jerusalem:

> I told him about the Mexicans who sneak into the United States seeking better-paying work, but noted the different quality of that migration— it involved an international border and raised questions about national sovereignty. Here migration looked different: the soldiers weren't keeping West Bankers out of Israel, they were merely keeping Palestinians from moving around too much. It reminded me of the way officers run a prison like Sing Sing: by dividing it up into discrete pieces, and forbidding or restricting movement between them.[94]

The personal story becomes self-referential here, but to his previous *reporting* background.

The "I" also changes here because it's not *his* journey. While watching activity at an Israeli checkpoint, he observes, "I watched them allow cars with yellow-and-black Israeli license plates, as opposed to white-and-green Palestinian ones, to skip the queue and pass through the checkpoint by using the oncoming-traffic lane." He describes guards making a pregnant woman wait more than twenty minutes in the hot sun while they run her ID. He observes an old woman climbing out of her car and saying she's not going to wait a minute more, before walking by and saying, "Go ahead and shoot me!"[95] He uses that style he calls "an act of witnessing," but it is not "fly on the wall." Nor, however, is it Plimpton's participatory "I." It is something more complex. This is Conover using that interpretative camera in a different way. He

shows that he can take himself out of the picture when needed, to use himself sometimes only as the director selecting powerful scenes, not the actor taking over the stage.

But Conover also demonstrates his versatility in other sections of this work, showing that at times he has become more willing to judiciously use personal vignettes to enhance to power of the story. Before getting into the world of Chinese group driving trips, he includes a section on his love of driving. He writes, "I grew up a passenger in a Rambler station wagon, and then an Oldsmobile. My first experience of incarceration was being buckled into the back seat of that Oldsmobile as my father drove the family across the seemingly endless American West on a summer vacation."[96] Conover is using his first person to observe and witness, but also to help frame the story.

His "I" in *The Routes of Man* is a cultural "I," used to reflect the material he has learned, but typically de-emphasizing himself. He uses his personal view as the glue to hold the stories together, but the focus remains on the culture of the roads, avoiding the pitfall of what Conover calls "making every story your next adventure."[97] His "I" is not the young man's "I" of *Rolling Nowhere*; it is the "I" of experience, not afraid to engage the subject, but not taking over. He uses his perspective to frame a situation, such as when he describes the casual intimacy of a trucker saying a quiet, touch-less goodbye to his wife before heading back out on the road. Conover notes that the two spoke closely and exchanged money before saying goodbye. "There are so many ways to be a couple," he writes. "My wife and I would have kissed, but theirs was a different intimacy."[98]

Conover's "I" in Recent Work II: "The Way of All Flesh"

In "The Way of All Flesh," Conover puts his first person back at the center of the story, working as a meat inspector for the Department of Agriculture at a slaughterhouse in Schuyler, Nebraska. The "I" here is similar to the one in *Newjack*, *Coyotes*, and *Rolling Nowhere.* He uses personal experience as a lens through which to tell a story. He writes of going into the facility with his ID badge and the way it made him feel: "Though I tend to dislike scrutiny, I actually don't mind the shack, because it makes me feel important: instead of a Cargill I.D., I get to flash my police-style USDA badge. And when I leave, at shift's end, the guards can't ask to see what's in my bag, as they can the regular workers."[99]

The "I" here goes back to his earlier approach, as he is using it to give the reader perspective on that world by using his personal experience. He is not just accentuating the story—his experience is the story.

Conover uses the "I" as a way to connect the story to a reader who does

not know the world of meat inspection. He writes about another inspector and how she had experience with a knife in a kosher slaughterhouse. "Which I do not," he writes. "That experience, I will soon learn, counts for a lot."[100] That type of approach is something Conover says he consciously tries to use as a means of using himself to convey the experience to the readers, much as with the prostitutes in *The Routes of Man*. "Showing the awkwardness that I stumble into can help readers understand the world I'm getting to know," Conover added in an interview. "Misunderstandings are interesting."[101]

He draws only minimally from the anthropological "I" here. Of inspectors changing out of bloody clothes in the locker room, he writes they look like "overseers of an industrial process" in their uniforms, and that ". . . naked, we resembled something else: a group of predators (a pack you might say) presiding over the slaughter of vast herds far too numerous for us to eat ourselves."[102] This approach is similar to the way he described correctional officers in *Newjack*, but stronger because he uses it less. He uses the personal "I" to show pain, noting how his forearms are sore from the physical labor—specifically "hook arm." After it spreads to his left arm, he gets advice from colleagues, procures a brace, and finds some relief. He then ties his personal experience to a broader story: "Turnover in the meat industry is said to be extremely high. Pain and these kinds of deep bloodless injuries have to be a main reason why."[103]

In the final paragraph, he shifts to how the experience changed him. In journalism, this can be sacrilegious, but Conover takes the gamble, writing:

> I know that going vegan is perhaps the proper ending to my story, and truly, it's the one I foresaw. But appetite is a hard thing to control; a lifetime of habit doesn't just go away. I do know that I eat much less beef than I did before, and I pay more for better stuff. I have subtracted 90 percent of the hamburger from my diet, and I now seek meat that requires a knife to eat. It will be better meat—and using the knife will mean I have to think about it, every single bite.[104]

"I wanted that in the piece," Conover said in an interview, adding that he had become about ninety-five percent vegetarian. "But I didn't want it in the piece too much. I felt I owed it to the reader."[105] Above all, it shows an increasing willingness to intersperse more of his personal "I."

"The Way of All Flesh" uses a version closer to his earlier "I," one akin to parts of *Newjack* and *Coyotes*, one where he tries on a new role, using himself as a lens to show the world to outsiders. He does not incorporate much ethnography or much memoir, except when he uses his personal "I" to show the experience didn't turn him completely into a vegan. For most of the piece, he uses a journalistic "I," once again demonstrating how he can modify his immersive camera so that it is best equipped to tell the story of that particular subject.

Conover's "I" in Recent Work III: "Rolling Nowhere, Part Two"

"Rolling Nowhere, Part Two" marks the greatest departure from his style. Thirty-three years after *Rolling Nowhere,* Conover crosses into a different first person as he decides to write about riding the rails with his eighteen-year-old son, Asa. It could have become a sort of "Older Plimpton returns to try out for Detroit Lions with teenage son as wide receiver." Instead, Conover goes to the anthropological "I," aimed inward at the relationship between father and son, no longer just using himself as a vehicle. Now, the story/ethnography is about him. This is an "I" Conover has not used before, where "I" is father first and reporter/ethnographer second:

> With the train rumbling past, I told Asa where to stand. Then I jogged away from him toward the back of it and nervously waited for the right kind of car—one we could ride. When one finally drew even with me, I set off at a sprint, trying to keep up—and decided I couldn't.
>
> "Too fast!" I shouted at Asa, waving him off. My rule: the train couldn't be going any faster than I could run, and this one, well, possibly was. It was hard to be sure. It had been a while. As we stepped away from the train, I thought ruefully that at 22, I probably would have grabbed it.[106]

It is a viewpoint that allows him to take on a different role, that of a participant reporter who is also a memoirist.

The piece takes a risk, engaging Conover's personal life like never before. This perspective provides for a new kind of reflection. Now he is the thing being studied. Here, there are new stakes: "The prospect of Asa getting injured had been haunting me the whole trip."[107] The collision between memoir and literary journalism culminates late in the piece when he fully crosses over into the personal: "After a minute, he placed his head on my upper arm as if resting. Then he put his arm around my shoulder. I put my arm around him, looked straight at the back of the grainer rumbling in front of us in the dark, tried not to cry. Wished the moment would last and last. It was one of the nicest things ever. How much credit can we take when a kid turns out well?"[108]

Conover's "I" here is not a journalist's, but a father's. It is almost purely memoir: The "subculture" under investigation is his son and him.

In "Rolling Nowhere, Part Two," Conover takes his first person almost all the way across the journalism/memoir divide. This story is about him and his relationship with his son. The self the reader gets here is all Conover—the person, not the journalist. This is a rare exception for Conover, not an indication of a change in his style. He capitalizes on his credentials as an established immersion journalist to tell a personal story.

Conclusion

Conover's work borrows from many approaches. But the question remains where and how to classify it—considering the different disciplines he straddles and the various writing/reporting techniques he can be seen as using. It is most logical to start by considering the realm of anthropology, where he has roots. But while his reporting may fit there, his writing does not. His narrative sets it apart from being classified as pure ethnography because he depends on characters and dramatic events—essential story elements. Likewise, Conover's approach does not involve him trying to "be the creature." He describes being not a "tourist" but a "traveler" trying to develop deeper connections with his surroundings.[109] "If you immerse yourself completely, you lose all critical distance; you 'go native,'" Conover wrote in an e-mail.[110] His work shows him using first-person to step back from the narrative and assess what is going on.

Conover's work does not fall under "submersion journalism." His "I" is rarely politically charged. If his work is advocacy, it is through the story itself, rather than via his voice. In terms of the undercover aspect of "submersion," Conover notes that while the undercover label stuck with *Newjack* and "The Way of All Flesh," he sees the tactic is mostly as the "easy way out."[111] His other work involves him being straightforward and visible—his subjects know what he is doing.

Historically, Conover has roots in early immersion journalists such as Cahan, Hapgood, Crane, and London, all of whom set out to inspect other perspectives, too. Likewise, Conover clearly borrows from the observational and sometimes more distanced approach of Orwell. And, in terms of the sheer depth of his reporting, Conover draws from Steinbeck, Agee, and Mitchell. But he has developed a more nuanced approach. He can be read and interpreted through a New Journalism lens, but only so far. Much of the study on the relationship between journalism and autobiography/memoir has focused on the New Journalists. Jason Mosser evaluated this boundary as he contrasted Hunter S. Thompson with Truman Capote and Wolfe, noting, "The key difference between Thompson's participatory approach and the approaches adopted by Capote and Wolfe is that the narrative persona in their works does not appear. . . ." He refers to the "narrative distance that Capote and Wolfe create. . . ."[112] Conover's work shows a high level of immersion, but, except for "Rolling Nowhere, Part Two," he typically doesn't make himself a character. In *The Routes of Man* he is himself, making observations and cultural assessments. In "The Way of All Flesh," he is a character, but the character is a meat inspector, not Conover "personally."

Plimpton is a relative, but Conover is more Wolfe than Thompson. He

seeks to tell a story, keeping attention mostly away from himself. Boynton observes how Wolfe focused on "status," while Conover is concerned about "subcultures" and views "the disenfranchised not as exotic tribes, but as people whose problems are symptomatic of the dilemmas that vex America."[113] Conover treats his subjects as slices of humanity, using the "I" to connect and understand, not gawk.

Thomas Meisenhelder, in comparing the tactics of the New Journalists to methods of the "Chicago School" of sociology in the 1920s and 1930s, writes that the New Journalist had to be aware of himself in his writing. He writes how "the new journalist forces the reader to become aware of the author's personal presence 'in' the research and how that presence adds to the report." He also notes ". . . unlike most sociologists, the new journalist understands that he too is part of the phenomena-under-study."[114] Conover knows he is part of the study, but does not take it to the extreme of Plimpton. Boynton's assessment of Conover as a "new new journalist" may fit best, as he has built on New Journalism to develop an increasingly multi-dimensional first-person approach.

Conover's purpose is to explore another world deeply, much as early immersion journalists did. His reporting methods are similar to the intense styles of Talese and Wolfe, and he builds on the tactics of Steinbeck and Agee. He involves himself in a participatory way, much like Plimpton, but avoids being a spectacle. He seeks to explore a culture, much like an anthropologist, but with a storytelling purpose. He belongs most in the company of Kidder and McPhee because he balances his presence in his writing. He arrives only when necessary, neither never appearing (like LeBlanc) nor taking over (like Plimpton). "By using the first person, I need to be able to take the writing to another level of meaning for the reader," he said in an interview. "I need to earn it if I'm going to put myself in there."[115]

The subjects in *The Routes of Man* and "The Way of All Flesh" show Conover broadening his horizons. He appears to be consciously trying to avoid being perceived as looking for that "next adventure." *The Routes of Man* is daring for its scope, as he explores a common issue in a global world with a breadth rarely attempted by previous immersion journalists. He shows the wide range of subjects to which a skilled journalist can apply immersion. Conover chooses those subjects with the goal of exploring them culturally and not, primarily, politically. "The Way of All Flesh" is no diatribe about the meat industry, nor is "The Routes of Man" an attack on political systems. He also shows an immersion journalist can use a personal story and make it deeper than autobiography: "Rolling Nowhere, Part Two" is memoir, but told with the perspective of an ethnographer/journalist.

Conover is also showing further advancement of the tactic of immersion in his latest work. He isn't trying to dance around the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle or be a "fly on the wall." He is not simply a participatory journalist, as he shows too much concern for the anthropological—the meaning behind mankind. Instead, he further demonstrates that the versatile "I" camera he has developed can be used in varying degrees and from different angles—the purely journalistic, the ethnographic, and even the more intensely personal—depending on the world that needs to be explored. His approach hasn't become bolder or braver, exactly. Rather, he has developed a more adaptable immersion, one capable of using "I" in very different ways to fully tell the nuanced, complex stories of our time.

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Notes

[1] Ted Conover, *Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails with America's Hoboes* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001).

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Ben Bradlee and some of his top editors during a so-called Pugwash in the early 1970s. They were meetings at Bradlee's cabin in the mountains where senior editors talked shop and socialized. The photo also shows Eugene Patterson, who briefly served under Bradlee and later was influential in advancing narrative journalism in American newspapers. Bradlee is wearing a sweater from the then-already defunct *New York Herald Tribune*, an early adopter of narrative journalism. Photo credit: Eugene C. Patterson papers/The Poynter Institute

Pioneer of Style: How the *Washington Post* Adopted Literary Journalism

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Abstract: The *Washington Post* was a pioneer in introducing the literary techniques used by the New Journalists into daily newspaper production. While the New Journalism had evolved mainly in magazine writing, the *Post*'s Style section established a distinctive form of feature journalism that for the first time was embedded in daily news routines and practices. Eventually this model was imitated all across the US newspaper industry. Even though the form of news writing has dramatically changed over the past decades, we lack an adequate understanding of how this novel form of news writing has been shaped by organizational, institutional, and cultural variables. Following John Pauly's call for an "institutionally situated history of literary journalism," this study offers a detailed account of Style's emergence and evolvement, through a description of the journalistic ecosystem of narrative writing from which it sprang. Based on archival documents and in-depth interviews, this study then outlines the conceptual and strategic origins of the Style section, showing how the staff collected, catalyzed, and percolated ideas that were circulating in the 1960s. The study analyzes the integration of the section into the daily newspaper's production. It identifies factors that shaped organizational practices and created a distinctive subculture in the newsroom, preconditions for creating a space for the narrative news logic to take hold in the US section and its contribution to the expansion of narrative journalism in US newspapers.

Keywords: *Washington Post* – Ben Bradlee – New Journalism – newsroom culture

Prelude: Benjamin Crowninshield Bradlee had just launched the Style section, the biggest and boldest experiment in his young career as executive editor of the *Washington Post*, and it wasn't going well. It was early 1969. Katharine (Kay) Graham, the publisher, was badgering him. Readers were complaining that the new form of narrative storytelling was "in very poor taste."[1] The Style section was buzzing with tension between the old guard of the women's pages (which focused on tea parties and diplomatic receptions) and the young, ambitious hotshots with their counterculture sensibilities. Looking back, Howard Simons, assistant managing editor during that time, described it as "a mixed-up, identity-crisis-ridden, constantly traumatized, and perhaps mismanaged section."[2] Seven years later, the Style section was called Bradlee's "clearest personal monument."[3]

The *Washington Post* Style section was a pioneer in many ways. It challenged the notion of segregated women's news, a common practice in the 1960s. It created a mix of entertainment and society coverage that was widely emulated throughout the industry. It combined criticism (art, music, television), opinion pieces, and service journalism, packaged in a stimulating and enticing layout. However, one of its most important accomplishments has not yet received sufficient attention: The Style section's staff deliberately and systematically introduced narrative writing into daily newspaper production. In doing so, the section followed and propelled the interpretive turn in US journalism and brought the narrative techniques of the New Journalism to a mainstream audience. As a result, the section's staff and the Style section transformed journalistic practices, changed news values, and diversified the newsroom culture so that narrative writing was able to take hold in a new environment, different from the magazine and book world where narrative nonfiction writing had experienced a renaissance beginning with the New Journalism of the 1960s. The Style section became a prototype and paved the way for innovations in other newsrooms.

This exploration of the emergence of the Style section pursues two objectives: (1) to provide the first detailed account of the Style section's beginnings and demonstrate that the experiment succeeded only after overcoming daunting obstacles; and (2) to make the argument, through an extensive analysis of internal documents, oral histories, and secondary sources, that the Style section served as a link between New Journalism and a subsequent shift towards narrative writing in the newspaper industry. As a result, the argument is made that the Style section's staff, by incorporating narrative techniques into daily news production, shaped organizational practices and a distinctive subculture

in the newsroom, demonstrating the possibility and feasibility of what I call a narrative news logic in daily newspaper production. Defined, *the narrative news logic* is an interlinked set of journalistic forms and practices that transformed routinized news conventions and established narrative journalism as a legitimate component of daily newspapers.

More than presenting a singular example, then, this study is an effort to historicize the emergence of narrative journalism as, to paraphrase Michael Schudson, a distinct "cultural form of news."[4] Far from being a fully developed model at its inception, the Style section was brought together in a process of trial and error, reflecting controversial notions of journalistic values, professional practices, and readership expectations. Now that journalistic writing has moved so decisively in the direction of storytelling,[5] it is easy to overlook how groundbreaking and revolutionary the Style section was when it was created. This study follows the call of John Pauly for an "institutionally situated history of literary journalism."[6] My interpretation undermines arguments disputing the importance of literary techniques advanced by New Journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, and Joan Didion for daily newspapers. Schudson has argued, "the highly personalistic, openly subjective elements of 'new journalism' had relatively little direct impact on the style of the daily newspapers."[7] In contrast, this study shows that the *Post* staff, by developing a model for narrative writing, created space for personal, subjective, and interpretive writing that incorporated some of the techniques and practices of the New Journalists without giving in to some of their excesses.

This study will proceed in the following way: First I will describe the conceptual and strategic origins of the Style section, showing how the section's staff collected, catalyzed, and percolated ideas that were circulating in the 1960s. Then I zero in on the implementation of the section into the daily newspaper production. Specifically, I will analyze the newsroom culture and identify particular elements that allowed the narrative news logic to take hold in the paper. Finally, I will discuss the importance of the Style section and its contribution to the expansion of narrative journalism in US newspapers.

Developing Style

Against the backdrop of the counterculture unfolding in the 1960s, Ben Bradlee wanted a section that was "modern, vital, swinging."[8] Style replaced and expanded the "women's section," a motley assemblage of society gossip, recipes, and news for the homemaker. As Bradlee later described the thinking behind launching the new section: "We had become convinced that traditional women's news bored the ass off all of us. One more picture of Mrs. Dean Rusk attending the national day of some embassy (101 of them)

and we'd all cut our throats. Same for dieting, parties that had no sociological purpose . . . or reporting teas, state societies, etc."[9]

This was the time when second-wave feminism was gathering momentum and when the women's movement was taking shape.[10] Women were flooding the workplace and for the first time in US history, a majority of women had a job outside their homes.[11] The women's pages of the *Post* had made tentative steps towards reaching a more diverse female audience (instead of focusing solely on the wife/homemaker role), but the section also maintained and reified sexual segregation.[12] For Bradlee, who certainly was not a feminist, yet was attuned to the changing gender roles, the women's pages were out of sync with the broader cultural climate. In his autobiography, he wrote:

> Women were treated exclusively as shoppers, partygoers, cooks, hostesses, and mothers, and men were ignored. We began thinking of a section that would deal with how men and women lived—together and apart—what they liked and what they were like, what they did when they were not at the office. We wanted profiles, but "new journalism" profiles that went beyond the bare bones of biography. We wanted to look at the culture of America as it was changing in front of our eyes. The sexual revolution, the drug culture, the women's movement. And we wanted to be interesting, exciting, different.[13]

What seemed so well defined from the perspective of looking back, however, was a more complex situation involving different, at times competing goals. Bradlee clearly wanted the women's pages to disappear. In a memo he wrote to publisher Katharine Graham and his top editors he suggested that the "Women's section as it is now constituted be abolished."[14] However, if the representation of women and their interests was one concern, there was also the big issue of improving the "readability"[15] of the paper. Prior to Style, items such as reviews (art, movie, theater), television listings, news stories about the cultural scene and features, and similar non-political articles were scattered throughout the paper.

If Bradlee was the visionary of the Style section, David Laventhol was its mastermind. He was one of Bradlee's favorite assistant managing editors and had experience in designing newspapers to look like daily magazines, first at the *St. Petersburg Times*, later at the *New York Herald Tribune*. In the fall of 1968, he visited the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Detroit Free Press* to gain insights about their new lifestyle and women's sections. Comparing the *Post*'s content to the other papers, he noticed that the society coverage in the women's section held up well, while coverage of newly developing areas, such as fashion, consumer issues, entertainment, and pop culture especially needed improvement. The biggest takeaway from this reconnaissance trip was that

Laventhol saw great potential for a section that was tentatively called Life Styles. “What surprised me,” he wrote to Bradlee, “was the limited thinking that is going on in this area.”[16] He reported that the *L.A. Times* was thinking about innovation, too, but had not developed a concept beyond combining the entertainment with the women’s section. Not mentioned in his report but widely known during that time was the fact that the *L.A. Times* had begun experimenting with the idea of making a newspaper more like a daily newsmagazine.[17] Supported by publisher Otis Chandler, who had taken over the family business in 1960, and conceptualized by Editor Nick Williams, the *Times* promoted interpretation and analysis.

Laventhol praised Dorothy Jurney of the *Detroit Free Press* as “probably the brightest person in the US about conventional womans [sic] editing,” but added, “that ends it.” The only really innovative new section in US newspapers, in Laventhol’s estimate, was a Monday supplement by the *Chicago Tribune* called “Feminique.” Laventhol concluded his original report to Bradlee by saying, “I’m still trying to bring thoughts together, but I think that Fashion [a preliminary title for the section] in its original sense—the current styles of life—is what is the key to the whole thing.”[18]

Focusing on popular culture and capturing the zeitgeist of the 1960s was a relatively new concept for most newspapers of this era. They were slow in adapting to the changing cultural climate and the growing competition of television. Nevertheless, innovations in newspaper content and design had been going on for years and in a variety of places. Of particular importance was the *Herald Tribune*. Before it ceased publication in 1966, it was a laboratory for new approaches to daily journalism. Part of its innovative spirit was to bring techniques from magazine journalism to the newspaper. John Denson had led the changes after taking over as editor of the *Herald Tribune*, bringing to the new role his success in improving the standing of *Newsweek*, where he closed the gap between it and its dominating competitor *Time*. He made the *Herald Tribune* more accessible and readable by emphasizing that the format ought to accommodate the news, not the other way around. He introduced catchy headlines, typographical innovations, horizontal instead of vertical design, and allowed for plenty of white space to focus the reader’s attention. The content got more sparkle and the writing became more interpretive. James Bellows, his successor, toned down the sensationalism but followed Denson’s approach to make the paper more modern, more sophisticated and more fun than any other US newspaper of that era. Bellows created an atmosphere that gave young, untested reporters, such as Tom Wolfe and Jimmy Breslin, free reign to experiment with storytelling formats.[19]

Under Bellows’s reign, the *Herald Tribune* emphasized elements of news

reporting that indicated the shift towards a more narrative style of journalistic storytelling: describing people as characters not sources; using sensory detail for descriptions; telling stories instead of writing news reports.[20] One of the young staffers in Bellows's newsroom was Laventhol. "I don't think they ever said, 'Hey, we're in the television age; we've got to put out a different kind of newspaper,'" Laventhol later told a historian. "But they had things like a news summary on page one. They had . . . a tremendous amount of rewriting—a lot more like a magazine in many ways than a newspaper."[21]

The *Herald Tribune* ceased publication in 1966, but Laventhol carried over some of its philosophy to the *Post*.[22] The first indication this new approach to reporting would require a particular style of writing can be found in the prospectus, the detailed outline of ideas and suggestions for the new section Laventhol sent to Bradlee. Later the prospectus would also circulate among the Style staffers. Laventhol wrote that the new section would contain "[r]eports and evaluations [that] would probe the quality of this life—and the kind of things happening elsewhere that affect it."[23] The next section laid out the approach to writing:

> People would be stressed rather than events, private lives rather than public affairs. Profiles and interviews would be used frequently. Direct reports, with lots of quotes and hard, specific detail, would be emphasized. The tone would be realistic, not polyannish [*sic*]. Clarity would be the guiding principle of the writing style; it would be bright without being flip; sophisticated without being snobbish; informed without being "in."[24]

This description is notable because it indicates elements of the New Journalism—the combination of "hard, specific detail" with a "realistic" tone, yet also defines the particular approach of the *Post* and accentuates the contrast with some of the *Post*'s potential competitors and the freewheeling experimentation of some New Journalists such as, for instance, Hunter S. Thompson. When Laventhol rejected a Pollyannaish tone, he seemed to push back against other approaches to lifestyle sections with lighter fare and fluffier prose. The other juxtapositions are instructive as well. Even if Laventhol did not mention any specific media from which he wanted to set the *Post*'s new section apart, his characterizations can be understood in light of the media ecosystem of the late 1960s. It appears Laventhol wanted to position the new section as different from other models of that era: *Esquire* (flip), the *New York Times* (snobbish), and *New York* magazine (in).

It is important to note that while the New Journalism was not established in name until 1969,[25] its practices and techniques had emerged throughout the sixties. It introduced novel journalistic habits of interpretation and "organizational practices that connected writers, editors, and publications," as John

Pauly has argued. "The writers who came to be described as New Journalists styled themselves as interpreters of large social trends . . . , and magazines like *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *New York* sought the work of those writers in order to create an identity that would appeal to educated, upscale readers."[26] The same holds true for the Style section in general and its writers in particular. However, the specific context of the *Post* as a daily newspaper also created a different and distinct iteration of these techniques. Magazines had to plan months ahead to meet their specific production needs. Journalist and scholar Garry Wills described this process as "lead time." He wrote, "The best editors made a virtue of necessity—they learned to stand off from the flow of discrete items filling daily newspapers, to look for longer trends, subtler evidence. They developed an instinct for the things a daily reporter runs too fast to notice."[27] The *Post*, of course, had to figure out a different approach. The goal was the same, looking for "longer trends, subtler evidence," but simultaneously the Style section needed to be produced on a daily basis. Laventhol thought that, with a good concept in hand, organizational practices would develop organically. Progress, however, was very uneven in the early phase.

Implementing Style

The first *Post* Style section appeared on January 6, 1969.[28] Both in terms of graphic layout and editorial content, the section was a major departure from the past. The first edition of the Style section featured the first woman to be listed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. Two days later, on January 8, the front page of Style led with a story titled "Life Styles: The Mandels of Maryland," a profile of Marvin Mandel, Maryland's then-newly chosen governor, and his family.

> About 6:30 in the morning, Marvin Mandel, who was chosen Governor of Maryland yesterday, rolls out of the double bed and heads for the bathroom at the head of the stairs (a small bathroom, in light blue tile, with three toothbrushes hung from little holes around the edge of a cup sconce, a plastic curtain concealing and also indicating the bath-shower, and a neat medicine cabinet containing a tube of Prell, a can of shaving foam, a slot for used razor blades, and three or four jars and boxes but no medicines, not so much as an aspirin) and shakes off the five hours of sleep which is all he usually gets or needs.[29]

The story goes on to describe a day in the life of Governor Mandel: when he leaves (at 8 in the morning); when he returns home (at 7 or 8 in the evening), what he watches on TV ("any damn thing that's on"); what he reads (everything from *Time* magazine to the Book-of-the-Month selection); what he drinks ("Bourbon is Mandel's drink, but he rarely takes more than two, even during the conviviality of a legislative session."). As a family portrait

the story also quotes the governor's wife ("He couldn't find a thing in the kitchen") and his daughter ("They are very understanding parents. . . . For instance, they have never set up a curfew").[30]

The detailed description of the governor's bathroom was so shocking to a wider audience that the story was soon referred to as "the medicine cabinet profile."[31] Letters to the Editor clearly show that readers were not amused by the new style. "Really now," Cheryl A. Skuhr from Arlington wrote. "Surely there must be more interesting things to write about Mandels other than their type of bathroom!"[32] For Catherine Kaufman the article was "cheap and vicious." She called it "a hatchet job 'exposure through intimacy' . . . that should be done on someone who deserves it, not on a man just starting out as a very public figure.[33] And Dorothea Beall from Stevenson, Maryland, added, "Of all the things that I am interested in knowing about the new Governor of our State of Maryland, what is kept on his bathroom shelves is really at the bottom of the list."[34]

These early reactions indicate that the narrative style was irritating to a large number of readers. They were puzzled that stylistic elements such as descriptions of personal details were part of a story in the *newspaper.* In all likelihood, they would not have been so surprised had this been a magazine story or a fictional narrative. Apparently, this detailed description offended their sense of propriety, revealing a certain cultural tension. Their expectations of *what* a newspaper should report and *how* it should report were clearly upset. The story was novel both in terms of news content and with regard to what Christopher Wilson describes as the *story-form*.[35]

In contrast to previous profiles in the women's pages, this article was a family portrait, describing not just the first lady (as would have been the customary approach in the women's pages), but the whole family dynamics, including the grown-up children. Thus, the content was a novelty. However, this story also offers interesting evidence that illuminates how the Style section incorporated narrative, documentary techniques in daily newspaper reporting. Thus, the form was a novelty, too. With regard to the story-form, the profile employs an ironic tone, suggesting to the reader that the depictions of this picture-perfect family should be taken with a grain of salt. Signposts of irony are strewn throughout the text,[36] but the writer's tone of bemusement reaches a climax at the end: "Assembling in the living room, the Mandel family posed for a portrait, smiling gently and flashing unanimous gray-green eyes. Behind them stood a pair of marble stands topped with ivy bowls, a glass dish of wrapped hard candy by the sofa and, next to the fireplace, a small table bearing a vase of plastic yellow roses."[37]

This article is an excellent example for showing how the narrative frame

affects the representation and interpretation of the subjects. To understand how radically this approach departs from previous conventions in the women's pages, one can look at a story that ran just a few days before the Style section was launched. Under the headline "Mrs. Onassis Explores Scenic Charms of Greece" the article began: "Mrs. Aristotle Onassis and her children sightsaw the Greek isle of Lefkas on New Year's Day, clambering up steep hills and riding donkeys to view the beautiful scenery."[38] No wonder many readers could not believe their eyes when they were reading about the Mandels. Instead of deferential treatment, the story portrayed the mundane details of the governor's life and did not hold back on irony (some readers took it as cynicism). In contrast to depicting the bucolic life of the rich and the famous, this story was rich in what Wolfe called "status details"[39] (some of it almost to a fault). The story shows the private side of a public figure, but by using a narrative frame of irony, the author also cautions the readers not to trust everything in this staged setting and encourages them to look behind the façade of the polished politician. A few years later, the Mandels would again take up quite some space in the Style section, and by then, the image of the wholesome family had fallen apart. The governor left his wife for another woman, and his former wife had refused to leave the governor's mansion for five months.[40]

Emphasizing the function of the narrative frame is important in this context, because this story-form breaks away from a traditional news form that adheres to presenting the news in a supposedly neutral way.[41] The two frames differ in their focus. The narrative frame responds to the question, "How do we live?" The news frame, in contrast, answers the question, "What happened?" While the news frame prioritizes a particular event, the narrative frame zeroes in on the context.[42] The personal point of view (as told through a third-person narrator) of the narrative frame reveals a private life not so different from that of ordinary citizens. In the case of the Mandels, this rhetorical move decreases distance and difference, humanizes the subjects, but also mildly ridicules their personal tastes. This difference in style also reflects an evolution of different news values. The private becomes political and is subsequently scrutinized for consistency with or deviation from the public image. Even though the profile is more descriptive than narrative, it employs typical traits of narrative storytelling, especially the use of status details to craft a character.[43] Seeing and describing the world through the lens of narrative technique is very different from applying the "5 W's" approach of traditional news reporting.[44] As mentioned before, the Style section obviously did not invent the narrative form of news reporting, but the section systematically incorporated the narrative form into daily newspaper production. As such, the Style section expanded the space in which the newspaper offered stories

about people and how they lived.[45]

Laventhol had identified a specific mission for Style: reports and evaluations probing the quality of life. However, living up to this mission on a daily basis proved to be a continuing struggle. About two months after the new section was launched, Laventhol wrote in a memo, "style is. But what it will be continues to be a necessary debate."[46] He acknowledged that society news and the political party circle was being covered well, while the section had not sufficiently explored the lifestyles of "lost communities: kids, blacks" as well as "the middle-class suburbanite with a kid who takes pot."[47] In a four-month review, the lack of direction and focus continued to be an issue. Laventhol identified the prime reason for this to be a "philosophical" one: "[W]hat ought Style to be?"[48] The core of the problem was a conflict between women's news and lifestyle coverage. Neither area was done satisfactorily, he argued. The allocation of staff lay at the core of the problem. "Should we tie some of our top people on time-consuming takeouts," Laventhol wrote, "or should we aim first at covering the parties, fashion shows and other social and women's events that always are at hand in Washington—and then pursue other stories only as we have extra staff?"[49] Quantity of the staff, however, was only one side of the challenge. Its composition—old guard vs. young writers and editors—was the other.

The staff of the early Style section was a "raucous collection of young weirdos and rebels,"[50] seasoned writers who had distinguished themselves in other sections, and the veteran writers and editors from the women's pages. Nicholas von Hoffmann had made a name for himself as the voice of the youth and counterculture within the *Post*. He was assigned to cover arts and culture for Style. Myra McPherson was a young mother of two, writing for the *Star*, when one day in 1968 she got a call from Bradlee: "McPherson, get your ass down here," he said. "I've got an offer you can't refuse."[51] Michael Kernan, after thirteen years of being editor of the *Redwood City Tribune* in California and a year in London, had landed at the *Post* in 1967. He started out as a city editor, but because of his elegant writing he was assigned to the Style section.[52] Sally Quinn was hired without previous journalistic experience but quickly rose from a neophyte party reporter to a star writer specializing in what can be described as chatty, yet illuminating personality profiles.

Most of the writers were very much aware that they were part of an endeavor meant to shake up traditional journalistic patterns of reporting and writing. What they were doing "threw a grenade into old-school reporting."[53] Many of them considered themselves to be reporters *and* writers. The goal was to write stories like those written by Wolfe and Talese, the leaders of the New Journalism.[54] Another key element was "riffing" on a particular topic.

As Henry Allen describes the term, "the true essence of it is a jazz musician improvising on a theme."[55] The goal was to ring out the writer's point of view. For Judy Bachrach, who had started out as a television critic at the *Baltimore Sun*, writing for the Style section was "TV criticism without having to watch TV."[56] As a consequence, Style became notorious for its tone, which would run the gamut from snarky to satirical, from ironic to judgmental. At the same time, reporters, especially women, developed a reputation of being insightful and tough profile writers. The combination of Quinn, McPherson, Judy Bachrach, and Nancy Collins was called "Murderer's Row."[57] Graham recounted a conversation with Henry Kissinger, when he said: "Maxine Cheshire [the *Post*'s gossip columnist] makes you want to commit murder. Sally Quinn, on the other hand, makes you want to commit suicide."[58]

This kind of reporting was not only revolutionary for a "family newspaper," but also for a city that had been known as the "graveyard of journalism."[59] As a result, the evolution of the new section was followed with great interest, especially from Graham. Despite a certain involvement in the development of the new section (Graham sat in on brainstorming sessions), she was not all too pleased once it had rolled out. As she wrote in her autobiography, "I became more and more distressed over the direction the new section was taking, but I was unsure how to criticize constructively something I wanted to improve."[60] Some of the stories she found "'tasteless,' 'snide,' or 'grisly.'"[61] Then the pendulum would swing in the other direction and she would complain in a memo: "Clothes, fashions, interiors and the frothy side . . . are all taking a hosing . . . I am quite fed up with the really heedless eggheadedness of Style."[62]

Graham was actively lobbying for a female editor of the entire section (not just the women's news), "because as long as you have culture-happy editors who dislike and don't want women's news in, you are going to have this situation continue." And she added, "I can't see why we have to build ourselves a structure in which we have to fight and plead and beg to get into the paper (and I have never said this before in 5 ½ years) what I quite frankly want to have there."[63] Graham complained to Bradlee so persistently that one time he yelled at her: "Get your finger out of my eye!" As they both recounted later, this was the only heated fight they ever had.[64] As a consequence, Bradlee bought some time by getting Graham's assurance that she would not interfere for the foreseeable future.

Readers were not just upset with individual stories, like the one about the Maryland governor. Some generally disliked the new direction. Yet the section also created excitement by offering a fresh take on life in Washington.[65] A closer look at letters to the editor reveals how polarizing the new section

turned out to be. Edith Fierst, from Chevy Chase, was certainly not happy with the Style section. She wrote:

> For many years it has been my ungrudging custom to surrender the first section of the *Washington Post* to my husband when he arrives for breakfast about five minutes after I do, and to read the Women's section instead. Now this tranquil arrangement is threatened, as morning after morning I find nothing to read in the Women's section.[66]

She went on to complain that many articles embraced viewpoints of the New Left, noting that "most Americans do not subscribe to it." In her view, the "steady diet of articles blaming the 'establishment' for everything, often in a smart-alecky way, [is] neither enlightening nor interesting."[67] In contrast, in a letter published in response to Ms. Fierst's, Margaret E. Borgers praised the new section as a "daily treasure" and added, "I, for one, am greatly flattered by the *Post*'s innovation, with its implicit statement that women might be interested in something besides debuts, weddings and diplomatic receptions."[68] It became obvious that the one-size-fits-all approach of the women's pages had lost its appeal while it was not clear yet what the alternative would be. As much as the Style section was presented as a new approach, it retained some of its patronizing outlook of assigning women a segregated news section. One advertisement for the Style section described the "new" way of looking at women: "Themselves. What they hope for, work for, worry about and achieve. Personal, individual stories."[69] In this context, these letters to the editor reveal more than individual attitudes to the Style section. They illustrate a larger trend in the transformation of the readership, highlighting competing attitudes towards women's role in society.

Writing in Style

If newsrooms are always "tribal societies,"[70] the *Post* of the early 1970s was an example of how a new kind of tribe fought its way in, staking out territory and trying to win recognition. Initially, the Style reporters were either dismissed as unimportant or openly criticized as trivial by their colleagues on the metro and national desks. "We were like the combination of the drama club and the juvenile delinquents," said former Style reporter Megan Rosenfeld.[71]

An analysis of oral history interviews reveals a particular subculture that took root at the Style section and established different ways of reporting and writing stories for the newspaper.[72] A variety of factors contributed to this subculture. As much as Bradlee demanded impact and encouraged competition (both with other papers and internally between different departments), he was particularly fond of the Style section and shielded it from criticism. He was unrelenting when Style editors did not deliver satisfying results, as a

high turnover of editors in the early years of Style would evidence. However, he also provided a safe zone while editors and reporters were figuring out how to develop a new approach to daily storytelling. Even if the collective vision for Style needed time to take shape, many of the reporters brought a certain mindset to the task—the belief that good writing matters. Their styles differed widely. There were modernist writers, who included Mike Kernan, Phil Casey, and Henry Mitchell; and young rebels influenced by the New Journalism, such as Henry Allen, Tom Zito, and Bachrach. There were idiosyncratic styles, like that of von Hoffmann (provocative) and Quinn (unfiltered). These writers competed with each other but rallied around the notion of being the artists of the newsroom. As much as other reporters in the newsroom criticized them, they also knew the executive editor and a growing fan base recognized their writing. Working for the Style section carried cultural and social cachet. Viewing the Style section as a particular subculture is crucial for understanding how its new kind of journalistic storytelling emerged, survived, and expanded in a potentially hostile environment of traditional newspaper values.

The Style section was embedded in a newsroom culture that was uniquely Bradlee's. Even before he was the famed and glamorous editor depicted in the movie, *All the President's Men*,[73] Bradlee governed the newsroom with charisma, magnetism, and a visceral presence that would both instill awe and send chills down the spines of his reporters.[74] With an "absolute sense of stage presence" he would walk the newsroom, prowling in search for the newest gossip, as his reporters and editors remember.[75] The biggest validation was a slap on the back, a quick comment like "a helluva story," the undivided attention of the boss who was said to have the attention span of a gnat.[76] Bradlee was equally powerful when communicating his disapproval. He would admonish reporters with characteristic candor, asking, "What the fuck are you doing?"[77] The biggest punishment, however, was when reporters realized Bradlee was ignoring them. Fully aware that they were craving his attention, Bradlee would turn his back or avoid eye contact. "He could be really cruel and obtuse," remembers Henry Allen. "He was like a cat playing with a mouse sometimes."[78]

Bradlee ran the newsroom on a star system.[79] Backed by the full support of Graham, he pushed his staff to compete with each other, pitting editors against editors and reporters against reporters.[80] He called it "creative tension."[81] It was a "piranha atmosphere," the longtime editorial writer John Anderson said in an interview with David Halberstam. "It can be uncomfortable as hell, but it may also be very good for people. And Bradlee is very good at making them feel that they're right on the edge."[82]

The guiding principle for Bradlee was impact. As he described his vision in the late 1970s to Chalmers Roberts, a *Post* reporter and designated historian of the paper: "I want to have some impact on this town and this country. . . . I want to know they are reading us. Impact."[83] The most prominent examples of creating impact were publishing the Pentagon Papers in 1971, and then, of course, the Watergate burglary and the reporting that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. But Bradlee's craving for impact was not just so much motivated by a particular political stance or an overarching moral vision.[84] He just immensely enjoyed good stories about power, people, and gossip.[85] Typically, the stories he appreciated the most were tales about winners and losers, one person's rise and another one's fall, human drama expressed in terms of individual bravery or tragedy.[86] In other words, Bradlee was a big fan of narrative storytelling.

With this proclivity Bradlee set the tone for the Style section (as with the rest of the paper) even if he did not involve himself heavily in the day-by-day operations. As Larry Stern, one of Bradlee's best friends, noted in the late 1970s, Bradlee "is a good newspaperman but not a sustained one. He doesn't follow through."[87] Bradlee had a vision for Style but it was intuitive and not informed by a conceptual framework or specific guidelines. He encouraged and advocated a sensibility for more personal, magazine-like stories and enjoyed good writing.[88] What that looked like in a particular context was for the editors to decide and achieve. A story succeeded, it appears, when Bradlee felt it reached a wider audience and got people talking.

Because the quality of news writing was of special concern to Bradlee and his top editors, the style of writing was vividly debated in internal communications. One particularly illuminating document is a memo Eugene Patterson, then managing editor, sent to Bradlee in June of 1971. Not only does it highlight the importance of writing at the *Post*, it also demonstrates how debates about the New Journalism (debates that had been going on for several years at that point) found their way into the newsroom. Patterson was responding to an internal discussion about creating a statement of principles or set of standards for reporting and writing. Citing a piece from Tom Wicker in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Patterson argued against a singular institutional or professional formula. Instead he emphasized the importance of creating and nurturing an environment for reporters as artists.[89] Then Patterson discussed a piece by Wolfe about the New Journalism in the *ASNE Bulletin*, which was an excerpt of Wolfe's book, published later, saying, "it lays out exactly what constitutes the New Journalism, in which I [Patterson] happen to believe." Patterson embraced Wolfe's view that new nonfiction was as much about substantial and insightful reporting as it was about skillful writing.

Patterson concluded his memo by making a case for incorporating some of the New Journalism techniques into the production of the daily newspaper:

> We need fewer exhibitions of moralistic, committed, romantic thoroughly conventional essay and more courage to do an *artist's reporting of universal reality*, not personal commitment, and the skill to put it together. We are talking about artists, which is what the *Washington Post* ought to be about, and not about tin ears who try to write rule.[90]

Patterson's view was just one piece in a larger context of internal debates, many of which are not documented in a paper trail, but his perspective encapsulated and promoted particular elements of the *Post*'s culture that were constitutive for establishing the Style section. Patterson's philosophy was also consistent with key elements of Bradlee's newsroom culture: good writing and substantial reporting, a star system based on skillful writers, and a desire to stay ahead of current trends in journalism. Eventually, the Style section would come together along the lines that Patterson had envisioned: without a dogmatic formula but based on a shared understanding to do "an artist's reporting of universal reality."[91] Moreover, Patterson's intervention was also one of the earliest signs pointing at the larger importance of organizational practices that were consonant with Style's subculture. Far from being relegated to the margins of the newsroom, the style that Style cultivated was embraced and ultimately expanded into other sections of the paper.

As much as Style was gaining traction and a loyal following, however, the paper was still struggling to find a cohesive strategy. There were problems with staff morale and productivity. There was friction with other sections and confusion about where news about women should go. And there was a power vacuum when after a few months Laventhol left to become associate editor at *Newsday*.

The situation at Style was so bad that Bradlee requested a special favor from his friend Larry Stern—to take over the lead of the Style section. At about the same time, the copy desk was also infused with new blood: Henry Allen, Joel Garreau, and David Legge. Henry Allen, an ex-Marine and Vietnam vet with some journalistic experience at the *Wall Street Journal*, was living with some artists in a decrepit loft on Connecticut Avenue and needed a job to pay for having his car fixed.[92] Garreau had seen a couple of small, ambitious magazines flounder by the time he was hired in September 1970. The copy desk, led by Legge and manned by Allen and Garreau, asserted itself against the assigning editors of the old days (in the women's section) and took liberties in editing stories and creating daring page layouts.[93] Stern steadied the ship and laid the foundation for later editors. When he left after nine months, he sent a famous farewell memo, writing something along the

lines of "If anybody asks you what style is about tell them it happens at mid-passage and everything will be all right."[94]

After about five years, the basic elements of the Style section were in place: a consistent philosophy, a reliable workflow, and productive collaborations between reporters and editors. While Stern had created the foundation for Style's development, it was only with the leadership of editor Thomas Kendrick that the growing pains went away. Kendrick summarized the state of Style and his analysis of the road ahead in a memorandum to then-assistant editor Howard Simons. The conclusion of this memo is worth quoting in its entirety as it identifies key ingredients of the narrative news logic that had taken hold at that point. Kendrick emphasized the importance of keeping the section experimental. He advocated the serious, hard news relevance of its content. And he made a case for embracing the narrative news logic as a promising way to capture the human side of the news. He wrote:

> Style's original concept holds. A number of subsidiary definitions of Style's role have even forged [*sic*] since its inception and this is as it should be. For many, these definitions seem hazy and that too, perhaps, is as it should be. It may well be a fatal error to define Style's role too strictly. The freedom to experiment, to gamble, to make mistakes (but not to repeat them) is basic to Style's charter. Such freedom is necessary to avoid the cardinal sin of dullness.
>
> Finally, there should be an end to the attitude that Style is a soft, feature section that can be ignored or curtailed in the crunch. It feeds information that directly affects how people spend the leisure time that now occupies one-third of their lives. Style's quick success and broad readership are evidence that its focus on people tapped an unfilled need. People are going to have more leisure time in the years ahead and their cultural interest will continue to expand. The political-governmental tunnel vision that this paper sometimes exhibits should not blind us to the possibility that our readers may be telling us that "people are as important as facts," that Style's fare "much more than luxury."[95]

The *Post*'s publication of an anthology of the best stories from the Style section in 1975 was a testament to the evolution of the section into a cohesive entity that was actively promoted as innovative news content.[96] When Kendrick moved on to become the director of operations for the Kennedy Center of Performing Arts in 1976, Shelby Coffey took over the leadership of the Style section and became one of Bradlee's favorite editors. Style was established.[97] In addition, the *Post* had reached the peak of its reputation and cultural cachet. Stars and high society flocked to the Kennedy Center for the premiere of *All the President's Men*, and it was obvious the *Post* had made the

step from reporting the news to being in the news. Within ten years, Bradlee had elevated the *Post* from a "swamp town gazette"[98] to the hottest paper in the country. Moreover, Bradlee became a person of interest himself, and his relationship with Style star writer Sally Quinn only added to the mystique.[99] Writing for *Esquire* in early 1976, James Fallows portrayed Bradlee and the *Post* in all their glory. "In the past ten years," Fallows wrote, "Bradlee has remade the *Post* in his own image, making it, at different times, the most exciting paper to work on, the most interesting one to read, and the one from which wrongdoers had most to fear."[100] Fallows called the Style section Bradlee's "clearest personal monument"[101] at the paper:

> What Bradlee saw in the section was illustrated by the kind of gossip it purveyed. Society sections everywhere carry gossip of the normal variety—who has been seen with whom. . . . Style delivered this straight gossip by the ton, but it offered something else as well. It carried symbolic gossip, the novelistic details, the significant anecdotes that tell everything about the way the world works. So much of life within the government, so much of Washington society, could be explained as a game of manners—and Style did try to explain it.[102]

By describing and "explaining these "game[s] of manners," the *Post* went beyond the traditional role of the press and its task to provide, in the words of the *Post*'s early publisher Phil Graham, a "first rough draft of history."[103] When the Style section highlighted the life world of politicians and people alike, attuned to changing attitudes, values and practices, it provided a first rough draft of culture.

Conclusion

The Style section continued to be the "prototype for daring, literary-minded newspaper feature sections throughout the country,"[104] but in the early 1980s the *Post* also suffered the biggest embarrassment of the Bradlee era—the Janet Cooke scandal. The fabricated piece about an eight-year old heroin addict did not appear in the Style section, but it had larger implications for the practice of narrative journalism. The scandal pointed to some potential pitfalls of narrative journalism (ethics of reporting, sensationalism, melodrama), which became topics of heated debates throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The *Post* was a pioneer and prototype in introducing into the daily newspaper production the literary techniques used by the New Journalists. "[Style stories] should be evaluated not as literature but as journalism with all its inherent strengths and faults," Kendrick wrote in the introduction to the anthology of Style stories. "They carry both the bite of immediacy and dead-

line warts, the punch of individual perception and flaws exposed by time's perspective. Still, they hold up—proof that risks are worth taking, daily."[105]

Subsequently, the *Post*'s innovation had a major effect on US newspaper journalism in the 1970s and thereafter. It provided a template for documentary writing and role models for narrative journalism, and laid the groundwork for a broader effort to incorporate magazine-style storytelling into daily newspaper production. As other major US newspapers began developing their own "style" sections throughout the 1970s (*L.A. Times*, *Miami Herald*, *New York Times*), their indebtedness to the *Post*'s trailblazing became obvious.[106] This transformation created occupational structures and literary incentives so that young, talented writers would seek out careers in journalism. It also led to the formation of a readership that would embrace narrative storytelling as an integral part of their daily newspaper diet.

In reconstructing the beginnings of the *Post* Style section, this case study documents the emergence of a novel logic for narrative news, one which resulted in a distinct form of news in US newspapers. The approach of conceptualizing news as a cultural form[107] provides a lens for analyzing the production and reception of narrative journalism in an early phase of its expansion.

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Notes

[1] Cheryl A. Skuhr, "The Governor's Bathroom," Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, January 11, 1969, A12.

[2] Chalmers M. Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 401.

[3] James Fallows, "Big Ben," *Esquire*, April 1976, 144.

[4] Michael Schudson, "Fourteen or Fifteen Generations: News as a Cultural Form and Journalism as a Historical Formation," *American Journalism* 30, no. 1 (2013): 32.

[5] Michele Weldon has noted, "Observers could then contend that a definition of good journalism has evolved into journalism with a narrative approach more often than a straightforward, summary presentation of facts. Modern newspaper journalism is as much about telling memorable stories as about telling the news of what happened." Michele Weldon, *Everyman News: The Changing American Front Page* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 108. For a critical perspective of narrative journalism's predominance in US media, see Rodney Benson, *Shaping Immigration News: A French-American Comparison*, Communication, Society and Politics Series (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[6] John J. Pauly, "The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation," *Journalism* 15, no. 5 (2014): 590.

[7] Michael Schudson, *The Rise of the Right to Know: Politics and the Culture of Transparency, 1945–1975* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), 177. Schudson does not dismiss the influence of the New Journalism entirely. He is careful to acknowledge that with its "brash outlook and its bold attack on the stodginess of 'objectivity' in news [the "new journalism"] was inspiring to many young journalists then and in the decades since." Ibid., 177.

[8] As quoted in Roberts, *Washington Post*, 401.

[9] Ibid, 400–401.

[10] For an excellent overview see Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

[11] Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 161.

[12] Mei-ling Yang, "Women's Pages or People's Pages: The Production of News for Women in the *Washington Post* in the 1950s," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1996): 364–78.

[13] Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 298.

[14] As quoted in Jeff Himmelman, *Yours in Truth: A Personal Portrait of Ben Bradlee* (New York: Random House, 2012), 124.

[15] "We were concerned . . . with the overall readability problem: how do you best organize the newspapers so as to give the reader the maximum ease in finding and reading what he wants to read in the minimal time he has to do it." David A. Laventhol, "*Washington Post* Thinks Style is Stylish," *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, no. 533, August 1969, 13.

[16] David Laventhol, memorandum to Ben Bradlee, n.d., ECP. [Note: Documents identified as "ECP" were retrieved from the Eugene C. Patterson papers at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida. The collection is not formally processed yet and does not have a finding aid.]

[17] Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the* Los Angeles Times*, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: G. P.

Putnam's Sons, 1977), 326.

[18] Laventhol to Bradlee, ECP.

[19] Richard Kluger and Phyllis Kluger, in *The Paper: The Life and Death of the* New York Herald Tribune (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), quoted Ben Bradlee, chief of the Paris and then the Washington bureau of *Newsweek* under Denson, as saying "He [Denson] taught me the sizzle is important, not just the steak," 606.

[20] Kluger summarized a memo that national news editor Dick Wald had written and was circulating at the *Herald Tribune*: "The reporter's chief obligation, wrote Wald, was to tell the truth, 'and the truth often lies in the way a man said something, the pitch of his voice, the hidden meaning in his words, the speed of the circumstances.'" Stories were not so much about people as subjects but, in Wald's words, "'characters in the cast'" and observed "details that 'make up the recognizable graininess of life to the readers.'" The *Herald Tribune* "was looking for writing with 'a strong mixture of the human element,' articles that were 'readable *stories*, not news reports written to embellish a page of record.'" Ibid., 666, 671–72 (emphasis in the original).

[21] As quoted in Robert F. Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History of the Respectable Tabloid* (New York: Morrow, 1990), 448.

[22] Ben Bradlee and Katharine Graham had a vision to make the *Post* among the most important newspapers in the country. "The demise of the *Herald Tribune* helped greatly. Until then, the customary iteration of the best papers was the *Times* and the *Trib*. Now a vacancy existed at the top that the *Post* was preparing to fill," wrote Harry Rosenfeld in *From Kristallnacht to Watergate: Memoirs of a Newspaperman* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 106. Bradlee wrote in his memoir, "Every newspaperman worth his pad and pencil had mourned the passing of the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1966. Wherever they worked, journalists envied the *Trib*'s style, its flair, its design, its fine writing, its esprit de corps." *A Good Life*, 302.

[23] David Laventhol, memorandum to Ben Bradlee and Eugene Patterson, October 11, 1968, ECP.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Dateline*, April 1969, 43–47.

[26] Pauly, "The New Journalism," 592.

[27] Garry Wills, *Lead Time: A Journalist's Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), xiv.

[28] The Style section was part of a general reorganization of the *Post*'s daily presentation. See advertisement, "The *Washington Post* in 1969," *Washington Post*, January 5, 1969, H54.

[29] Michael Kernan, "Life Styles: The Mandels of Maryland," *Washington Post*, January 8, 1969, B1.

[30] Ibid., B1, B2.

[31] Helene Melzer, "Ben, Where Are You Hiding the *Post* Women's Section?" *Washingtonian*, April 1969, 53.

[32] Skuhr, "Governor's Bathroom," *Washington Post*, A12.

[33] Catherine Kaufman, "Governor's Bathroom," *Washington Post*, A12.

[34] Dorothea Beall, "Governor's Bathroom," *Washington Post*, A12.

[35] Christopher Wilson, online project, "Reading Reportage," Boston College. Access granted to the author.

[36] "One hallmark of a cohesive family is the dog, preferably one of long tenure. For the Mandels it was Sandy, a collie who was with them 13 years until his death a year ago." Kernan, "Life Styles," B2.

[37] Ibid.

[38] "Mrs. Onassis Explores Scenic Charms of Greece," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1969, B1.

[39] Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism*: W*ith an Anthology*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 32–36.

[40] See, for example, Judy Bachrach, "Barbara Mandel: Time to Move On," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1973, B1.

[41] My argument builds on Barnhurst and Nerone, who argue that the form of news has an impact on the content of news. "Form structures and expresses that environment, a space that comfortably pretends to represent something larger: the world-at-large, its economics, politics, sociality, and emotion." Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, *The Form of News: A History*, Guilford Communication Series (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 6.

[42] For a discussion of the narrative form see 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, Volume 15 in the Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 67–86.

[43] In literary terms, one could describe this technique as "tableau," a "description of some group of people in more or less static postures." It is worth noting that in nineteenth-century drama, this device was used in melodrama and farce, interesting connotations in this context of a political profile. Chris Baldick, "tableau," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), accessed May 9, 2017, http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1124.

[44] Jack Hart, *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). The 5 W's are who, what, when, why, where. Typically, "how" is added as a sixth element.

[45] Evidently, narrative stories had been part of newspapers before. Far from being a creation *ex nihilo*, narrative journalism had its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. When scholars of literary journalism describe this era, they emphasize a broad cultural shift in US culture. Connery, for example, talks about a "paradigm of actuality." See Thomas B. Connery, *Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 3–11. During the time of realism, journalism and literature turned their gaze to actual people and how they lived in an age of accelerating industrialization, massive immigration, and the nationalization of US life. It became important to describe the cities (especially

New York) with their sights and sounds, social life in all its complexity and diversity. Journalists and fiction writers were intrigued by the variety of immigrant lifestyles and their often abysmal living conditions. They were trying to make sense of the modern world, brought about by scientific innovation and economic expansion.

[46] Laventhol, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, February 26, 1969, ECP.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Laventhol, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, May 6, 1969, ECP.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Anonymous source (former Style section editor), interview with the author.

[51] Myra McPherson, interview with the author, September 8, 2015.

[52] See also Thomas R. Schmidt, "Michael Kernan: Poet and Newspaperman" (presentation, IALJS-10 [Tenth Annual Conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies], University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, May 7–9, 2015).

[53] Sally Quinn, interview with the author, September 3, 2015.

[54] McPherson, interview with the author. Various staff members referenced *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *New York* as literary influences.

[55] Henry Allen, interview with the author, September 12, 2015.

[56] Judy Bachrach, interview with the author, September 5, 2015.

[57] McPherson, interview with the author.

[58] Aaron Latham, "Waking Up with Sally Quinn," *New York*, July 16, 1973, 25.

[59] Roberts, *Washington Post*, 468.

[60] Katharine Graham, *Personal History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 414. She went on to explain: "I tended to apply a dentist drill too frequently instead of considering things cooly and not constantly complaining" (ibid.).

[61] As quoted in Roberts, *Washington Post*, 404.

[62] Ibid, 401.

[63] Katharine Graham, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, May 6, 1969, ECP.

[64] Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 300; Graham, *Personal History*, 414.

[65] Thomas Kendrick, memorandum to Howard Simons, October 15, 1973. Courtesy of Evelyn Small.

[66] Edith Fierst, "Woman's Point of View," Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, April 25, 1969, A26.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Margaret Borgers, "Flattered by Style," Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, April 30, 1969, A26.

[69] Advertisement, *Washington Post*, January 5, 1969, H54.

[70] Shelby Coffey, interview with the author, September 3, 2015.

[71] Megan Rosenfeld, interview with the author, September 17, 2015.

[72] This was an "organizational cultural analysis," as described by Gerald W. Driskill and Angela Laird Brenton, in *Organizational Culture in Action: A Cultural Analysis Workbook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), based on primary sources,

qualitative interviews with more than twenty newsroom veterans.

[73] Based on the book by the same title, by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1975).

[74] Martha Sherrill, "Ben Bradlee: His Sense of Style Brought a New Sensibility to Features," *Washington Post*, washingtonpost.com, October 21, 2014 [retrieved online]; David Remnick, "Last of the Red Hots," *New Yorker*, September 18, 1995, 78: "He is also the only editor who, even in his sixties, made women blush and men straighten their posture."

[75] Eugene Patterson, interview with David Halberstam, n.d., Halberstam Collection, Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, box 194, folder 3, 1. These characterizations were confirmed in several interviews with the author.

[76] Coffey, interview with the author.

[77] McPherson, interview with the author.

[78] Allen, interview with the author.

[79] Patterson, interview with Halberstam.

[80] Bradlee was also aggressive with hiring and firing. "With Graham's support, Bradlee was soon firing the lazy and the mediocre, the racist and the dull, and he then set about raiding topflight papers around the country for their best talent. The talent level in the newsroom began to shift, and so did the culture of the place." David Remnick, "Citizen Kay," *New Yorker*, January 20, 1997, 68.

[81] See, for example, Rosenfeld, *From Kristallnacht to Watergate*, 113; Fallows, "Big Ben," 144.

[82] John Anderson, interview with David Halberstam, Halberstam Collection, box 192, folder 5, 7.

[83] Roberts, *Washington Post*, 379. Jeff Himmelman quoted Haynes Johnson as having said in October 2007, "[Bradlee] was determined to make the paper into what it could be: A great paper. Exciting. You had to read it. It was just, impact. He wanted impact. You ought to have impact, goddamnit. Instead of this namby-pamby stuff. And impact isn't cheap. It ought to have power, authority, and be well written; it ought to say something, and tell you about something you wanted to know; and it ought to be displayed so you don't miss it. That's what it's all about." Himmelman, *Yours in Truth,* 106.

[84] Patterson, interview with Halberstam.

[85] Anderson, interview with Halberstam, folder 5, 15.

[86] Bagdikian, interview with Halberstam, n.d., box 192, folder 6, 14.

[87] Larry Stern, interview with Halberstam, n.d., box 194, folder 9, n. p.

[88] Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 302. See also end note 22.

[89] Patterson included an extensive quote from Wicker: "First we must get the best people to work as journalists . . . good writers in the broadest literary sense . . . who in the best sense are the novelists of their time. The other thing we must do, having got all these good writers, we must create the kind of conditions in which they can do their best work. We can't do that by imposing formula writing, by group journalism. We are talking about artists." Eugene Patterson, memorandum to Ben Bradlee, June 1, 1971. See also Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Bulletin of*

the American Society of Newspaper Editors, September 1970, 1.

[90] Patterson, memorandum to Bradlee (emphasis added).

[91] Bagdikian, interview with Halberstam.

[92] Allen, interview with the author.

[93] Ibid. Anonymous source, interview with the author; Paul Richards, interview with the author, September 14, 2015.

[94] Anonymous source, interview with author.

[95] Kendrick, memorandum to Simons, 7.

[96] Laura Longley Babb, ed., *Writing in Style: From the Style Section of the* Washington Post*: A New Perspective on the People and Trends of the Seventies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975). In the introduction, Kendrick wrote: "One certainty is that the old feature formula of a grabber lead, a lively if unfocused anecdote or two, direct quotes and a good kicker was abruptly exposed as curiously obsolescent, unable to cope with the cultural change and revival of individualism that was rolling across the country. That tide rose so high and fast in the '60s that daily journalism often foundered in its task of forging patterns from the chaotic data spewing out of newsroom teletypes." Thomas R. Kendrick, "Introduction," in Babb, *Writing in Style*, i–xi, ii.

[97] "Under Tom Kendrick, and later Shelby Coffey, the Style Section had gathered under one roof a unique collection of young 'new journalists,' like B. J. Phillips, Myra McPherson, and Nick von Hoffman, to name just a few, who wrote with vitality, imagery, and humor. They knew their subjects, and they shared their insights with great flair." Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 387.

[98] Allen, interview with the author; David Remnick put it this way: "To understand the scale of Bradlee's achievement, it is important to know something about the mediocrity with which he began. The *Washington Post* in 1965 not only had no claim to rivalry with the *New York Times* but could not even claim to be the best paper in its city. Ever since the *Post* bought out the *Times-Herald*, in 1954, it had been profitable, but as an editorial enterprise it still was simply not competitive. It was, like most newspapers everywhere, pretty awful." Remnick, "Last of the Red Hots," 80.

[99] Sally Quinn, *We're Going to Make You a Star* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

[100] Fallows, "Big Ben," 53.

[101] Ibid., 144. See also Jeffrey Toobin, "The Regular Guy," *New Yorker*, March 20, 2000, 99: "For more than a decade after Bradlee founded the section, in 1969, Style developed a distinctive voice—bitchy, funny, sometimes smugly fatuous, but always readable."

[102] Fallows, "Big Ben," 144, 146.

[103] Quote commonly associated with Phil Graham, without more specific origin.

[104] Jack Limpert, "David Laventhol, Ben Bradlee, and the Rise and Fall of Style," *About Editing and Writing* (blog), jacklimpert.com, April 10, 2015, http://jacklimpert.com/2015/04/david-laventhol-rise-fall-style/.

[105] Kendrick, "Introduction," in Babb, *Writing in Style,* v.

[106] As one example, see Edwin Diamond, *Behind the Times: Inside the New* New York Times (New York: Villard Books, 1993).

[107] "Reporters breathe a specifically journalistic, occupational cultural air as well as the air they share with fellow citizens. The 'routines' of journalists are not only social, emerging out of interactions among officials, reporters and editors, but literary, emerging out of interactions of writers with literary traditions. More than that, journalists at work operate not only to maintain and repair their social relations with sources and colleagues but their cultural image as journalists in the eyes of a wider world." Michael Schudson, "Four Approaches to the Sociology of News," in *Journalism: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* vol. 2, ed. Howard Tumber (London: Routledge, 2008), 57–84, 77.

Illustration of G. W. Steevens by Karl Litz

Literary Journalism and Empire: George Warrington Steevens in Africa, 1898–1900

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Abstract: It has been suggested that "for a few years at the end of the nineteenth century" *Daily Mail* correspondent George Warrington Steevens (1869–1900) was "probably the best known and most eulogized, and possibly the most influential, British journalist."[1] Descriptions of Steevens's writing read like definitions of a nascent literary journalism. A contemporary judged that "there were never newspaper articles which read more like short stories than his."[2] Steevens's work was typical of the highly commercial, personal, and sensational British "new" journalism of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This essay argues that it is high time that Steevens and his fellow "new" journalists are included in the history of literary journalism. However, that inclusion raises important issues about the relationship of literary journalism to power. British "new" journalism played an important role in securing public acquiescence in the aggressive imperial expansion of the last decades of the century. Historians variously refer to that phase of imperialism—in which major European powers seized territory at an unprecedented rate—as the "Scramble for Africa" or the "new imperialism." Arguably, it was the symbiotic closeness of the relationship between empire and "new" journalism that was the newest feature of the new imperialism. While modern literary journalism often challenges entrenched ideologies and deconstructs the discourses of the powerful, it is important to acknowledge that literary journalism has also played a part in the reification of those ideologies and the construction of those discourses.

Keywords: War correspondence – Victorian print media – New Journalism – New Imperialism – British Empire

On, December 13, 1899, at the height of the Boer War, the *Daily Mail*'s star war correspondent, George Warrington Steevens, fell ill, another victim of unsanitary conditions within the besieged South African town of Ladysmith. Enteric fever was diagnosed; despite prompt treatment, it worsened. However, by early January, the crisis appeared to have passed. Steevens remained confined to his bed but was "able to attend to some of his journalistic duties."[3] An attending doctor had hopes that a full recovery might not be far off. However, on January 15 Steevens suffered a relapse and died late in the afternoon. In the estimation of the Australian scholar Simon During, Steevens had been "the most famous journalist of his time."[4] Laurence Davies has pointed out that Steevens was the most profitable author on the lists of the House of Blackwood at the time of his death.[5] Certainly, after Steevens's death a veritable outpouring of eulogy augmented and burnished an already considerable reputation. Roger T. Stearn suggested that "for a few years at the end of the nineteenth century," Steevens was "probably the best known and most eulogized, and possibly the most influential, British journalist."[6] Winston Churchill judged him to be "the brightest intellect yet sacrificed by this war."[7] Even Kitchener of Khartoum, as a rule no friend to war correspondents following his armies in the field, expressed his profound regret at Steevens's passing.

Vernon Blackburn, who edited and completed Steevens's last volume, *Capetown to Ladysmith: An Unfinished Record of the South African War*, described him as an "extraordinary journalist" whose combination of "scholarship with a vigorous sense of vitality brought about a unique thing in modern journalism." Blackburn adds that "he was the pioneer, he was the inventor, of the particular method which he practised."[8] In particular, Blackburn praises the balance in Steevens's prose of "vigour," "vividness," and "brilliance," with "sparseness," "slimness," and "austerity."[9] Perhaps with the ease of future scholarship in mind, Blackburn collated the reflections of other writers in the final chapter of *Capetown to Ladysmith*. One of those quoted commends Steevens's "scarcely exampled grasp and power of literary impressionism" and notes that it was Steevens's "pen that had taught us to see and comprehend India and Egypt and the reconquest of the Soudan."[10] Another commentator called his style "cinematographic,"[11] while a third witness called by Blackburn asserts, "There never were newspaper articles that read more like short stories than his, and at the same time there never were newspaper articles that gave a more convincing impression that the thing happened as the writer described it." [12]

The glowing assessments of Steevens's contemporaries read almost as definitions of a nascent literary journalism. This is an observation of no small

importance. Steevens's writing was an important contribution to the development of the British new journalism of the late-nineteenth century.[13] The term new journalism is usually traced to Matthew Arnold's use of it in an 1887 article for *Nineteenth Century*.[14] Arnold intended the term pejoratively, commending the "ability, novelty, variety, sensation, [and] generous instincts" to be found in the new style of writing but simultaneously deploring it as "*feather-brained*."[15] Notwithstanding Arnold's disapproval, the personal tone, accessibility, and sensationalism of the new journalism revolutionized British print culture and facilitated extraordinary commercial success. The *Daily Mail*, which employed Steevens, was the most successful of the new journals in commercial terms. Founded in 1896, it reached almost a million readers in 1901 during the second Boer War.[16] Yet, despite its importance for the history of journalism in Britain, the new journalism has attracted comparatively little attention from literary journalism specialists. Isabel Soares's work has been a notable exception, exploring the work of the Portuguese counterparts to the British new journalists of the late-nineteenth century. Notably, Soares observes that the new journalism of the period might be considered a "proto-literary journalism."[17] Soares's contributions are valuable; yet in exploring the links between Portugal and Britain her work underlines the absence of sustained engagement with British new journalism by academics working in the field of literary journalism. There are doubtless many reasons for this. The particular closeness of transatlantic literary culture can make it harder to identify distinct developments, for example. And, as Jenny McKay has argued, a lingering conservatism too often haunts both the literary academy and public discourse in the United Kingdom when it comes to matters journalistic.[18] This article aims to redress the balance both by showing how a special correspondent like Steevens fits into the history of literary journalism and by exploring the consequences of acknowledging late-Victorian, British special correspondents as a key part of that history. For such an inclusion must have consequences. Literary journalism has challenged establishments and championed the dispossessed—but it has also served empires and reified the ideologies of the powerful.

New Journalism, New Imperialism

The role of Britain's late-Victorian new journalism in fostering support for imperial expansion may well help to account for its absence from existing histories of literary journalism. It sits uneasily, after all, with the social campaigning associated with North American literary journalism of the same period, yet it makes it all the more important that room is made in histories of the form to confront the issues it presents. Those eminent historians of

literary journalism, John Hartsock and Norman Sims, have approached the discipline as a North American form and have written its history with a distinct American accent. This is not a criticism of their work: Hartsock's seminal history of the discipline is, after all, entitled *A History of American Literary Journalism*, while Sims's *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* is published in the Medill School of Journalism's Visions of the American Press series. It would be perverse to object to the limits scholars must necessarily set on their work. And, importantly, both books roam beyond the borders of the United States to acknowledge or establish a lineage of precursors to literary journalism dating back as far as the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century works of Aphra Behn and Daniel Defoe, taking in Boswell's biography of Samuel Johnson, Edward Ward's sketches in the *London Spy*, and Addison and Steele's work for the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*.[19] Nevertheless, the emergence of British new journalism in the late-nineteenth century has yet to receive the full attention it deserves from literary journalism scholars.[20] Men such as Steevens, who knew the United States well after covering the 1896 presidential election for the *Daily Mail*, and William Thomas Stead, editor of the influential *Pall Mall Gazette*, developed and refined Britain's new journalism during the 1880s and 1890s, their work drawing heavily on parallel and related developments in the United States.[21]

Steevens makes an excellent case study, partly because of his own interest in the politics and culture of the United States and partly because he, of all the special correspondents working in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century and writing in the style established by the new journalism, fits most neatly within the framework of literary journalism. By way of example, Vernon Blackburn in his eulogy to Steevens drew attention to another literary-journalistic feature of Steevens's work, the use of multiple perspectives: "If you look straight out at any scene," Blackburn wrote, "you will see what all men see when they look straight out; but when you enquire curiously into all the quarters of the compass, you will see what no man ever saw when he simply looked out of his two eyes without regarding the here, there and everywhere."[22] This is very much the sort of approach one would expect of the literary journalist, collapsing the distinction between subject and object by approaching an issue from every possible perspective. And yet, despite Blackburn's high praise and despite possessing an adeptness at rendering voice and personality rarely seen in the columns and volumes generated by late-Victorian war correspondents, Steevens did not quite regard the here, there, and everywhere, nor did he inquire into all the quarters of the compass. Or, perhaps more precisely, if he did engage in such truly comprehensive observation and research, he elected not to represent everything he saw from every angle.

As Roger T. Stearn has suggested of Steevens's Boer War correspondence, his reports are shaped as much by what they omit as by what they include.[23] On occasion, Steevens goes out of his way to construct absences, especially in his writing on Africa. It is important to recognize that the usually far-sighted Steevens was in no way unusual in suffering from a distinctively Anglocentric myopia when it came to matters imperial. As I have argued at greater length elsewhere, many of the characteristic features of the new journalism, including a personal tone, an accessible style, a tendency towards the sensational, and a campaigning impulse, were also the signature traits of the newspaper discourse on Britain's imperial adventures.[24]

In Britain, the aggressive phase of formal imperialism, running from the early 1880s to the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, which came to be known as the new imperialism, emerged in symbiotic closeness with the new journalism. As Soares has put it, "Empire fuelled the press."[25] One might legitimately add that the press also fuelled empire. Historian Ben Shephard's formulation neatly expresses the relationship: "In the late Victorian period journalism was to imperialism as the tick bird is to the rhino."[26] Arguably, this close relationship with the press was the newest feature of the new imperialism. The period in which the new journalism emerged and flourished was also the period of the so-called Scramble for Africa (a phenomenon *almost* synonymous with the new imperialism), during which the African continent was divided up among the European powers with astonishing speed. As Niall Ferguson points out, during "twenty short years after 1880, . . . ten thousand African tribal kingdoms were transformed into just forty states, of which thirty-six were under direct European control."[27] A newspaper press hungry for sensational news did much to secure public acquiescence in this extraordinarily rapid imperial expansion. This is the context within which Steevens's writing about Africa must be understood.

The importance of the relationship between new journalism and the new imperialism of the period from 1880 to the outbreak of war in 1914 must not be underestimated. Perhaps the newest element of Britain's remarkable expansion in that period was the extent to which the willing print media were enlisted to report and endorse imperial adventures as a part of a thrilling news narrative.[28] While historians have debated the extent to which British imperialism was ever truly popular, a survey of the newspapers of the period reveals the intensive coverage given to events in the empire by publications of the new style. As the *Daily Mail* managing editor Kennedy Jones argued, "We realized that one of the greatest forces, almost untapped, at the disposal of the Press was the depth and volume of public interest in Imperial questions."[29] London's illustrated newspapers, notably the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated Lon-*

don News, relished the frequent opportunities to provide readers with exotic images of Africa and India afforded by active imperial policy. Various commentators have noted the stylistic and tonal closeness of imperial reportage and imperial adventure fiction by men such as Henry Rider Haggard. H. John Field has identified sources comparing Steevens's writing to that of Rudyard Kipling and G. A. Henty, while he himself identifies "Haggardism" in Steevens's work.[30] It would be difficult to overestimate the cultural and political importance of the relationship between new journalism and new imperialism, with their productive exchange of good copy and public support.[31] Paula Krebs has gone so far as to say that "hand in hand, the New Imperialism and the New Journalism brought Britain into the twentieth century."[32] It is equally clear that the preferred literary style of reportage adopted by leading special correspondents, including Steevens, had a part to play in that relationship. Recognizing Steevens and his peers as a part of the history of literary journalism makes good scholarly sense. Doing so, however, demands that scholars of literary journalism must confront the fact that the journalism which sustained and promoted Britain's imperial expansion is an integral part of that history. The very strategies and techniques that have made literary journalism such a powerful force in challenging vested interests and established hierarchies have also made it a powerful force in the service of empire and hegemony.

Steevens and the New Journalism

For many readers of Steevens's era none of this was a problem. W. E. Henley, Steevens's friend and colleague, described his transition from academia at Oxford and Cambridge to journalism on the *Pall Mall Gazette* magnificently—and apparently without irony: "Out of a past of books and prizes and debating societies and sentimental socialism, he came into an atmosphere of wit, and scholarship, and laughter, and sound Toryism, and the practice—the right practice—of affairs."[33] For others, however, that combination of scholarship and popular journalism was more problematic. "Journalist and scholar he was, both," lamented Blackburn. "But the world was allowed to see too much of the journalist, too little of the scholar, in what he accomplished."[34] The latter point is one that may well be familiar from more recent debates on literary journalism. In Blackburn's article, "journalism" had not quite lost the stigma attached to the word for much of the century. The definition of the journalist was a contentious issue through the second half of the nineteenth century, with the term straining to cover a wide variety of newspaper and periodical writing. Competing notions of journalism as profession and as vocation further muddied the waters.[35] The commercial success of the new

journalism brought additional challenges. As Curran and Seaton explain, that commercial success had come at the expense of radical publications and dissenting voices.[36] For Blackburn's readers at the turn of the twentieth century, then, journalism connoted populism and sensationalism. On the one hand, the journalist/scholar binary his piece seeks to establish plays into a familiar high culture/low culture—or "old" journalism/new journalism—contest; on the other hand, it also acknowledges the political and cultural shift experienced by Steevens and described by Henley. It is notable in this context that Steevens's first journalistic post was on the *Pall Mall Gazette* which, under the editorship of W. T. Stead in the mid-1880s, had come to epitomize the new journalism. Steevens was recruited to the paper in 1893 by the new and staunchly Conservative editor Harry Cust. This combination of the Toryism identified by Henty with journalism of the new style also characterized the *Daily Mail*, which was brand new when Steevens joined the staff in 1896.[37] There is no question that Steevens had exchanged academic idealism for journalistic worldliness; the sentimental socialist had become a forceful imperialist *by virtue of his move into the world of the new journalism*.

Steevens was a commercial writer who understood the necessity of adapting both style and content to the requirements of his audience. As Field puts it, Steevens "produced sheafs of copy and seven books in three and one-half years on the places, events, and people that Harmsworth anticipated should matter to the *Daily Mail* reader."[38] For Harmsworth's anticipated readers, as Kennedy Jones well understood, empire was often what mattered most. Sidney Lee and Roger T. Stearn have judged that Steevens's "political beliefs apparently shifted to the right, and became imperialist and concerned with defence" during the early part of his career in journalism.[39] Publications, including a volume entitled *Naval Policy* (1896),[40] which urged the need to strengthen Britain's fleet, and an article for the pro-empire *Blackwood's Magazine*, entitled "From the New Gibbon" (1899),[41] which warned Britons of the twin dangers of degeneration and imperial decline, give a strong sense of Steevens's politics in the period. Another *Blackwood's* article, "The New Humanitarianism" (1898) set out strident social Darwinist and imperialist views. In the latter piece, Steevens condemns humanitarianism, which "is throttling patriotism and common-sense and virility of individual character," and civilization, which restrains "the strong and bold."[42] Of empire, he remarks, "The naked principle of our rule is that our way is the way that shall be walked in, let it cost what pain it may."[43] This should not be misinterpreted as a critical, anti-imperialist sentiment. Steevens criticizes the hypocrisy of the humanitarians who promoted a more consensual approach to imperial governance, rather than the force and violence that he saw as essential to imperialism.

This was no abstract rhetorical position, either. Steevens had experienced war and empire at first hand, corresponding from the Greco-Turkish War in 1897 (where he worked alongside Stephen Crane and Richard Harding Davis), Egypt in 1897–98, and India and the Sudan in 1898. The ideological transformation of the sentimental socialist who emerged from the dusty conclaves of university life into the adventuring journalist who reached the peak of his success with sympathetic coverage of Kitchener's spectacularly bloody victory at Omdurman in September 1898 was apparently comprehensive (though as Phillip Knightley notes, Steevens was always conscious of "the difficulty in reconciling the glories of battle with its horrors").[44] Steevens's career yoked new journalism firmly together with British imperialism.

Tension between Ideology and Reportage

The apparent contradiction in Steevens's work between openly held ideological positions and reportage that seems to be poised in the moment of observation, declining to foreclose on meaning, has troubled scholars. That tension is noted almost universally in assessments of Steevens's work. Laurence Davies notes Steevens's "moments of ambivalence," his ability to write "not only what he sees but how he sees it," and his "[immersion] in the moment's flux."[45] Davies even goes so far as to suggest that Steevens shared "a literary kinship with the innovators of his time," including Joseph Conrad, Ford Madox Ford, and Stephen Crane.[46] Yet Davies also remarks on Steevens's "power of articulating or creating cultural master-narratives" and his rigid beliefs.[47] Lee and Stearn describe Steevens's writing as too often "hurried . . . insufficiently researched, impressionistic, dogmatic, and sometimes biased."[48] Field argues that his articles were just the kind of "predigested" journalism preferred by Harmsworth,[49] with little risk that the reader would miss the editorial line, but also acknowledges clarity, sharpness, adept use of paradox, humor, and unexpected effects in Steevens's prose. It is difficult to reconcile these critical positions. That difficulty is important because it reveals the extent to which Steevens's work embodied the central challenges faced by literary journalists. His writing cannot be satisfactorily dismissed as mass-market journalism, though that is a fair description in many ways. Nor can it be safely categorized in any traditional literary genre, despite his undoubted narrative and stylistic abilities. In Steevens's writing on Africa, these tensions are compounded by the ideological context in which Steevens worked and the imperial subject matter about which he wrote.

At the time the tension was not nearly so apparent. The literary quality of Steevens's writing, and his ability to convey sharp and fresh impressions of his experience, enabled him to shape his readers' responses to the scenes

described. John Simpson has commented on Steevens's "wiry, tough and conversational" prose, "with a biting wit lying concealed in it."[50] The ability with which he gave to his readers the impression of contact with Bakhtin's "openended present" granted Steevens's work a seemingly unassailable authority.[51] His immersion in the events he reported, whether a presidential election or a military campaign, helped to create a sense of verisimilitude. The very qualities that qualify Steevens's writing as a precursor to literary journalism are the qualities that made him such a successful propagandist for empire—in Lee and Stearn's judgment, one of "the most influential" of the period.[52] It was not simply a case of literary journalism being a useful tool for empire: The relationship worked both ways. The power dynamics of empire allowed Steevens freedom to develop his style. In his African work, Steevens pursues a strategy of erasure, scraping clean the surface of the continent to permit its re-inscription with his own narrative. In three major, volume-length engagements with Africa—*Egypt in 1898*, *With Kitchener to Khartum*,[53] and *Capetown to Ladysmith*—Steevens offers his readers Africa-as-palimpsest. Rather than providing a voice to his African subjects, he ventriloquizes them or renders them altogether voiceless; rather than establish identity he identifies miscegenation; rather than describing the distinctive features of landscapes he renders them featureless and indistinct. By these means, Steevens created a space for his own imperial praxis, a space in which the report could become the event and in which the reader's imagination might operate untrammelled. The power dynamics of empire facilitated the development of a creative, literary-journalistic style. In turn, that style perpetuated the same power structures.

Steevens in Africa

Steevens spent two key periods in Africa, reporting from Kitchener's campaign for the re-conquest of the Sudan in 1898 and from the front line of the Boer War in 1899. Britain's involvement with Egypt and the Sudan requires some explanation. Beginning in the 1870s British interest in the region was based on financial and strategic interest in the Suez Canal, but had grown into an informal administration by the 1880s, with Egypt governed for all practical purposes by a British agent. The Sudan was Egypt's colony—a colony of a colony—and leaders there chafed under efforts to eliminate the lucrative slave trade and a punitive approach to tax collection. When in 1881 a charismatic religious leader, Mohammed Ahmed, emerged and proclaimed himself the Mahdi, or expected one, religiously inspired rebellion quickly spiralled out of control. Britain's response was indecisive, hampered by the complexities of Egyptian politics and the challenge of deploying troops to such a

remote region. The deployment of General Charles George Gordon, popularly known as "Chinese" Gordon, to evacuate threatened garrisons in 1884 was disastrous, resulting in Gordon's death at Khartoum in early 1885 as a relief expedition fell agonizingly short of its goal. All this happened in the glare of a popular press ravenous for news.[54] Gordon's death was presented as a national calamity. Kitchener's meticulously prepared campaign in 1898 was widely seen as an act of vengeance. In rival correspondent Winston Churchill's phrase, Kitchener's campaign was "the last Act in the great Drama of Khartoum."[55] The last act was bloody. At Omdurman on September 2, 1898, Kitchener's Anglo-Egyptian army killed more than ten thousand of the Mahdi's warriors for a loss to themselves of just forty-eight men.[56] Steevens's reports are colored by the potent sense of events in Africa being a part of a wider imperial narrative. When the Boer republics sought to break away from the British Empire in 1899, there was a strong sense that this was simply a new chapter in the imperial drama, complete with the same principal characters and narrators—Kitchener, Churchill, Steevens, and others. The narrative quality of British imperialism—responsible for inspiring public enthusiasm for empire—produced and was a product of the literary journalism published by Steevens and his peers.

Some close analysis is necessary to support these claims. Rather than focus on Steevens's descriptions of combat and of fighting men, which have been widely discussed, this analysis focuses on his engagement with African people and landscapes.[57] Steevens's imperial values are at their most pungent in his descriptions of the African and Levantine people he encountered on his travels. Field has criticized Steevens for his "abbreviated caricatures of aliens" and argued, "A reader of Steevens is never forced to interact with the human material of his reporting because Steevens never gave him a sensitive, full rendering of impressions."[58] There is ample justification for this in Steevens's writing. In Egypt, the dockside laborers unloading mail sacks from his ship are described as "specimen[s] of the raw material"—the raw material of the British Empire, that is—and Steevens suggests that imperialism is justified by "Their very ugliness and stupidity."[59] The men are rendered wholly voiceless and formless in the curt prose of Steevens's travelogue. A stevedore becomes "a little wisp of brown ugliness" who "faded . . . to a spectre" before being "lost in the darkness of the ship."[60] The choice of language is doubly important. The otherworldly, spectral quality of Steevens's subject separates him irrevocably from the reader; the act of fading into darkness is a total denial of individuality. Steevens does not simply allow the figure to become lost in the bustle of the docks but instead merges him back into his physical surroundings. The man is a part of his continent, not a distinct being. These are by no means isolated instances of racial stereotyping. Elsewhere, African laborers

are “ghosts [climbing] up the gangway, more teeth gleaming devilishly out of demon faces, more dirty legs staggering into the lamplight under more mail bags.”[61] Under Steevens’s undeniably literary touch, African bodies are fragmented. Parts—teeth, faces, legs—replace the whole, while dirt, darkness (presumably both literal and metaphorical) and demonism are added to the marginal, spectral qualities noted above. The stylized, impressionistic approach creates a sense of freshness and immediacy, while the symbolic potential of Steevens’s impressions stimulates the imaginative engagement of the reader. Importantly, such an approach also has the effect of rendering the reader complicit in Steevens’s judgments. We see through his eyes and are expected to share in his worldview.

Steevens’s ability to communicate a whole value system in brief descriptions is a great strength of his prose, and his ability to argue through narrative is one of the features that help identify his work as an antecedent of today’s literary journalism. In a longer passage, Steevens sketches the scene as workmen on board a barge replenish his ship’s coal bunkers on the Suez Canal. The barge nears and Steevens writes:

> It seemed a great black raft, slowly warping itself nearer and nearer, and on it—what was moving?—by the Powers, they were men!
>
> Men they were, and the raft was an enormous coal-lighter; only which was coal and which was lighter and which were men was more than anybody could say. . . . They seemed to wear shirt and drawers and a rag round the head; but, again, which was clothes and which was man? Clothes and skin were both grimed the same black with coal dust.[62]

The lighter’s crew is consumed by the commodity they handle, indistinguishable from it. The very stuff that fuels modernity is ground into skin, clothes, and vessel alike. Once again, the non-European is figured as inhuman, scarcely recognizable, merged with their surroundings and accoutrements. The delayed decoding in the first sentence enlists readers’ participation in Steevens’s interpretation of the scene. As the lighter draws alongside, Steevens presents an increasingly dramatic scene: “Slowly and slowly, but nearer and nearer,” he writes, “howling and grinning, naked and black—till you thought the Canal must have opened and let up the sooty monster straight out of the Pit.”[63] So far are these men from Steevens’s Anglocentric vision of humanity that they are rendered otherworldly. Paradoxically, they are both consumed by modernity and characterized by a primal, mythic savagery. Straightforward racial commentary is linked with an ambivalent response to the imperial narrative of progress. The “howling” subjects of Steevens’s description are denied language: As Field has suggested, “surface physical traits

were made to tell all."[64] Steevens skillfully constructs the illusion that the scene is presented to the reader in all its dynamism and immediacy.

Steevens's ability to combine moments of ambivalence, in which meaning appears to be destabilized, with a clear ideological message is apparent elsewhere in his writing. A crisis of category is felt through Steevens's prose. Among the clientele of what he describes as "an Arab music-hall" in Cairo, Steevens finds himself unable to satisfactorily locate and define the origins and lineages of his fellow revelers. He explains to his readers that: "The modern Egyptian is crossed, they say, between Arab and ancient Egyptian or Copt, with a dash of negroid Nubian thrown in. The faces of these people illustrated the process—yellow, copper coloured, brick-red, chocolate, brown, black."[65]

The customers against whom Steevens jostles initially confound his system of imperial taxonomy. His solution is to exclude them from it. Instead of being Egyptians, they are the varied products of a multiracial corner of the Mediterranean. The streets of Cairo provide Steevens with ample confirmation for this view. He observes Turks, Armenians, Arabs, Italians, Greeks, Syrians, and French mingling as they go about their business. Such cosmopolitanism can have only one meaning for Steevens: "there are no Egyptians, and there is no such nation as Egypt."[66] As a result, the people of Cairo are denied a clear and stable identity. Stripped of any troublesome individual or corporate importance, they become the means by which Steevens can expound his theory of racial history, signifiers of a history from which they, as individual agents, are excluded. Imperial notions of race and identity are made compelling by Steevens's immersion in the scenes he describes and his superficially empirical observations.

It is on the streets of Cairo that Steevens develops his racial logic to its apparently natural conclusion. Lest any particularly slow-witted reader has failed to grasp the imperial message, Steevens spies a British soldier walking through the city. The soldier, he tells us, "is the first and last thing you will see in Cairo that is all in one piece and knows its own mind."[67] Oneness and wholeness are the privileges of the imperial Briton; Egypt is fragmented out of existence. As we are told late in the book, "Egypt is neither Europe, Asia, nor Africa: set at the corner of all three, it takes character from each, and overlays it with a filmy something of its own."[68] The refusal to concede any more than "a filmy something" to Egyptian identity is to construct a lack, an emptiness that requires filling. On one level the lack can be supplied by British imperialism; on another it demands the imaginative intervention of the readers, rendering them complicit in the imperial project. Steevens has created a space replete with interpretive possibility and closed down that space simultaneously. A dual colonization is at work in the text, a colonization in deed and a colonization in discourse.

Description and Imperialistic Negation

While Egyptian and African identity is variously denied, diminished, or disintegrated, the landscapes of Africa are either mute witnesses to imperial intervention, dangerous and intractable wastes, or simply blank spaces awaiting delineation, definition, and description. And above all, it is description that the African landscape awaits, for the ultimate function of all this denial of identity is to produce a space in which the act of reporting becomes the central event. As Simon During has put it, this is reportage at the point where "discursive ambiguity and distantiation begin to disappear—where the report knows itself as an event."[69] That knowingness is apparent in Steevens's topographical writing. The townscape of Wadi Halfa, for example, is presented not as a place with inherent importance but as a space on which to record the progress of Britain's involvement with Egypt and the Sudan. "To walk around Wadi Halfa," muses Steevens, "is to read the whole romance of the Sudan"[70] Not only does Steevens proceed to present a reading of the town as though it were a historical document, he also lays claim to the story it tells: "half the tale of Halfa is our own as well as Egypt's."[71] The town is co-opted as a narrative device, establishing key themes that underpin the book. As Steevens puts it, "From the shops at Halfa the untamed Sudan is being tamed at last. It is the new system, the modern system—mind and mechanics beating muscle and shovel-head spear."[72] Any previous importance of Halfa is effaced; the town is simply a background onto which Steevens can project his own narrative.

That narrative is partly the narrative of British imperialism and partly Steevens's own narrative. Perhaps predictably, the full description of Halfa has much to say about the mechanics of modernity—railways, workshops, supply depots, and the telegraph lines stretching across the desert. It is notable that the technologies that facilitated reportage are themselves the subjects of reportage. That focus on the extension of imperial infrastructure into an empty continent extends throughout *With Kitchener to Khartum*. Distances and measurements are essential features, allowing readers to follow the progress of the campaign. Steevens gazes along the length of a railway embankment that ran "straight and purposeful as ever, so far as you could see," through the Sudanese desert. In the far distance he perceives the tiny figure of "a white man with a spirit level."[73] Survey and division are the special tasks of the imperialist. "The native," Steevens tells us, "has no words for distance and number but 'near' and 'far,' 'few' and 'many'; 'near' may be anything within twenty miles, while 'many' ranges from a hundred to a hundred thousand."[74] The ability (or perhaps the inclination) to define, delimit, and describe territory indicates the right of the incomer over the land.

A single incident in the book illustrates the point beautifully. Steevens accompanies an advancing column, threading its way:

> . . . sleepily desertward through the mimosa-thorns. After a few minutes we came, to our wonder, on to a broad flat road embanked at each side. It could hardly have been built by scorpions, and there were no other visible inhabitants. Then, at a corner, we came to a sign-post—a sign-post by all that's astounding—with "To Metemmeh" inscribed thereon. We learned afterwards that the fertile-minded Hickman Bey, finding himself and his battalion woodcutting in the neighbourhood, had used up some of his spare energy and of his men's spare muscle in making the road and setting up the sign, the only one in the Sudan. At the time the thing was like meeting an old friend after a long parting.[75]

The lone signpost, on a road that ends as abruptly as it began, without reaching any destination, is freighted with symbolism. An incongruous reminder of home, it is also a statement thrust into the blank surface of the desert, a claim staked on the land. The presence of the signpost serves to emphasize the absence of anything else noteworthy to Steevens's roving eye. It also serves as an anchor for his judgments, a fragment of evidence for his imperial worldview that helps transform a personal narrative of experience into a carefully crafted piece of imperial propaganda. The power dynamics of empire allow Steevens space in which he is able to develop his individual brand of narrative journalism.

In his essay "Geography and Some Explorers," Joseph Conrad famously lamented that the blank spaces on the map of Africa, so enticing in his youth, had been filled in by the turn of the century.[76] Steevens's response to the same problem was to cleanse the meaning from the surface of Africa in his writing. In the concluding chapter of *With Kitchener to Khartum*, Steevens writes that "the Sudan is a God-accursed wilderness, an empty limbo of torment" before explaining that "the very charm of the land lies in its empty barbarism."[77] He later applied the same unseeing eye to South African terrain, too. Crossing the Karoo desert early in the second Boer War, he explains to his reader, "You arrive and arrive, and once more you arrive—and once more you see the same vast nothing you are coming from."[78] Once again it is this absence that is "the very charm" of the place—"the unfenced emptiness, the space, the freedom, the unbroken arch of the sky."[79] Steevens's Africa is a stage for imperial endeavor, its surface unencumbered by pre-existing meaning, the arch of sky like the proscenium of a theater awaiting the imperial actor. That actor is the special correspondent who provides a vicarious experience of empire for readers in the relative comfort of their homes.

Berny Sèbe has suggested that Steevens eschews detailed geographical

description in *With Kitchener to Khartum* in order to allow a clear focus on the serious cultural and commercial business of promoting Kitchener as an imperial hero.[80] It is, however, an older hero of empire, General Gordon, who becomes the indirect focus of Steevens's reflections after the capture of Khartoum. After the final victory at Omdurman, Steevens enters Omdurman and Khartoum. The urban landscape he records "was planless confusion," a "threadless labyrinth."[81] A single space within the city bore the traces of order. The garden, which had been General Gordon's before his death in February 1885, was a "pathetic ruin . . . . Untrimmed, unwatered, the oranges and citrons still struggled to bear their little, hard, green knobs, as if they had been full ripe fruit. . . . Reluctantly, despairingly, Gordon's garden was dropping back to wilderness."[82] The scene is replete with symbolism. Like a fallen Eden, the garden has returned to wilderness in the absence of the colonizer. Note that Steevens chose to use the word "wilderness" rather than "wildness"—this is a falling back into emptiness and absence, not into a state of nature.

In an oft-quoted passage, Steevens described Kitchener as "the Sudan Machine."[83] Simon During suggests that, rather than Britain's imperial foes, it is the "natural void that is the real technical challenge for the machine" in Steevens's writing.[84] On the contrary, there is nothing natural about the void described in Steevens's work; he creates it deliberately and comprehensively. As Sèbe reminds us, "commercial interest" as well as "ideological convictions" had an important role in shaping Steevens's prose.[85] An empty continent, reconstructed as an imperial theater with its inhabitants marginalized, allowed Steevens space in which to develop his own commodity—an individual style of literary journalism with the reporter at its center. It is hard to disagree with Field's argument that by interposing himself between reader and subject matter, Steevens creates for his reader "an insulating distance from alien things and people."[86] His is a reportage that deploys literary style to suppress truth, instead constructing a mediated Africa designed for popular consumption. Efforts by some of Steevens's contemporaries (notably Sir Charles Dilke) and by more recent critics to explain away the more distasteful aspects of Steevens's work as the result of the hurried conditions under which a special correspondent necessarily worked, or as a concession to pro-imperial editors and readers, are ultimately unconvincing.[87] Indeed, such analysis misses the crucial point. Style and content cannot be separated in Steevens's work any more than the literary and the journalistic strands of his writing can be teased apart. The opportunities afforded by British imperialism permitted Steevens to develop his literary-journalistic style, while that style enabled Steevens to perpetuate the ideological constructs of imperialism in compelling fashion.

Conclusions

Should any doubt remain about Steevens's place within the history—and it might not be too bold to suggest the *canon*—of literary journalism, it may be instructive to reflect on one final anecdote. Alfred Harmsworth who, as proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, had contracted (and perhaps persuaded) Steevens to cover the war in South Africa, was sufficiently affected by his death to bestow an annual pension of £500 on Steevens's widow and to endow a scholarship fund in the writer's memory as well as eulogizing Steevens in a powerful editorial.[88] Harmsworth also visited Mrs. Steevens to express his condolences personally. However, even while the pair was lamenting Steevens's loss, in a reportedly moving encounter, the dead writer's replacement on the *Daily Mail* staff was loitering in the garden, awaiting Harmsworth's final instructions. The "fierce-looking man in khaki" waiting outside was none other than Richard Harding Davis, whose reportage on the German invasion of Belgium in 1914 has secured his own place in the mainstream of the established historical narrative of literary journalism.[89] Steevens has a clear place in the genealogy of modern literary journalism.

The importance attached to the integration of Steevens and his fellow new journalists, who narrated British imperialism in such thrilling style, into the history of literary journalism is worth restating. It is tempting to conceive of literary journalism as a form ideally adapted to expose dominant ideologies and to challenge established power structures. Isabel Soares, for example, has argued convincingly that the personal engagement inherent in literary journalism, or new journalism, enabled writers "to expose the hidden and complex factors behind the Scramble for Africa."[90] Soares's analysis is accurate, yet as this reading of Steevens's work indicates, while literary journalism certainly exposed truths about empire and deconstructed colonial discourses, it also obscured truths and (re)constructed those very same colonial discourses.

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Notes

[1] Roger T. Stearn, "G. W. Steevens and the Message of Empire," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 17.2 (1989): 210.

[2] Vernon Blackburn, "The Last Chapter," in G. W. Steevens, *From Capetown to Ladysmith* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1900), 190.

[3] Vernon Blackburn, "The Last Chapter," in *From Capetown to Ladysmith: An Unfinished Record of the South African War*, by G. W. Steevens; ed. Vernon Blackburn (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1900), 155.

[4] Simon During, "Writing Outside the Book," *Cultural Critique* no. 16 (Autumn 1990): 150.

[5] Laurence Davies, "'Sideways Ending to It All': G. W. Steevens, Blackwood, and the *Daily Mail*," in *Print Culture and the Blackwood Tradition, 1805–1930*, ed. David Finkelstein (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 236, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctt1287w01.15.

[6] Roger T. Stearn, "G. W. Steevens and the Message of Empire," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 17, no. 2 (January 1989): 210.

[7] Winston Spencer Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), 477.

[8] Blackburn, "The Last Chapter," 156.

[9] Ibid., 157.

[10] Ibid., 166.

[11] Ibid., 176.

[12] Ibid., 173.

[13] For a discussion of the relationship between British new journalism and literary journalism, see Isabel Soares, "Literary Journalism's Magnetic Pull: Britain's 'New' Journalism and the Portuguese at the Fin-de-Siècle," in *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, eds. John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 118–33.

[14] Laurel Brake and Maryssa Demoor (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Academia Press, 2009), 443.

[15] Matthew Arnold, "Up to Easter," *Nineteenth Century*, May 1887, 638 (emphasis in the original).

[16] Matthew Rubery, *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

[17] Soares, "Literary Journalism's Magnetic Pull," 118. See also Isabel Soares, "John Bull Scrambling for Africa: A Portrait of the English at the Heyday of Empire," in *Profile Pieces: Journalism and the "Human Interest" Bias*, eds. Sue Joseph and Richard Lance Keeble (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), 137–50, and Isabel Soares, "Literary Journalism on War and Imperialism: The British Annexation of Egypt Viewed by Portuguese Eça de Queriós," in *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination*, eds. Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, vol. 2, Mass Communication and Journalism Series, vol. 15 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), 111–24.

[18] Jenny McKay, "Reportage in the U.K.: A Hidden Genre?" in Bak and Reynolds, *Literary Journalism across the Globe*, 47–60.

[19] John C. Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 24–25, 111–14; Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 1.

[20] Researchers from outside the immediate field of literary journalism have explored connections between fiction and journalism in British print culture in recent books that should be of interest to historians of literary journalism. See, for example, Doug Underwood's *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Matthew Rubery's *The Novelty of Newspapers: Victorian Fiction after the Invention of the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Joel Wiener's *The Americanization of the British Press, 1830s–1914: Speed in the Age of Transatlantic Journalism* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Andrew Griffiths's *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism and the Fiction of Empire, 1870–1900* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[21] See Wiener, *Americanization of the British Press*, for a substantial account of transatlantic influences in the period.

[22] Blackburn, "The Last Chapter," 157–58.

[23] Stearn, "Steevens and the Message of Empire," 224.

[24] See Griffiths, *The New Journalism*, *the New Imperialism,* 1–19.

[25] Soares, "John Bull Scrambling for Africa," 137.

[26] Ben Shephard, "Showbiz Imperialism: The Case of Peter Lobengula," in *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, ed. John M. Mackenzie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 94.

[27] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2004), 223.

[28] The expansion of European empires in the period was undoubtedly remarkable. Thomas Pakenham has provided useful figures to quantify expansion within Africa in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, of which the most striking are the acquisition of "10 million square miles of new territory and 110 million dazed new subjects." See Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa, 1876–1912* (London: Abacus, 2003), xxiii.

[29] Quoted in H. John Field, *Toward a Programme of Imperial Life: The British Empire at the Turn of the Century* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1982), 156.

[30] Ibid., 153–54, 174, 140.

[31] Public support, at least in the sense of writers lending their public voices to imperialism—though I find it hard to imagine that, as some historians have suggested, this did not translate into or reflect public support for imperialism in the broader sense. For such an argument, see Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[32] Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourse and the Boer War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.

[33] W. E. Henley, "Memoir," in *Things Seen: Impressions of Men, Cities, and*

Books, by G. W. Steevens, ed. G. S. Street (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1900), xvii.

[34] Blackburn, "The Last Chapter," 156.

[35] For a rich discussion of journalism as a profession in the period, see Mark Hampton, "Defining Journalists in Late-nineteenth Century Britain," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22, no. 2 (June 2005), 138–55.

[36] James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1988), 30–46.

[37] For fuller discussion of the new journalism and the *Daily Mail* see Griffiths, *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism*, 5–10.

[38] Field, *Toward a Programme*, 122.

[39] Sidney Lee and Roger T. Stearn, "Steevens, George Warrington (1869–1900)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 52:385.

[40] Lee and Stearn, 52:385. See also, G. W. Steevens, *Naval Policy with Some Account of the Warships of the Principal Powers* (London: Methuen, 1896), 267.

[41] G. W. Steevens, "From the New Gibbon," in Steevens; ed. G. S. Street, *Things Seen,* 21–36.

[42] G. W. Steevens, "The New Humanitarianism," in Steevens; ed. G. S. Street, *Things Seen*, 3, 12.

[43] Steevens, "The New Humanitarianism," 16.

[44] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Iraq*, updated ed. (London: André Deutsch, 2003), 57.

[45] Davies, "A Sideways Ending," 246–47.

[46] Ibid., 246.

[47] Ibid., 241, 247.

[48] Lee and Stearn, "Steevens, George Warrington," 52:385.

[49] Field, *Toward a Programme*, 189–90.

[50] John Simpson, *Unreliable Sources: How the Twentieth Century Was Reported* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2010), 28.

[51] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 7.

[52] Lee and Stearn, "Steevens, George Warrington," 52:385.

[53] This article uses the standard spelling of Khartoum except when reproducing the title of Steevens's 1898 book, *With Kitchener to Khartum*.

[54] For a fuller account of events in the Sudan, see Kwasi Kwarteng, *Ghosts of Empire: Britain's Legacies in the Modern World* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 217–30.

[55] Winston Churchill, "The War on the Nile," *Morning Post* [London], 31 August 1898, 5. For more discussion of the drama of imperial news reporting, see Richard Fulton, "The Sudan Sensation of 1898," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 37–63; and Andrew Griffiths, "Winston Churchill, the *Morn-*

ing Post, and the End of the Imperial Romance," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 163–83.

[56] Pakenham, *Scramble for Africa*, 546.

[57] For analysis of Steevens's writing about combat, see Knightley, *The First Casualty*; Griffiths, *The New Journalism, the New Imperialism*; Field, *Toward a Programme*; Davies, "'A Sideways Ending.'"

[58] Field, *Toward a Programme*, 161, 192–93.

[59] G. W. Steevens, *Egypt in 1898* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1898), 16.

[60] Ibid., 10.

[61] Ibid., 11.

[62] Ibid., 19–20.

[63] Ibid., 20.

[64] Field, *Toward a Programme*, 166.

[65] Steevens, *Egypt in 1898*, 39.

[66] Ibid., 58.

[67] Ibid., 59.

[68] Ibid., 275.

[69] During, "Writing Outside the Book," 141.

[70] G. W. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1898), 1.

[71] Ibid., 1.

[72] Ibid., 8.

[73] Ibid., 30.

[74] Ibid., 104.

[75] Ibid., 226–27.

[76] Joseph Conrad, "Geography and Some Explorers," in *Heart of Darkness: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism/Joseph Conrad*, 4th ed., ed. Paul B. Armstrong (New York: Norton, 2006), 273–78.

[77] Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum*, 325.

[78] G. W. Steevens, "The Army Corps—Has Not Left England," in Blackburn, *From Capetown to Ladysmith*, 12.

[79] Steevens, "The Army Corps," 12.

[80] Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 264–89. [Sèbe uses *Khartoum* rather than *Khartum* in his Chapter 7 title reference to Steeven's book "George Warrington Steevens, Blackwood Publishers and the Making of *With Kitchener to Khartoum,*" 264–89, 264.]

[81] Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum*, 300.

[82] Ibid., 315.

[83] Ibid., 46.

[84] During, "Writing Outside the Book," 155.

[85] Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa*, 264.

[86] Field, *Toward a Programme*, 192.

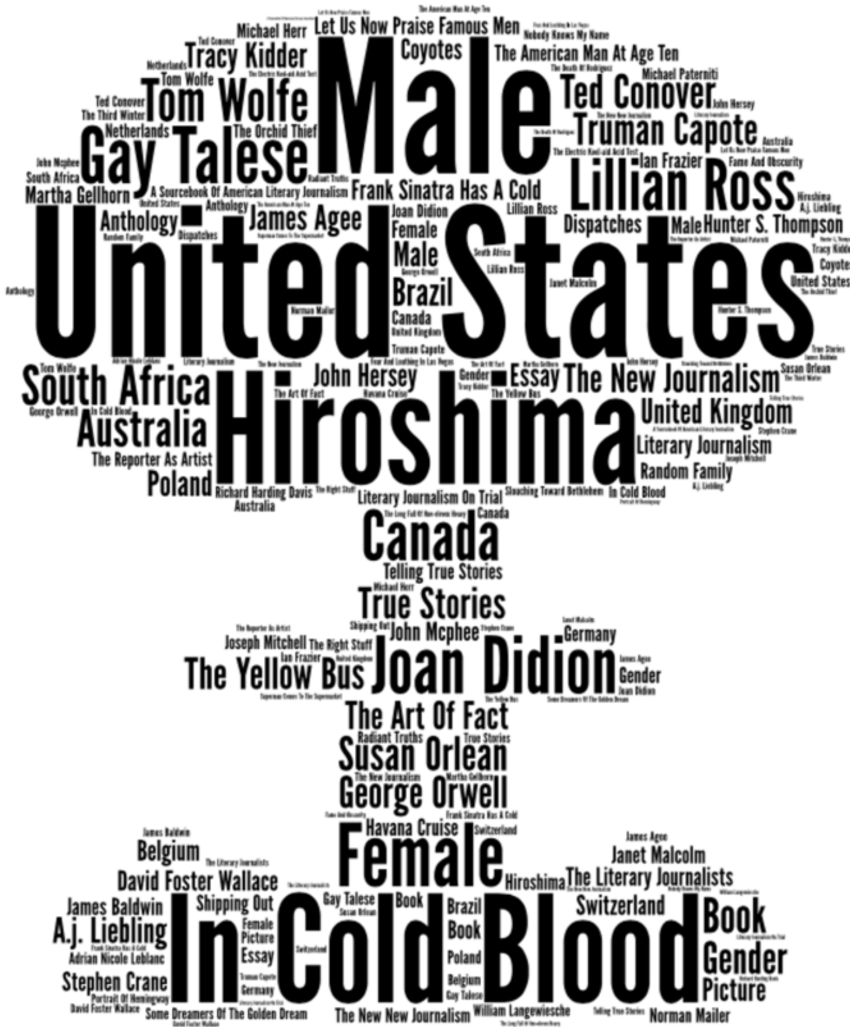
[87] Field's chapter, "Steevens as a Careerist in the New Imperialism," in *Toward*

a Programme of Imperial Life, 153–201, provides a good overview of this critical debate.

[88] Field, *Toward a Programme*, 182.

[89] Ibid., 198n77. See Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth's *Northcliffe* (London: Cassell, 1959) for a fuller account of this episode.

[90] Soares, "John Bull Scrambling for Africa," 148.



Word-cloud image by Anthony DeRado

Teaching LJ . . .

The Ammo for the Canon: What Literary Journalism Educators Teach

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Abstract: Webster defines the word *canon* as a "sanctioned or accepted group or body of related works." Despite criticisms suggesting that canons serve as tools of exclusion, they have staying power within academic disciplines and shape curriculum choices. This article presents the results of a limited study of reading lists submitted by members of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, an organization that stresses "inclusive" and "wide variety of approaches to the study and teaching of literary journalism throughout the world." The research focuses on addressing three research questions: (1) Does a literary journalism canon exist? If so, which writers appear most consistently? (2) Do geographic or linguistic biases exist in selecting from this canon? (3) Do gender differences exist? The results indicate that a canon of writers has emerged and that their writings are nearly always represented on course reading lists. Important study findings strongly suggest that writers whose language (English), gender (male), and geography (North America) dominate reading lists. Further, the investigation points to the prevalence of North American scholars and critics whose secondary works are most often used to define the genre. While the study does not offer concrete suggestions for broadening the scope and meaning of literary journalism or nonfiction, it does provide some evidence that may convince educators to reframe and reconstruct their reading lists to go beyond the list of "usual suspects" to include new writers and explore new approaches to the field.

Keywords: canons – elite sources – gender bias – linguistic bias – geographic bias – literary journalism

In her 2012 keynote address, "Firing the Canon: The Historical Search for Literary Journalism's Missing Links," delivered at the Seventh Annual Conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS), Nancy Roberts reminded her audience of mostly literary journalism educators that they should dig deeper and think beyond their usual source materials to find new examples beyond "the elite sources of literary journalism," suggesting that such an "[excavation] could reveal the ammunition to explode our formulaic approaches, resulting in a different history of literary journalism."[1] This implies that a standard history of literary journalism exists, and it relies on "elite sources," which Roberts identified as books, magazines, and newspapers, and well-known authors, such as Joan Didion, Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, and others.

What gives these elite sources the power to shape and define the genre of literary journalism, namely its history and epistemology, is their continued presence on the syllabi of literary journalism educators who come to rely on them as representing the best of the field. These writings have become part of a canon of literary journalism (and nonfiction). It is the purpose of this research to investigate that assumption while attempting to identify the canon's components. To do so, the reading lists of literary journalism educators are analyzed to identify the required books and articles written by practitioners and the anthologies that include their work. In addition, the research identifies the frequently used secondary sources that give a defining shape to the field or that commend to readers those journalistic or nonfiction writings that are considered literary. Notably, what this study does not do is address the question, "What is literary journalism?" Instead, it focuses on addressing these questions:

(1) Does a literary journalism canon exist? If so, which writers appear most consistently?

(2) Do geographic or linguistic biases exist in selecting from this canon?

(3) Do gender differences exist?

The word *canon*, to forgive the pun, is a loaded term, fraught with allusions to hierarchies, right ways of thinking, and cultural controversies. In fact, the word comes from *kan*ōn, the Greek term for "any straight rod or bar."[2] As it was sometimes applied to church doctrine, a canon defined appropriate Christian church literature. Later, as literate, non-secular cultures exploded in Western Europe, following the advent of printing technologies, universities and other academic bodies adopted the term to help distinguish disciplinary boundaries, especially in the humanities.[3] This was most often a top-down process that resulted in a body of work that, as elites argued, presented the ideal works or at least writings that should be emulated and admired. Thus,

canons became useful instruments for social groups who devised them as tools of "self-definition,"[4] as Charles Altieri has noted.

Canons have also morphed into cultural weapons, wielded to disarm and marginalize competing bodies of thought.[5] And, once created, they have remarkable regenerative powers to become what Barbara Herstein Smith identified as "esteemed objects" of culture that can "illuminate and transmit the traditional cultural values presumably embodied in them."[6] Inevitably, the culturally and socially powerful germinate mighty canons and tend to rely on reductive rationales to sustain them: "[T]he canonical judgments of dominant groups have been typically justified by an appeal to transcendent norms of judgment, as though history itself were the judge of works, or as though individuals could really transcend the conditions of their specific judgments."[7]

To a large extent then, the debate over canons has fallen into two main camps. Conservatives argue that a canon represents "permanent greatness" and standards. In other words, without a canon there would be no measure by which to judge other works.[8] The liberal camp argues that this is too narrow and that canons need to be more representative "of the true diversity of society and the wide span of its cultural heritage."[9] For this group, the singular problem with canons is that they most always set the criteria for what is included and what is excluded.[10] The purpose of this research is not to take sides on this debate. Instead, it asks whether a literary journalism canon exists that favors—as Jan Gorak cautions about canons in general—"a privileged set of writings" that affects curriculum choices while potentially ignoring others that might have equal merit.[11] The objective in this study is to identify that "privileged set of writings."

Method and Findings

This study began in 2012 with a goal of determining whether a canon for literary journalism might exist. In August and October of 2012, e-mail queries were sent to members of the IALJS, via the organization's listserv, requesting a copy of their most current reading lists for their courses.[12] In all, thirteen people (11 male, 2 female) responded to the first request, which produced interesting but very limited results. Unsurprisingly, this initial research indicated that, as a genre, literary journalism focuses on English-speaking writers from the United States.[13] A follow-up study began with two e-mails being sent to IALJS members in July and September 2013. While the follow-up study produced a 41% higher participation rate of 22 respondents (16 male, 6 female), the results supported the earlier findings, indicating a genre dominated by North American writers.[14]

In June 2016, another request was sent to IALJS members (372 mem-

bers), with a final reminder e-mail sent in September 2016.[15] As in the previous requests, respondents were reminded if they had already contributed to the study, they did not need to contribute again except to answer, if they wished, the following, additional questions:

(1) How many years have you been teaching literary journalism or creative nonfiction?

(2) What considerations do [you] take into account when you create your reading list (such as: gender, race, ethnicity, nationality balance, or "tried and true" writers)?

A total of 35 respondents contributed reading lists for this study. Two reading lists were excluded because the data were not clear or contained information that was not germane. As a result, the content of the reading lists of 33 respondents (21 males, 12 females) was analyzed (Table 1). As to their countries of origin, they are as follows:

Country		Respondents Total N
1.	United States	16
2.	Canada	6
3.	Australia	4
4.	South Africa	3
5.	Belgium	1
6.	Brazil	1
7.	Netherlands	1
8.	Switzerland	1
	Total	**33**

Table 1. Respondents by Country

Teaching Experience: Of the 33 respondents (Table 1), a total of 7 provided information on the number of years they have been teaching or have taught literary journalism or creative nonfiction: 25 years (1); 14 years (1); 9 years (1); 8 years (1); 6 years (1); 3 years (2). This represents an average of 9.7 years of teaching experience.

Text Categories (Table 2): An initial parsing of the reading lists produced 627 separate items for analysis. Of these, 27 items were eliminated from further analysis, including the following: podcast (5); film (3); graphic novel (3); short story (3); photography (2); book of fiction (2); non-podcast audio (1); children's book (1); query letter (1); speech (1); memo (1); and no data (4); leaving 600 total items that were divided into the following major categories: books, articles, secondary sources, essays, and anthologies. They are shown in Table 2.

The two major categories in Table 2, labeled "Book" and "Article," represent assigned readings by instructors who considered them examples of

Kind of Text	Total Readings
Book (Full and Excerpts)	227
Article (Individual)	237
Secondary	84
Essay	27
Anthology	25
Total	**600**

Table 2. Readings by Kind of Text

literary journalism. These categories will be further detailed in subsequent analyses. The categories labeled "Secondary" and "Essay" represent assigned readings that provide definition and explanation for the term "literary journalism" or words of wisdom about the crafts of writing and reporting. The "Secondary" category includes academic articles, reference materials, and guides, and interviews with authors. The "Anthology" category is notable because it contains collections of journalistic or nonfiction writings deemed literary by editors who consider them so.

The demographics of the 92 separate authors of books and articles identified from the reading lists' total 464 entries, were then analyzed to determine author countries of origin and gender (Table 3).

Author Demographics		**Author N**	**Authors % of N=92**
Gender:	Female	24	26%
	Male	68	74%
	Total	**92**	**100%**
Country of Residence:	United States	75	82%
	South Africa	9	10%
	United Kingdom	5	5%
	Canada	1	1%
	Germany	1	1%
	Poland	1	1%
	Total	**92**	**100%**

Table 3. Total Book and Article Authors by Gender and Country

The analysis indicates: (1) the majority, 74%, that is, 68 of the 92 writers who authored the books and articles listed on these syllabi are male, and (2) a majority, 82%, that is, 75 of the 92 writers, are from the United States.

The analysis of the syllabi findings also indicate (Table 4) that 27 of the 92 authors (29%), of whom 6 are female and 21, male, were included in 5 or more reading lists. Of the remaining authors, 65 (71%), had 4 or fewer syllabi mentions and are not listed by name in this table. Authors with 5 or

more syllabi mentions produced 315 items or 68% of the readings assigned by the respondents and are rank ordered, from highest number of publications to least:

Author*		Gender M / F		Country of Origin or Residence?	Total Syllabi Mentions
1.	Didion, Joan		F	United States	32
2.	Talese, Gay	M		United States	24
3.	Ross, Lillian		F	United States	22
4.	Wolfe, Tom	M		United States	22
5.	Capote, Truman	M		United States	17
6.	Conover, Ted	M		United States	14
7.	Orlean, Susan		F	United States	14
8.	Orwell, George	M		United Kingdom	13
9.	Thompson, Hunter S.	M		United States	12
10.	Wallace, David Foster	M		United States	12
11.	Kidder, Tracy	M		United States	11
12.	Hersey, John	M		United States	11
13.	Agee, James	M		United States	10
14.	Crane, Stephen	M		United States	10
15.	Liebling, A.J.	M		United States	10
16.	Malcolm, Janet		F	United States	9
17.	Langewiesche, William	M		United States	8
18.	McPhee, John	M		United States	8
19.	Mailer, Norman	M		United States	8
20.	Mitchell, Joseph	M		United States	8
21.	Gellhorn, Martha		F	United States	7
22.	Baldwin, James	M		United States	6
23.	Herr, Michael	M		United States	6
24.	Paterniti, Michael	M		United States	6
25.	Davis, Richard Harding	M		United States	5
26.	Frazier, Ian	M		United States	5
27.	LeBlanc, Adrian Nichole		F	United States	5
		21	6		315
	65 Authors	48	17	Mixed	4 or less

Table 4. Books and Articles by Author, Gender, Country, and Syllabi Mentions

The reading list data were further examined and organized by format, that is, book and article title, including author name, and then rank ordered according to number of times each title appeared.

Books

Of the 227 book titles identified, the analysis indicates the majority of titles, 187, or 82%, appeared in a single reading list. In Table 5A, which follows, are listed the number of book titles appearing in the reading lists as required reading (full book text; or excerpt, e.g., chapter) and the number of reading lists in which they appeared (22 additional books were noted in the

reading lists but were not required reading).

The books' countries of origination are as follows: 157 (69%) are from the United States; 30 (13%) are from South Africa; 17 (7%) from United Kingdom; 5 (2%) from Canada; 2 (<1%) from Australia; 2 (<1%) from India. In addition, the following countries were represented by a single entry: Argentina, Belarus, Colombia, France, Germany, Italy, Kenya, New Zealand, Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Russia, and Uruguay. One was considered "not applicable," and 2 are works of fiction and not considered for this tabulation.

Number of Separate Titles	Total Reading List Appearances per Title
187	1
25	2
7	3
5	4
1	5
1	11
1	16
227 Total	42 Total:

Table 5A. Book Titles by Appearances on Required Reading Lists

Table 5B gives the rank orders for the 15 book titles that appeared in three or more reading lists, as required reading either of the full book or an excerpt from the book:

Title		Author	Country of Origin	Total Reading List Appearances per Title
1.	*In Cold Blood*	Capote, Truman	United States	16
2.	*Hiroshima*	Hersey, John	United States	11
3.	*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*	Agee, James	United States	5
4.	*Coyotes*	Conover, Ted	United States	4
5.	*Slouching Towards Bethlehem*	Didion, Joan	United States	4
6.	*Dispatches*	Herr, Michael	United States	4
7.	*Random Family*	LeBlanc, Adrian Nicole	United States	4
8.	*The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*	Wolfe, Tom	United States	4
9.	*Nobody Knows My Name*	Baldwin, James	United States	3
10.	*The Orchid Thief*	Orlean, Susan	United States	3
11.	*Picture*	Ross, Lillian	United States	3
12.	*Portrait of Hemingway*	Ross, Lillian	United States	3
13.	*Fame and Obscurity*	Talese, Gay	United States	3
14.	*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*	Thompson, Hunter S.	United States	3
15.	*The Right Stuff*	Wolfe, Tom	United States	3

Table 5B. Book Titles by Author, Country, and Reading List Frequency

John Hersey's *Hiroshima* is the book that is most often required reading in its entirety, appearing on 11 separate reading lists. Capote's *In Cold Blood* appeared on 10 syllabi as required full-text reading while 6 excerpts from the book were required on other reading lists: thus, *In Cold Blood*'s total is 16. What is also clear is that book titles from the United States appeared most often in the reading lists, comprising 69% of the 15 book titles listed.

Articles

Of the 237 articles identified (Table 6A), the analysis indicates that, as it did with book titles, the majority (87%) of these articles appeared only once on any reading list. The following chart identifies the number of article titles appearing in the reading lists as required reading (only three selections were excerpts of a full article):

Number of Separate Titles	Number of Reading Lists Title Appears
207	1
16	2
8	3
1	4
2	5
1	6
1	7
1	8
237 Total	

Table 6A. Article Titles by Appearances on Reading Lists

Table 6B rank orders the 14 article titles that appeared in three or more reading lists as required reading (full or excerpted sections):

	Title	Author	Country of Origin	Total Reading List Appearances per Title
1.	"Frank Sinatra Has a Cold"	Talese, Gay	United States	8
2.	"The American Man at Age Ten"	Orlean, Susan	United States	7
3.	"The Yellow Bus"	Ross, Lillian	United States	6
4.	"The Long Fall of One-eleven Heavy"	Paterniti, Michael	United States	5
5.	"Shipping Out"	Wallace, David Foster	United States	5
6.	"Some Dreamers of the Gold Dream"	Didion, Joan	United States	5
7.	"Havana Cruise"	Agee, James	United States	4
8.	"Stephen Crane's Own Story"	Crane, Stephen	United States	3
9.	"When a Man Falls, a Crowd Gathers"	Crane, Stephen	United States	3
10.	"The Death of Rodriguez"	Davis, Richard Harding	United States	3
11.	"Slouching Towards Bethlehem"	Didion, Joan	United States	3
12.	"The Third Winter"	Gellhorn, Martha	United States	3
13.	"Superman Comes to the Supermarket"	Mailer, Norman	United States	3
14.	"The Kandy Kolored Tangerine-Flaked Streamline Baby"	Wolfe, Tom	United States	3

Table 6B. Article Titles by Author, Country, and Reading List Frequency

Also of the 237 articles identified, but not included in the table, the analysis indicates that, as it did with book titles, the majority, or 194 (82%), of the article titles appearing on the reading lists were from the United States. Other countries of origination for articles, included 19, or 8%, from Canada; 11 (5%) from the United Kingdom; 3 (1%) from Germany; 2 (<1%); 1 from Australia; 2 (<1%) from South Africa. In addition, the following countries were represented by a single entry: Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Russia, and Trinidad. Three were of undetermined country of origin.

Essays

The analysis includes essays, with 27 entries placed into this category. Essays varied slightly from the "articles" category in that they provide opinions and reviews about a topic or writer, or they offer instruction or guidance about the art of reporting or writing well (Table 7). Of the latter essays, 14 focus on the craft of writing or a particular publication, as follows:

	Title	Author	Country of Origin	Total Reading List Appearances per Title
1.	"Notes on the New Journalism"	Arlen, Michael	United States	1
2.	"The Defects of English Prose"	Clutton-Brock, Arthur	United Kingdom	1
3.	"The Novel Today"	Coetzee, J. M.	South Africa	1
4.	"Notes for Young Writers"	Dillard, Annie	United States	1
5.	"Encountering the Other: The Challenge for the Twenty-first Century"	Kapuściński, Ryszard	Poland	1
6.	"How I Write"	Langewiesche, William	United States	1
7.	"It Took a Village: How the Voice Changed Journalism"	Menand, Louis	United States	2
8.	"A Passion for Writing"	Orlean, Susan	United States	1
9.	"Why I Write"	Orwell, George	United Kingdom	1
10.	Foreword (*Village Voice Anthology*)	Stokes, Geoffrey	United States	1
11.	"Culture Is Ordinary"	Williams, Raymond	United Kingdom	1
12.	Foreword (*New York Stories*)	Wolfe, Tom	United States	1
13.	"The Art of Biography"	Woolf, Virginia	United Kingdom	1
14.	"The Modern Essay"	Woolf, Virginia	United Kingdom	1

Table 7. Essays by Author, Country, and Reading List Frequency

Anthologies

In examining the anthologies, the research differentiated those edited collections that contained the writings of various authors and those that contained only the work of a single author. Anthologies that contained the work of multiple, selected authors, including the titles in the reading lists examined, follow (Table 8). Of the collected works by a single author, there was a single reading list entry for the following authors: Albert Camus, Stephen Crane, Walter Lippmann, and Gay Talese.

	Title	Editors	Total Reading List Appearances per Title
COLLECTIONS WORKS BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS			
1.	*The New Journalism*	Wolfe, Tom	5
2.	*The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism*	Kerrane, Kevin and Ben Yagoda	2
3.	*The Literary Journalists*	Sims, Norman	2
4.	*America's Best Newspaper Writing*	Clark, Roy P. and Christopher Scanlon	1
5.	*The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction*	Lounsberry, Barbara	1
6.	*The Beholder's Eye: A Collection of America's Finest Personal Journalism*	Harrington, Walt	1
7.	*Best American Essays 2010*	Hitchens, Christopher	1
8.	*A Book of English Essays*	Williams, W. E.	1
9.	*In Fact*	Gutkind, Lee	1
10.	*Literary Journalism across the Globe*	Bak, John S. and Bill Reynolds	1
11.	*The Literature of Journalism*	Berner, Thomas	1
12.	*The New Kings of Nonfiction*	Glass, Ira	1
13.	*New Journalism*	Fishwick, Marshall	1
14.	*Next Wave: America's New Generation of Great Literary Journalists*	Harrington, Walt and Mike Sager	1
15.	*Radiant Truths: Essential Dispatches, Reports, Confessions, and Other Essays on American Belief*	Sharlett, Jeff	1
16.	*The Reporter as Artist*	Weber, Ronald	1
17.	*Telling Stories, Taking Risks*	Klement, Alice and Carolyn Matalene	1
18.	*The Writer's Reader*	McDonald, Willa and Susie Eisenhuth	1
19.	*Women Writing Africa*	Daymond, M. J.	1
20.	*Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women*	Nekola, Charlotte and Paula Rabinowitz	1
		Total	26
COLLECTIONS OF THE WORK BY A SINGLE AUTHOR			
1.	*Selected Essays and Notebooks* (Albert Camus)	Albert Camus	1
2.	*The War Dispatches of Stephen Crane* (Stephen Crane)	R. W. Stallman and E. R. Hagemann	1
3.	*Early Writings* (Walter Lippmann)	Walter Lippmann	1
4.	*Gay Talese Reader* (Gay Talese)	Gay Talese	1
		Total	30

Table 8. Anthologies by Editor and Reading List Frequency

Secondary Sources

The final category comprises secondary sources, which include an array of items, mostly book chapters from anthologies that define the genre of literary journalism or nonfiction, while explaining how a writer's technique and artistry combine to produce examples of. Of 84 separate entries, only 6 were cited in more than one syllabus, and they are as follows:

	Title	Author	Total Reading List Appearances per Title
1.	*The New New Journalism*	Boyton, Robert S.	4
2.	*Literary Journalism*	Sims, Norman and Kramer, Mark	4
3.	*Telling True Stories*	Kramer, Mark and Call, Wendy	3
4.	*A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*	Connery, Thomas B.	2
5.	*Literary Journalism on Trial*	Forde, Kathy Roberts	2
6.	*True Stories*	Sims, Norman	2
		Total	17

Table 9. Secondary Sources by Title, Author or Editor, and Reading List Frequency

Discussion

The study posed the following research questions:

(1) Does a literary journalism canon exist? If so, which writers appear most consistently?

(2) Do geographic or linguistic biases exist in selecting from this canon?

(3) Do gender differences exist?

The discussion begins by addressing Question 2: Do geographic or linguistic biases exist in selecting from this canon? The data suggest a resounding yes, with English being the most common form of linguistic expression among the items analyzed. Specifically, of the 227 books identified, 214 or 94% were written by writers from countries where English is the dominant spoken and written language. The percentage was higher for the identified articles, indicating 97% (229 out of 237) articles by English-speaking writers. In all, for both categories, 95% of the articles and books were in English.

As to a geographic bias, the answer again is yes: the reading lists revealed an overall preference for North American writers. A total 213 articles were from the United States (194) and Canada (19), representing 90% of the total number of 237 articles identified. As for books, a total 163 titles were from the United States (158) and Canada (5), representing 72% of the total 227 books identified. It is worth noting that South African writers were also represented, with 30 titles, or 13% of the total books. Again, North American writers made up 81% of the combined categories of books and articles. Importantly, the data in the category Secondary Sources suggested the dominance by U.S. scholars who have defined the genre. Of course, it is worth recalling that the majority of the respondents are from North America.

Question 3 asks: Do gender differences exist? The data indicate a strong bias toward the selection of male writers (See Table 3). Of the 227 separate book titles, men wrote 154, or 68%, of them, with the remaining 75 (32%) written by wom-

en. As for the articles, women authored 80 articles, or 34%, while men wrote 157 or 66%. While these averages do indicate a slight variance from Table 3, which accounted for the total number of separate authors cited, they still strongly suggest that literary journalism educators rely heavily on the works of male writers.

In addressing the first question, "Does a literary journalism canon exist? If so, which writers appear most consistently," Tables 4, 5, and 6 provide the most suggestive evidence that a literary canon does exist, and it is a canon heavily dominated by writers from the United States. As the reading lists indicate, writers such as Gay Talese, Joan Didion, Truman Capote, Norman Mailer, Susan Orlean, Lillian Ross, and others, whose writings were most often cited on these lists, are writers whose works have long been cited as exemplars of literary journalism. As indicated especially in Table 4, 26 writers produced 69% of the assigned readings.

Nine of the 33 participants in the survey also provided qualitative responses to the following question: "What considerations do you take into account when you create your reading list (gender, race, ethnicity, nationality balance, "tried and true" writers)?" (See Appendix A, Reading List Considerations). The responses provide some interesting insights about considerations made in constructing a gender-balanced reading list. One male educator from Canada noted, "For the past several years I've been mindful of gender. . . . I realized I had an unconscious bias toward 'guy' writers such as Krakauer, for example, and set out to re-balance the reading list to include 50 per cent women." The respondent also recognized that he had not yet "made this correction regarding race." Another respondent, this time a female educator from Australia, wrote, "I take into consideration the western tradition of the genre and then introduce samples from our region and beyond, if time permits. I choose works by both male and female authors, different ethnicities, nationalities and race. I also discuss the historical development of the genres by using examples." And still a third, a male educator from the United States, said he chose mostly "canonical" writers for his reading list but added, "I really encourage [students] to break out of the canon for their final projects, and that seems to be a good way to encourage diversification."

Conclusion and Thoughts

While this study claims neither to be exhaustive nor definitive, it does suggest the field of literary journalism and nonfiction has a canon, and a canon dominated by English-speaking writers, with the majority of them male and from the United States. As for the dominance of North American writers, this should not be surprising, given that the majority of respondents (67%) are from the United States or Canada. So, Roberts's words about seeking the "ammunition to explode our formulaic approaches" to the traditional canon are quite salient, especially if the canon is to be more inclusive (and interesting).

Of course, the selections appearing in this study have great merit and are worthy of inclusion on any reading list, suggesting that canons in and of themselves are not a bad thing and may represent, as Gorak argues, “a recurring human and aesthetic need.”[16] Canons also help recall a certain past of “selective memories of traditions or ideals,” as Altieri observed.[17] (However, this suggests that such canons can be restrictive and difficult to change.)

However, the challenge remains regarding how this canon can be expanded so that a “different history of literary journalism” can be revealed. While the work must begin to include more non-English speaking or non–North American writers on reading lists, those efforts often pose a problem of linguistic access. In other words, how can these writings receive fair judgment, given different literary traditions and obstacles to translation? How can one linguistic group understand the nuance and brilliance of another linguistic and journalistic tradition? Appendix B identifies readings from respondents whose lists contain literary journalism and nonfiction in languages other than English. Would translations of these works produce the same exemplars of literary journalism? Such efforts have succeeded with the nonfiction works of Gabriel García Márquez and Ryszard Kapuściński, for example, because both authors had close collaborative relationships with their translators and were comfortable with English. These writers prove more the exception than the rule, unfortunately. Journalism educators must rely on the expertise of their colleagues who can provide critical guidance in selecting well-translated writings. This is something the IALJS membership is ideally equipped to do. It is also something the organization should consider providing for its membership.

In addition to important issues of gender, race, nationality, and language, another pressing issue facing the genre is the digital age’s impact. By far, the greatest number of readings represented in this study came from traditional media sources such as books and magazines. However, the digital age’s current incunabula is breaking down the cultural power structure, giving almost anyone with a computer and an internet connection what Guillory calls “access to the *means of cultural production.*”[18] With so many digital sites producing good material, what will rise to the top? How will literary journalism educators find it? What will the canon look like years from now?

Finally, as organizations such as the IALJS, which notes on its website that it is “warmly supportive of a wide variety of approaches to the study and teaching of literary journalism throughout the world,”[19] wrestle and argue about new definitions and approaches to literary journalism, it is worth remembering that traditions and therefore canons change. They are, as William Cain noted, “not outside of history.”[20]

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Brian Gabrial is professor in the Department of Journalism at Concordia University in Montreal. His book The Press and Slavery in America *is now available from the University of South Carolina Press. Besides literary journalism, his other research projects concern race and nationalism in the nineteenth-century press.*

Country	Gender	What considerations do you take into account when you create your reading list (gender, race, ethnicity, or nationality balance ("tried and true" writers? for example)?
Australia	Female	I take into consideration the western tradition of the genre and then introduce samples from our region and beyond, if time permits. I choose works by both male and female authors, different ethnicities, nationalities and race. I also discuss the historical development of the genres by using examples.
Australia	Female	I take gender into consideration and also try to include as many Australian examples as possible. I've also sought out Chinese examples (in translation), as we have a number of students from there. US and UK examples, especially US. . . . I also try for a balance of new writers and the classics.
Brazil	Male	My criteria were both chronological sampling (showing different moments of literary journalism development) and diversity of narrative strategies (especially considering Eason's classification of realist and modernist approaches).
Canada	Male	For the past several years I've been mindful of gender. . . . I realized I had an unconscious bias toward 'guy' writers such as Krakauer, for example, and set out to re-balance the reading list to include fifty per cent women. Alas, I have not made this correction regarding race, although I did add an Indigenous author this term as part of Call to Action 86 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
Canada	Male	I like to add a fresh piece or two. . . . Plus, students get a pick for the final week and they almost always choose a recent feature. And it's almost always crime-related.
Canada	Male	I don't want to have a list dominated by white American men. I also aim to have 35–40 per cent women, and to have countries outside the U.S., Canada, and the U.K. represented. . . . While I love some of the classic literary journalism writers, this list also includes several who are younger than 45, and are still writing a great deal.
Canada	Male	In choosing the pieces, I wanted a mix of female and male authors, some solid Canadian content and a range of pieces that I hoped would interest fourth-year undergraduates.
United States	Female	They are dominated by examples of successful journalism (newspaper, magazine, and now digital) and journalistic techniques/strategies employed by American reporters and writers. The result is a fairly strong gender mix but, no doubt, a paucity of racial and nationality mix. However, each semester we read and discuss stories that are recently published or that reflect something specific we are exploring in class; that often includes pieces from diverse cultures and experiences.
United States	Male	I teach a pretty canonical list of writers in my history course. But then I really encourage them to break out of the canon for their final projects, and that seems to be a good way to encourage diversification. I'm very upfront about the need to broaden and expand the scope of the texts that we include. But at the same time, I need to cover certain writers.

Appendix A: Reading List Considerations

Author	Title
Alarcón, Cristian	"Cuando Muera Quiero que Me Toquen Cumbia" [When I die I want to touch cumbia]
Caparrós, Martín	"Entre Santos" [Between Santos]
Caparrós, Martín	"El Imperio de los Sentidos" [The empire of the senses]
Caparrós, Martín	"Por la Crónica" [By the chronicle]
Carrión, Jorge (ed.)	*Mejor que Ficción. Crónicas Ejemplares* [Better than fiction. Exemplary Chronicles]
De Stoop, Kris	*Ze Zijn Zo Lief Meneer*[They are so sweet gentleman]
Durnez, Gaston en Kamiel Vanhole	"Over de Borinage" [About Borinage]
García Márquez, Gabriel	*Relato de un Náufrago* [Story of a castaway]
Grunberg, Arnon	*Kamermeisjes en Soldaten* [Chambermaids ad Soldliers]
Guerrero, Leila	"El Rastro de los Huesos" [The Trace of The Bones]
Guerrero, Leila	*Los Suicidas del Sin del Mundo* [The suicides of the end of the world]
Jaramillo Agudelo, Darío, (ed.)	*Antología de la Crónica Latinoamericana Actual* [Anthology of the Current Latin American Chronicle]
Joris, Lieve	*Terug naar de Congo* [Back to the Congo]
Koelemeijer, Judith	"Het Zwijgen van Maria Zachea" [The Silence of Maria Zachea]
Lemebel, Pedro	*De Perlas y Cicatrices. Crónicas Radicales* [Of Pearls and Scars. Radical Chronicles]
Mak, Geert	"Hoe God Verdween uit Jorwerd" [How God Disappeared from Sydney]
Martínez, Tomás Eloy	"Ficciones Verdaderas" [True Fictions]
Monsiváis, Carlos	"De la Hora del Angelus a la Hora del Zapping" [From the Hour of the Angelus to the Zapping Hour]
Monsiváis, Carlos	"Manuel Nunca Dijo Adios" [Manuel Never Said Goodbye]
Poniatowska, Elena	*La Noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de Historia Oral* [The Night of Tlatelolco: Testimonies of Oral History]
van Casteren, Joris	"Een Vreselijk Land" [A Terrible Country]
van der Linde, Irene	"Het Veer van Istanbul" [The Feather from Istanbul]
van der Zee, Renate	"Een Meisje voor Dag en Nacht" [A Girl for Day and Night]
van der Zijl, Annejet	"Sonny Boy"
van Reybrouck, David	"Congo"
Verbeken, Pascal	"Arm Wallonië: Een Reis door het Beloofde Land" [Arm Wallonia: A Trip through the Promised Land]
Van Westerloo, Gerard	"De Pater en het Meisje" [The Father and the Maiden]
Vásquez, Juan Gabriel	"Entrevista con la Nueva Especie Humana"[Interview with the New Human Species]
Verhulst, Dimitri	*Problemski Hotel*
Westerman, Frank	"De Graanrepubliek" [The Grain Republic]

Appendix B: Works in Non-English Languages (not otherwise accounted for in the report).[1]

[1] Spanish titles listed are from a respondent (female) professor in Switzerland. Dutch titles listed here are from a respondent (female) in the Netherlands.

Notes

[1] Nancy L. Roberts, "Firing the Canon: The Historical Search for Journalism's Missing Links," Keynote address, International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, Toronto, Canada, May 2012, *Literary Journalism Studies* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 82, 90.

[2] Jan Gorak, *The Making of the Modern Canon: Genesis and Crisis of a Literary Idea*, Vision, Division and Revision: The Athlone Series on Canons (London:

Athlone, 1991), 9; see also *Greek-English Lexicon*, comp. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, new ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925/1940), s.v. "Kanon."

[3] John Guillory has argued that social conditions created canons because when men and women began to read they chose what to read. See John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 16.

[4] Charles Altieri, "An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon," in "Canons," ed. Robert von Hallberg, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Joel Snyder, special issue, *Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 1 (September 1983): 39.

[5] Ibid., 39. Altieri adds that canons can be problematic in that they determine the ideal while eliminating criticism of that ideal. (Who has the authority to oppose the perfect?) Canons represent a past that continually shapes our present, 48.

[6] Barbara Herrnstein Smith, "Contingencies of Values," in "Canons": 2.

[7] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 26. Mats Dahlstrom notes that editors, publishers, critics, librarians, teachers, and readers all participate in the creation of a canon. See Dahlstrom's review of *Text och tradition. Om textedering och kanonbildning* [Text and Traditions: On Text Editing and the Creation of a Literary Canon] in *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 134–37, 135.

[8] E. Dean Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), 25.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 6. See also Gorak, *Making of the Modern Canon*, 1.

[11] Gorak, Ibid., 6.

[12] The call read: As educators in the field, we speak of a literary journalism 'canon,' which often consists of the usual suspects (New Journalists, et al.). What I'm interested in finding out is do we really use such a "canon" in our classes? Further, I'd like to determine which readings appear consistently and which are 'outliers.'" Twenty-six respondents provided the following course names: Literary Journalism (14); Literature of Journalism (2); Long-form Journalism (1); Narrative Journalism (1); Creative Nonfiction (1); Narrative Nonfiction (1); Literary Nonfiction (1); Magazine and Feature Writing (1); Literary Feature Writing (1); Advanced/Intermediate Writing (1); Journalism and Ideas (1); Writing about Family (1).

[13] The results were presented at the 2013 IALJS-8 conference in Tampere, Finland.

[14] The results were presented at the 2016 IALJS-13 conference in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

[15] The text of the e-mail is as follows:

> Dear Literary Journalism Educators,
>
> I want to thank everyone who has contributed to my ongoing study that examines the readings and critical texts used in literary journalism or creative nonfiction courses. Recently, I was pleased to present findings of this research at the IALJS Eleventh International Conference for Literary

Journalism at Porto Alegre. Now I need your help again because I hope to produce an article for *Literary Journalism Studies* (Vol. 8, No. 2) that may be of interest and use to you. If you have not contributed to the study, I hope that you will consider doing so by sending me your most recent reading list. (Reading lists not written in English are most welcome!) I hope that this additional data will better represent the broad spectrum of our membership.

In addition, I hope to add a qualitative element to the research, so I ask anyone responding, including those who've already contributed to the study, to address briefly these questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching literary journalism or creative nonfiction?

2. What considerations do [you] take into account when you create your reading list (gender, race, ethnicity, nationality balance, "tried and true" writers)?

[16] Gorak, *Making of the Modern Canon*, 254.

[17] Altieri, "An Idea and Ideal of a Literary Canon," 37.

[18] Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 18.

[19] "About Us," IALJS, International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, accessed January 4, 2016, http://ialjs.org/about-us/.

[20] William E. Cain, "Opening the American Mind: Reflections on the 'Canon' Controversy," in *Canon vs. Culture: Reflections on the Current Debate*, ed. Jan Gorak (New York: Garland, 2001), 6.

Top: "Greenland Is Melting Away" (*New York Times*)
Bottom: "My Four Months as a Private Prison Guard" (*Mother Jones*)

Digital LJ . . .

Toward a New Aesthetic of Digital Literary Journalism: Charting the Fierce Evolution of the "Supreme Nonfiction"

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Abstract: Increasing mobile audience engagement with long-form journalism has prompted industry to update the digital design conventions originally established by the *New York Times*'s Pulitzer-Prize winning "Snow Fall" in 2012. Since 2015, such innovations have adapted to smaller mobile screens with a leaner aesthetic orienting multimedia elements in succession rather than crowding them on the same screen. Increased automated activation via scrolling has intensified the immersive experience of the story world, making its function as cognitive container of reader attention even more potent than in the first wave of products following "Snow Fall." With roots in *ekphrasis*, the word/image dialectic central to media theory, the aesthetic borrows from the photographic art movement of Pictorialism and from the cinematic montage method of Sergei Eisenstein. This new wave of innovative storytelling signals the latest attempts at capitalizing on engaged time without burdening users with excessive interactive elements. Legacy media have invested in major projects while start-ups less than a decade old have generated award-winning pieces, cementing their reputations as the latest powerhouses of literary journalism. Branded content is also on the leading edge of the genre as seen in the most recent productions of TBrand and WSJ Studios, the respective content marketing divisions of the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* that produced multimedia features to promote *Narcos* and *Orange Is the New Black* for Netflix, indicating corporate synergies between print, television, and online news media.

Keywords: digital long-form journalism – narrative aesthetics – mobile audiences – cognitive container – media convergence

"I trust the creative eye will continue to function, whatever technological innovations may develop." — Ansel Adams

In December of 2016, Harvard University's Nieman Storyboard spotlighted the *Washington Post*'s "A New Age of Walls" for crossing a new "storytelling frontier" in digital long-form journalism, thus designating it the most important advance in the genre's brief but fierce evolution since the landmark 2012 publication of "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek" in the *New York Times*.[1] Spanning "eight countries across three continents," its announced purpose is to delve into "divisions between countries and peoples through interwoven words, video, and sound."[2] Unlike "Snow Fall," the *Post* had several close competitors in 2016. Longform.org—a major aggregator of digital literary journalism, along with Longreads.com—gave top honors for its Best of 2016 list[3] to Shane Bauer's "My Four Months as a Private Prison Guard" from *Mother Jones*. His story—culled from his 35,000-word manuscript—was the most ambitious in the history of the magazine.[4] This chilling latter-day *Newjack* has prompted comparisons to Ted Conover's magnum opus and earned mention among the most acclaimed works of undercover reporting dating back to Nelly Bly's 1887 infiltration into Gilded Age madhouses.[5] Second after Bauer on Longreads' list is Evan Ratliff's "The Mastermind," an absorbing saga of Paul Le Roux's leadership of a prescription drug, narcotics, and money laundering cartel while working as a D.E.A. cooperative. The piece appeared in the *Atavist Magazine*, which Ratliff founded and now edits, a platform that has emerged as a major force among startups in the digital long-form industry along with Byliner, Narratively, and the Big Roundtable.

Screenshot of Evan Ratliff, "Mastermind," *Atavist*, March10, 2016. Ratliff is the founder and editor of the digital magazine that revolutionized longform journalism online. *Atavist* produced its first print anthology, *Love and Ruin* (New York: Norton, 2016) to showcase its status as the first digital-only publication to win the prestigious Feature Writing category of the 2015 National Magazine Awards.

This new generation to follow the first wave of digital literary journalism inspired by "Snow Fall" reflects the latest developments in technological and industrial media convergence. Pew labs have recently found that despite the small screen and multitasking often associated with cellphones, consumers spend about twice the time with long-form news compared with short form.[6] Industry has responded with stunning new products featuring unprecedented achievements in multimedia storytelling. Centuries of experimentation with mixed-media artistic expression preceded this radically hybridized form, beginning with the ancient Greeks' use of *ekphrasis* and extending through Richard Wagner's 1849 *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Now Wagner's aim of "uniting every branch of Art into the *common* Artwork"[7] appears more attainable than ever, promising to enable journalism to be conceived of as "literary, musical, visual, and performative, rather than just as one of these forms," as Owen Smith notes.[8] Through digital long form's advanced media technology, *ekphrasis*—media at the intersection of word and image—has never been more capable of closing the gap between the verbal and the visual so that the effect "begins to seem paradigmatic of a fundamental tendency in all linguistic expression," as W. J. T. Mitchell asserts in his seminal *Picture Theory*.[9]

As old media and their attendant narrative powers converge with the latest digital storytelling technologies, industry has moved into a heightened state of economic competition that has inspired some of the most innovative achievements in digital literary journalism. This research examines how the market for digital literary journalism has accelerated into an experimental phase marked by a distinct turn toward streamlined app-inspired design features desired by mobile audiences. Those innovations have introduced a leaner narrative aesthetic marked by careful editorial selection and placement of multimedia elements prioritizing storytelling over displays of technological prowess. Intensified focus on linear narration marks a major advance in digital long form's function as a cognitive container[10] captivating reader attention. This study reveals how the bourgeoning aesthetic of digital literary journalism is fueled by industry's quest for audience engagement, and how the form's largely unexplored adaptation of print conventions to cinema's montage method is the lynchpin of its narrative function. If "the house of journalism," as Robert Boynton envisions it, "is a big house" with many different rooms each with its own unique shape and décor bearing names like "'feature,' 'essay,' 'foreign report,' and 'book,'" the digital interface has introduced space for the "supreme nonfiction."[11] He reasons that if technological tools are designed to advance civilization and enhance the quality of life, and that if we expect constant improvements in media software and hardware devices that have raised the standard of quality for users' expectations for

Screenshot of Shane Bauer's award-winning piece that he speculated was the most ambitious published in *Mother Jones* (July-August 2016). Aggregator Longform.org selected it as the Best of 2016.

what they watch, read, browse, listen to or communicate, we should expect journalism to rise to commensurate new supreme heights.

The following examination of literary journalism's digital renaissance builds on Nora Berning's assertion that "online literary reportages represent an imperative counterweight to conventional journalism," one "essential both for our emotional and intellectual survival."[12] Attention then turns to the aesthetics of the *Post*'s "A New Age of Walls," followed by the form's broader adaptation of cinematic storytelling techniques. The conclusion considers the new—and surprisingly young—audiences the genre now attracts. The rising appeal and status of digital literary journalism testifies to Berning's assertion that "as part of the panoply of human communications, literary reportages on the Internet will, in the long term, serve as a fruitful alternative to tell stories in a captivating way."[13] The new aesthetic underscores how digital long form is undergoing its next "cool moment" since "Snow Fall," as then-editor Jill Abramson described the impact of its 2012 release.[14] The current media ecosystem has enabled journalists to perform "the double role of communicator and narrator to give shape to the information in a way that the print version does not allow," as Berning aptly observes.[15]

WSJ Studios, the content marketing division of the *Wall Street Journal*'s Advertising Department, produced this story for Netflix to promote its original TV series, *Narcos*. This is a screenshot of the piece that won the 2016 Webby Award for Best Branded Editorial Experience Site.

Literary Journalism's Digital Renaissance

The aesthetic of digital narrative has evolved distinctly toward an immersive experience with an in-app feel that combines cinema's enthralling sense of audiovisual wonder with literary culture's craft of the written word. New rooms in the house of journalism have recently opened, and literary journalism scholars have only begun to explore their transformation of the art of narrative. Alternative production processes—which involve nontraditional funding and partnerships—have spawned products that have transformed online literary culture.[16] Interactivity, for example, may be a benefit or detriment depending on how it is deployed. Because interactive elements in a long-form piece do not lend themselves well to iPhone use, industry has moved away from embedding them within the body of stories, placing them instead at the beginning or end of the text. After the denouement has settled in, readers can revisit the most salient points of the piece in an interactive format, as in the conclusion of WSJ Custom Studios' "Cocainenomics," a *Wall Street Journal* paid piece commissioned by Netflix to promote *Narcos*.[17] Its striking opening offers a pointer bearing the invitation, "click to interact" hovering near the letters of its title spelled out in the white powdery narcotic. Clicking, or tapping on a mobile device, enables the reader to move the snowy substance around the screen, breaking up the lettering, an effect both pleasing for its sheer feat of technological verisimilitude, and appalling to the reader's moral conscience. In this case, the interactive element is extremely effective at sounding the narrative's keynote and luring the reader into this highly immersive—and addictive—world of Pablo Escobar's deadly cartel.

Screenshot of *New York Times*'s Webby Award–winning story, October 27, 2015, arguably its most innovative storytelling since "Snow Fall" (2012).

The *New York Times*'s "Greenland is Melting Away," which won a 2016 Webby Award for Best Individual Editorial Experience,[18] typifies the latest move away from embedded interactives, especially optional elements to tap

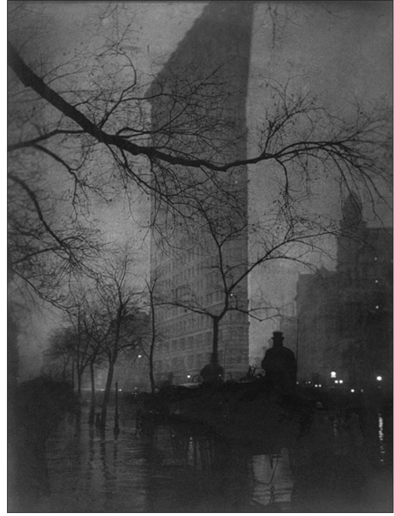
or click that might interrupt downward scrolling that drives the narrative. Thus to *read* this story is to experience it in a *linear*, and thus more deeply absorbing top-to-bottom progression with no sidebars or diversions to pull the reader out of the main narrative sweep. Even the spectacular satellite zoom-in effect—which distinguishes this piece from the rest of the genre—is only interactive and thus user controlled through scrolling. Data visualizations tell their stories increasingly through automation as the reader progresses through the story. This is the *Times*'s showcase of sterling prose working in tandem with photography, charts, graphics, and documents, and scrollytelling for an immersive *National Geographic* aesthetic, such as that established in "K2" for its tablet magazine.[19]

The industrial context for such digital production has shifted literary and book culture traditionally rooted in print toward the screen.[20] Encouraged by the expansion of smartphone screens and the growth of the tablet market, book publishers are investing in developing new combinations of textual forms. Scribner's *Nixonland*, for example, appeared in a tablet version featuring footage from the CBS archive imbedded in the narrative as twenty-seven video clips. Integrated into the text at opportune moments, this footage contextualizes the prose storytelling.[21] Literature's migration onto the screen includes e-short publisher Byliner's acquisition of original journalism by a host of renowned authors, including Anthony Swofford, Buzz Bissinger, Jon Krakauer, Lawrence Lessig, and Paige Williams.[22] Krakauer's *Three Cups of Deceit* was Byliner's debut story that famously sold over 200,000 copies after the first 90,000 circulated as free publicity.[23] The print magazine industry has seized upon the new aesthetic potential of enhanced multimedia storytelling, as witnessed in *Wired*'s pioneering iPad edition that encouraged similar digital products from *Popular Mechanics* and *Esquire*.[24]

Byliner and *Atavist* charge readers for their stories, either as e-singles or by subscription, whereas the *Post*'s "New Age of Walls" functions as a loss leader much in the way

Screenshot from the *Washington Post*'s "A New Age of Walls" (October 12, 2016), spotlighted by *Nieman Storyboard* for crossing a storytelling frontier.

the products of WSJ Custom Studios and TBrand Studio ("Women Inmates") circulate as free Netflix advertisements for *Narcos* and *Orange Is the New Black*. This radical experimentation in alternative business models has converged print media into cross-platform storytelling, as in Piper Kerman's prison memoir finding new life on television and as long-form digital journalism.[25] In 2015, Atavist won its first National Magazine Award for Feature Writing for "Love and Ruin" by James Verini, prompting the publication of its first print anthology. Founder and editor Adam Ratliff could appreciate the irony of the situation, acknowledging, "We are known as much for our digital design as for the pieces animated by that digital design." Yet publishing a print anthology carries special transmedia significance in his view, since, "stories meant as a breakwater against the creep of online ephemerality are naturally at home in print, the medium that originally inspired us to create them."[26]



Edward Steichen, *The Flatiron Building, New York City, on a Rainy Night*, 1905 (Library of Congress/Wikipedia Commons). This atmospheric photograph epitomized the Pictorialist movement in photography, which promoted the medium of individual artistic expression. Its aesthetic—soft visual effects that use light to evoke a mood—are echoed in the Post's 2016 "A New Age of Walls."

The Aesthetic Achievement of "A New Age of Walls"

"The New Age of Walls" has inaugurated a visual aesthetic not seen in media history since Pictoralism, the movement that aestheticized photography by depicting subjects with soft visual effects as in the brooding atmospherics of Edward Steichen's *The Flat Iron Building*. Among the *Washington Post*'s most visible innovations is that its videos appear only in black and white, casting the narrative's aesthetic in a chilling almost surreal light. The color world we know and routinely see in journalistic photography and videography appears at an otherworldly critical distance in the piece. The "grayscale montage of recent speeches by world political figures from Trump to Boris Johnson to Marine Le Pen . . . . strikes a retrospective chord, as though we were analyzing these events from a moment in the future," Nieman's Allison Eck notes. The concussive violence of this sequence echoes the

rage of these leaders responsible for the global proliferation of walls between nations. Such dark moments are alleviated by video loops the open chapters with the daily life of migrant camps at borders, which function as "an ostinato against the bleakness of struggle."[27]

Such subtlety is not lost on the reader, who encounters one medium per screen, thus eliminating the multitasking of older designs that encouraged simultaneously playing videos and reading, a practice that erodes overall user cognition and robs power from the narrative.[28] The innovation has corrected for two other flaws in the original digital long-form design established in 2012: readers had too much autonomy to skip ahead in text-heavy formats, and conversely not enough freedom to navigate between sections in multimedia stories that flow from one scene to the next. The result is an immersive experience harkening back to 1990s video games in which video interludes end by landing players in a new environment, inviting them to continue their adventure through whatever channel and pace they desire. "Moon Shot" and "Beyond the Map," both interactive online documentaries on the digital *Epic Magazine*, similarly provide immersion and cohesion through aerial video transitions, as well as user autonomy to select the video "chapter" of choice. This autonomy does not sacrifice, but instead encourages the deep reading associated with the literary mind that critics such as Nicholas Carr have feared would become obsolete in the digital age. These latest multimedia designs represent nearly two decades of innovation toward linear storytelling that has advanced well beyond the hyperlinked shovelware that encouraged superficial horizontal scanning and skimming practices associated with multitasking.[29] The aesthetic of digital long form now relies less on individual effects such as parallax scrolling, the dramatic "curtain effect" made famous by "Snow Fall."[30] Editorial selection and sequencing of multimedia have never been more sensitive to the written narrative, thus gaining greater emphasis than technological pyrotechnics, as seen in the unmistakable documentary feel of

Screenshot from the *Washington Post*'s "A New Age of Walls" (October 12, 2016), spotlighted by *Nieman Storyboard* for crossing a storytelling frontier.

"The New Age of Walls" that frees readers from distracting opportunities to "interact" through a series of buttons.

New Media Spawn New Narratives

Both documentary film and print literary journalism depend on creative processes that demand time to consider events so they may be rendered in a "more detailed and often layered context."[31] Immersive reporting is a signature of both forms, which necessarily are investing in the aesthetics of narrative method. In some cases, such as Francois Girard's *Thirty Two Short Films about Glen Gould*, a biopic of the eccentric musical virtuoso, the form can be radically experimental, eschewing the traditional Aristotelian narrative convention for one closer to Sergei Eisenstein's montage.[32] Montage, the process of creating a coherent composite from fragments, is the direct forbearer of digital literary journalism and its eclectic repertoire.[33] Recent research has established that visual transitional techniques integral to digital long form are responsible for "forging a space for linear narrative on the web," especially in comparison to hyperlinked menus of items.[34] Whereas seminal studies of digital long form emphasize how the core elements of literary journalism drive linear narrative in the genre and spread brand identity,[35] research has yet to explore its full range of aesthetic expression of *ekphrasis*.

The standard narrative staples of setting, characters, events, and plot play vital roles in digital long form.[36] Yet more ambitious plot structures reach toward an epic global scale, while others experiment with complexity, such as the Russian doll method of recursively embedded storytelling. Marie-Laure Ryan's definition of narrative as "a mental representation of causally connected states and events that captures a segment in the history of a world and of its members" is intentionally broad enough to accommodate a wide range of modalities expressed through converged media. "This logico-semantic characterization of narrative is sufficiently abstract to be regarded as a cognitive universal but flexible enough to tolerate a wide range of variations," such as simple, dramatic, complex, parallel, and epic storytelling structures.[37] Theoretical nomenclature must ascend beyond basic categories to properly identify the new narratives that new media is producing. Technological prowess is not an end in itself, but is at the heart of these new digital long-form narratives, as the latest research interventions by Tuomo Hiippala into the structure of multimodal documents demonstrate.[38]

Kathryn Hayles has shown that digital media do not simply place us before a static text, but instead situate us within a system continually producing a dynamic object. So immersed, "we are the medium and the medium is us,"[39] according to her twenty-first century version of Marshall McLuhan's

famous formulation. A side-by-side comparison of "Snow Fall" with its more recent counterparts such as "A New Age of Walls" highlights the importance of increased linearity in design innovation. Designers have taken seriously the point made by literary critic Sven Birkerts that "if readers are really caught in narrative suspense, eager to find what happens next or emotionally bonded to the characters, they would rather turn pages under the guidance of the author than freely explore a textual network."[40] Phones and tablets now mimic books in precisely this manner. Fewer lateral features appear in the margins beside the written text of "A New Age of Walls," making it far better adapted for reading on a smartphone. The new streamlined designs have encouraged more linear reading on a vertical axis akin to book reading or film viewing rather than surveying a news landing page or database of hyperlinks across a broader, rather than deeper, horizontal axis.

New Narratives Beckon New Audiences

Complex long form is not beyond the reach of today's online audiences, who are more sophisticated than the stereotype of online readers with short attention spans suggests. Many news organizations have discovered alternatives to clickbait, headline-driven news briefs, and stories generated by a single tweet. Multiplying niches, media, and templates have encouraged a sharp rise in the supply of narrative reporting. The charge that literary journalism is a "small niche activity, produced for a limited and culturally privileged audience" is no longer tenable, as Erik Neveu argues, even across media such as television's online renaissance that thrives on the proliferation of choice that is "endlessly increasing, fragmenting audiences."[41] The long tail of the internet now includes not only on-demand streaming video, but long-form in-depth podcasting, as the triumph of NPR's *Serial* illustrates. Length and complexity may be a reason for, not a hindrance to, success as seen in the increasing complexity of narrative on television (*The Wire*, *House of Cards*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Leftovers*, *Black Mirror*).

Television's link to print literary journalism and the book publishing industry is readily apparent in the example of Piper Kerman, the Smith College graduate—and felon—whose book, *Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison*, Netflix acquired for its series. Rising interest in digital long form thus converges with the literary world and lengthy on-demand television series to reinforce recent findings indicating decreasing attention span is more myth than documented fact.[42] Even BuzzFeed, the platform most notorious for its "snackable" content, has entered the long-form market with content that now competes with august platforms, such as the *Guardian*.[43] Because audiences now search and *witness* events themselves, journalism must

not become obsolete. This post-scoop era should free journalists to "return to an older and higher view of their calling: not as reporters of what's going on," but as literary artists, equipped with digital tools to "[strengthen] our understanding of the world" with "informed, interpretive, explanatory, even opinionated takes on current events," as Mitchell Stephens explains.[44] With this freedom, the supreme nonfiction as Boynton envisioned it is soaring at the height of its powers.

David Dowling, Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Iowa School of Journalism & Mass Communication, specializes in publishing industries and the culture of media production. The author of six books and one monograph, his articles have appeared in such journals as Convergence*,* Genre*,* American Journalism*,* Digital Humanities Quarterly*, and* Digital Journalism*. His next book,* A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in Paul Engle's Iowa Writers' Workshop*, is under advance contract with Yale University Press. This article draws on research for his current book project, "Immersed: Longform Journalism's Digital Renaissance."*

Notes

[1] Allison Eck, "The *Washington Post* Crosses a Storytelling Frontier with 'A New Age of Walls,'" *Nieman Storyboard*, December 20, 2016, http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/the-washington-post-crosses-a-storytelling-frontier-with-a-new-age-of-walls/.

[2] Samuel Granados, Zoeann Murphy, Kevin Schaul, and Anthony Faiola, "A New Age of Walls, Episode 1: Raising Barriers," *Washington Post,* October 12, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/world/border-barriers/global-illegal-immigration-prevention/.

[3] "Best of 2016," *Longform*, accessed May 20, 2017, https://longform.org/lists/best-of-2016.

[4] Davis Harper, "Notable Narrative: Shane Bauer and 'My Four Months as

a Private Prison Guard,'" *Nieman Storyboard*, July 21, 2016, http://niemanstoryboard.org/stories/notable-narrative-shane-bauer-and-my-four-months-as-a-private-prison-guard/.

[5] The American Society of Magazine Editors named *Mother Jones* Magazine of the Year in part on the strength of Bauer, who earned the highly competitive Best Reporting category. David Uberti, "Inside *Mother Jones*' Monster Investigation of Private Prisons," *Columbia Journalism Review*, June 24, 2016, http://www.cjr.org/criticism/mother_jones_private_prison_undercover.php; Sid Holt and Susan Russ, "Ellie Awards 2017 Winners Announced," ASME: American Society of Magazine Editors, February 7, 2017, http://www.magazine.org/industry-news/press-releases/asme-press-releases/asme/ellie-awards-2017-winners-announced.

[6] Amy Mitchell, Galen Stocking, and Katerina Eva Matsa, "Long-form Reading Shows Signs of Life in Our Mobile News World," Pew Research Center, May 7, 2016, http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/05/long-form-reading-shows-signs-of-life-in-our-mobile-news-world/.

[7] Richard Wagner, "'Outlines of the Artwork of the Future,' *The Artwork of the Future* [1849]" in *Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality*, ed. Randall Packer and Ken Jordan (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 4 (emphasis in the original).

[8] Owen F. Smith, "Fluxus Praxis: An Exploration of Connections, Creativity, and Community," in *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet*, ed. Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 126.

[9] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 153.

[10] This point extends the concept of the cognitive container first introduced in David Dowling and Travis Vogan, "'Can We 'Snowfall' This?': Digital Long-form and the Race for the Tablet Market," *Digital Journalism* 3, no. 2 (2015): 209–24. doi: 10.1080/21670811.2014.930250. The original iteration emphasized the coherence of multimedia elements around a single narrative, all of which were available within the story itself rather than on the open web via hyperlinks, thereby minimizing distraction associated with superficial reading on the web. The current argument here is that the cognitive container of digital long form since 2015 now works against distraction not only through its in-app self-contained feel, but more specifically through sequenced multimedia elements that yield to each other in succession screen-by-screen rather than crowding onto the same screen. Typically, the new effect of the cognitive container is marked by linear succession via scrolling whereby the media are not pitted in competition with each other for the reader's attention. "Snow Fall" contains multiple clips that users can play while they read; this option has been pruned out of the latest design, as clips more often play automatically and take up their own screen, as with animated maps and graphics. This allows written text to occupy unmitigated space for full comprehension with transitions to multimedia selected to enrich its meaning.

[11] Robert S. Boynton, "Notes toward a Supreme Nonfiction: Teaching Literary Reportage in the Twenty-first Century," *Literary Journalism Studies* 5, no. 2 (Fall

2013): 129, 125.

[12] Nora Berning, "Narrative Journalism in the Age of the Internet: New Ways to Create Authenticity in Online Literary Reportages," *Textpraxis* 3, no. 2 (2011): 12.

[13] Ibid., 12–13.

[14] Jim Romenesko, "More Than 3.5 Million Page Views for *New York Times*' 'Snow Fall' Feature," Jimromenesko.com, December 27, 2012.

[15] Berning, "Narrative Journalism in the Age of the Internet," 13.

[16] Rigid canon formation during this crucial phase might stymie the accelerated growth and diversification of the genre; prescriptive approaches adhering to technological determinism might unnecessarily eliminate certain technological designs from consideration as literary journalism. Such an approach would risk reprising the homogenizing literary canon formation witnessed during the heyday of mid-twentieth century New Criticism and critics such as F. O. Mattheissen and a host of scholars lacking in gender and ethnic diversity. According to Nina Baym, the American literary canon is rooted in hegemonic misogynist and masculinist nationalism, Nina Baym, *Feminism and American Literary History: Essays* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 95–96, 99. For more on the ideology of the New Criticism and its impact on canon formation, see John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 155–160.

[17] Peter S. Green, "Cocainenomics," *WSJ Custom Studios*. September 24, 2015, https://www.wsj.com/ad/cocainenomics.

[18] "2016 People's Voice/Webby Award Winner," 2016, Webby Awards, http://webbyawards.com/winners/2016/websites/website-features-and-design/best-individual-editorial-experience/nyt-greenland-is-melting-away/.

[19] For more on scrollytelling and user expectations of *National Geographic*, see Cornelia Wolf and Alexander Godulla, "Potentials of Digital Longforms in Journalism: A Survey among Mobile Internet Users about the Relevance of Online Devices, Internet-specific Qualities, and Modes of Payment," *Journal of Media Business Studies* 13, no. 4 (2016): 199–221.

[20] Sherman Young, *The Book Is Dead, Long Live the Book* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2007).

[21] Tablet and iPhone app versions of award-winning and classic literary works such as Harry Mantel's *Wolf Hall* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, both published before the 2010 release of the iPad, have been repurposed into enhanced multimedia versions for mobile audiences. See Graham Meikle and Sherman Young, *Media Convergence: Networked Digital Media in Everyday Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 89–90.

[22] A *New Yorker* staff writer since 2015, Paige Williams is a National Magazine Award winner, former editor of Neiman Storyboard, and professor of literary journalism.

[23] Rachel Kaufman, "The Business of Byliner," *Ad Week*, December 14, 2011, http://www.adweek.com/digital/the-business-of-byliner/.

[24] Meikle and Young, *Media Convergence: Networked Digital,* 93.

[25] This pattern is indicative of media ownership's tendency to grow more concentrated so that fewer companies are now making a greater diversity of products. The "top tier of media firms show that ownership in the media environment grows ever-more concentrated, . . . at the same time as these businesses diversify their platforms and products to increasingly segmented and fragmented audiences," Ibid., 39; see also, Manuel Castell, *Communication Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 93.

[26] Evan Ratliff, "Editor's Foreword," in *Love and Ruin: Stories of Obsession, Danger, and Heartbreak from the Atavist Magazine*, ed. Evan Ratliff (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016), xi.

[27] Eck, "*Washington Post* Crosses a Storytelling Frontier," 2.

[28] For more on multitasking's effect on reading, see Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 122.

[29] Ibid., 27. Elsewhere David Ciccoricco notes, "amid the alarm of attentional breakdowns, contemporary cognitive science" has proven that there is no simple on-off switch for attention, but rather a series of types of attentional focus. Activities such as writing an essay, playing tennis, or engaging in a phone conversation, each "require engagement in different tasks that recruit a different part or parts of the brain in order to execute them." Thus "attention is always divided, and this is a biologically necessary state of affairs." However, heavy demands on supervisory attention via interactives in multimedia long form may "inhibit and override all other competing signals in favor of a prioritized one" to the detriment of the reader's focus on the narrative, David Ciccoricco, *Refiguring Minds in Narrative Media* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 71. However, if the nature of the interactive builds directly upon the narrative, the reverse could be true depending on its design.

[30] Parallax is simply a wipe transition in film, only user activated through scrolling, and traveling from top to bottom with text on one plane and image on another, rather than horizontally across the screen with film footage typically on both planes. Tuomo Hiippala notes that "a wipe transition is not the most common choice for transitions between semiotic modes in the longform genre, but simply constitutes one alternative among the more traditional scroll and click transitions," in Tuomo Hiippala, "The Multimodality of Digital Longform Journalism," *Digital Journalism*, 5, no. 4 (2016): 420–42, 429, 437.

[31] Sheila Curran Bernard, *Documentary Storytelling: Creative Nonfiction on Screen*, 4th ed. (New York: Focal Press, 2016), 4.

[32] Sergei Eisenstein, *Towards a Theory of Montage, vol. 2, Sergei Eisenstein, Selected Works*, ed. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor, trans. Michael Glenny (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010).

[33] Although cinematic "traditional montage is less effective at displaying networked relationality, the notion of difference in space is better suited to a single plane which is then bisected one or more times," a point that illustrates precisely the

difference between the segmented screens of news landing pages and the self-contained (i.e., cognitive container) of digital long-form stories, Alexander R. Galloway, *The Interface Effect* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 117. Landing pages disperse the reader's attention across the page, whereas digital long-form stories draws it downward deeper into the narrative through scrolling. Networked relationality, furthermore, may be displayed in non-distracting ways that do not sacrifice linearity, as that intense momentum of the story may be maintained while also pointing to a complex spatial orientation periodically through transitional devices such as animated maps and aerial visuals.

[34] Susan Jacobson, Jacqueline Marino, and Robert E. Gutsche, Jr., "The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism," *Journalism: Theory, Practice, and Criticism* 17, no. 4 (2016): 539.

[35] Ibid.; Hiippala, "Multimodality of Digital Longform Journalism"; Dowling and Vogan, "'Can We 'Snowfall' This?'; Richard Koci Hernandez and Jeremy Rue, *The Principles of Multimedia Journalism: Packaging Digital News* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Hanna Pincus, Magdalena Wojcieszak, and Hajo Boomgarden, "Do Multimedia Matter? Cognitive and Affective Effects of Embedded Multimedia Journalism," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, June 27, 2016, doi: 1077699016654679; David Dowling and Travis Vogan, "Longform Narrative Journalism: 'Snow Fall' and Beyond," in *The Routledge Companion to Digital Journalism Studies*, eds. Bob Franklin and Scott Eldridge II (New York: Routledge, 2017), 478–86.

[36] Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, Jr., 532.

[37] Marie-Laure Ryan, "Will New Media Produce New Narratives?" in *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 337. "A New Age of Walls" represents both epic and complex narrative methods, as it spans the globe to profile immigrants facing similar dilemmas despite being continents apart.

[38] Hiippala, "Multimodality of Digital Longform Journalism," 421.

[39] N. Kathryn Hayles, "The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext," *Narrative* 9, no. 1 (2001), 37.

[40] Sven Bikerts, quoted in Marie-Laure Ryan, introduction to Part 5,"Digital Media," in Ryan, *Narrative Across Media*, 331.

[41] Erik Neveu, "Revisiting Narrative Journalism as One of the Futures of Journalism," in *The Future of Journalism: In an Age of Digital Media and Economic Uncertainty*, ed. Bob Franklin (New York: Routledge, 2016), 83–84.

[42] Mitchell, Stocking, and Matsa, "Long-form Reading Shows Signs of Life," 1. Other studies corroborating longform's increasing popularity among an array of audiences including younger demographics previously thought to have short attention spans include, Jacqueline Marino, Susan Jacobson, and Robert Gutsche, Jr., "Scrolling for Story: How Millennials Interact with Longform Journalism on Mobile Devices," Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute, August 1, 2016; Michael Z. Newman, "New Media, Young Audiences and Discourses of Attention," *Media, Culture & Society* 32, no.4 (2010): 581–96; and Chris Giliberti, "Three Reasons Why Mil-

lennials Want Long Form Storytelling Over 'Snackable' Content," *Forbes*, March 8, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/under30network/2016/03/08/3-reasons-why-millennials-want-long-form-storytelling-over-snackable-content/#38057aca380e.

[43] Even popular online news organizations specializing in stories with fewer than 3,000 words have responded to the surging demand for long form. BuzzFeed, for example, produces high-quality long-form articles that resonate with their audiences, as evidenced by how they consistently perform better on social media than shorter pieces, with an average of 38,000 shares. See Steve Rayson, "BuzzFeed's Most Shared Content Is Not What You Think," *Buzzsumo*, May 2, 2015, http://buzzsumo.com/blog/buzzfeeds-most-shared-content-format-is-not-what-you-think/.

[44] Mitchell Stephens, "Quality in Journalism Reconsidered: The Limits of Realism," in *Journalism and Technological Change: Historical Perspectives, Contemporary Trends*, ed. Martin Schreiber and Clemens Zimmermann (New York: Campus Verlag, 2014), 231–32, 240–41. See also Mitchell Stephens, *Beyond News: The Future of Journalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Dan Heaton, *Border Fence*, U.S. Air Force DOD Photo 061003-F-1726H-004 (Public Domain)

Research Review . . .

Recent Trends and Topics in Literary Journalism Scholarship

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This survey of literary journalism scholarship published in print during 2016 is intended as a guide to recent trends and topics in the field rather than a comprehensive listing of all research and commentary. It focuses primarily on peer-reviewed journal articles and books. Some works may have appeared online before print publication.

BOOKS

Individual Author Studies

David Foster Wallace's narrative nonfiction continued to receive notice in 2016, notably with the publication of Lukas Hoffmann's *Postirony: The Nonfictional Literature of David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers*.[1] Hoffmann spends considerable time delineating the differences between fiction and nonfiction, stressing how creative nonfiction exists on the borderland between the two while also looking at how the nonfiction work of both Wallace and Eggers, work that he describes as "postironic," looks to communicate directly with the reader. The book's largest argument is that we should attend more closely to the nonfiction writing of both Wallace and Eggers on its own, rather than reading it as secondary and primarily supportive of their fiction. To that end, his focus is on the "artistic value" of their nonfiction and the effects it has on readers.

In *Hunter S. Thompson: Fear, Loathing, and the Birth of Gonzo*,[2] Kevin T. McEneaney argues that Thompson, "America's most incisive and savvy

political commentator since H. L. Mencken" (17), has been largely under-recognized by academics because of his "complex sense of humor." Offering some biography, the book primarily focuses on analysis of Thompson's work, devoting most of its pages to Thompson's literary journalism and two full chapters to *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.* McEneaney draws parallels between Thompson and his literary influences—Fitzgerald and Hemingway among them—and places him in the tradition of such canonical Western writers as Virgil, Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Shakespeare, arguing that Thompson, like his forebears, achieved great originality by modifying traditional literary templates.

Jan Whitt's *The Redemption of Narrative: Terry Tempest Williams and Her Vision of the West*[3] focuses on the environmental writer and activist's significant and expanding oeuvre, situating her among writers with shared and varied concerns, notably T. S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, Tom Wolfe, and Roger Rosenblatt. While Williams has been a prolific writer—of narrative nonfiction and poetry especially, including works for children—Whitt's volume is the first book-length study of her work. Exploring themes frequently associated with Williams but going beyond them as well to address existential concerns, including the value of language, Whitt's book situates Williams as a writer whose work exemplifies the combined concerns of literature and journalism.

National/Regional Studies

In 2016, two books were published that brought together writers with a shared national and/or ethnic identity while also demonstrating the great diversity in their work in terms of theme and style. Sue Joseph interviewed eleven of her "favourite" Australian writers for *Behind the Text: Candid Conversations with Australian Creative Nonfiction Writers,*[4] which is the first book to look at how Australian writers of creative nonfiction think about their work. Aware that Australia was not caught up in the international debates about what defined writing as creative nonfiction and literary journalism, Joseph set out to use her interviews to engage her writers with that debate. She quickly found that her interviewees lacked interest in narrowing their work to a pre-defined genre. The resulting book offers what Joseph terms the "unique Australian perspective" on the ongoing academic debate while also demonstrating the range of topics these writers find worthy to explore in their work, from war to national identity to the treatment of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Accompanied by photos by Hans Bool and Joseph's first-person accounts of her subjects and their settings, the book is itself a text of literary and journalistic text.

Marta Caminero-Santangelo's *Documenting the Undocumented: Latino/a Narratives and Social Justice in the Era of Operation Gatekeeper*[5] outlines the evolution of US anxiety about its southern border since the 1990s and the official actions that grew out of that anxiety to prepare for the focus of the book: Latina/o writers' response to those actions in fiction and especially nonfiction. She discusses how the Clinton administration's Operation Gatekeeper, begun in 1994 near San Diego, California, in spreading to Operation Safeguard in Arizona and Operation Rio Grande in Texas, served to create a border that was "reified into an 'imaginary' line with real material gravity, where crossing signaled criminal and life-threatening trespass"[6] for those on the "wrong" side of that line and has given rise to the nomenclature "illegal alien," which conjoins both violation and trespassing. The writers whose work she analyzes seek to challenge and reframe that identity, producing "counternarratives" that seek to create empathic responses to the traumas experienced by undocumented immigrants trying to navigate the border. While the book looks at both fiction and nonfiction, the first chapter focuses explicitly on literary journalism, and three and parts of four of the remaining five chapters focus on memoir and personal narratives.

International Studies

Three books appeared in English in 2016 that, in varying degrees, focus on literary journalism as an international genre. In *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*,[7] reviewed in the Spring 2016 issue of *LJS*, John C. Hartsock probes concerns his earlier *History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (2000) had raised for him. His primary focus is on how "the aesthetics of phenomenal experience"[8] that emerge in what he prefers to call "narra-descriptive" journalism differ from either mainstream journalism or realistic fiction, and to probe that question he works with ideas developed by a range of international theorists, including Mikhail Bakhtin, Wolfgang Iser, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Vicktor Shklovsky. As Richard Keeble notes in his *LJS* review, while the new book retains a "heavy American emphasis" (171),[9] Hartsock does discuss a number of European writers and devotes significant attention to Russian writers, including Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich.

David Swick and Richard Keeble's edited volume *The Funniest Pages: International Perspectives on Humor in Journalism*[10] takes a look at how humor has played a longstanding role in journalism over hundreds of years and across the globe. Bringing together an eclectic range of topics, from "News Mockery in the English Civil War" to "How John Diamond Used Humor to Tackle the Taboo Topics of Cancer and Dying" to "Twitter and the Revitalization

of Black Humor in Journalism," the volume seeks to accord humor a more prominent role in scholarly investigations as well as in journalism pedagogy. The countries that writers and venues discussed are from include Australia, Britain, Canada, Chile, and the US.

Finally, a much-needed international approach to the volatile decade of the 1960s emerges in *Witnessing the Sixties: A Decade of Change in Journalism and Literature*, edited by Frank Harbers, Ilja van den Broek, and Marcel Broersma.[11] In eleven chapters and an Introduction, the contributors cover the convergence of journalism and fiction in the work of Australian, Dutch, Flemish, German, and US writers. The focus is on how individual writers such as Louis Paul Boon, Hugo Claus, Joan Didion, and Norman Mailer, as well as groups of writers—the New Journalists, the Flemish "Stenciled Revolution" Authors—sought to find new ways to capture the decade's rapid social and political changes.

ARTICLES

Individual Author Studies

The Australian writer Helen Garner is the subject of Sue Joseph's "Australian Literary Journalism and 'Missing Voices'," which appeared in *Journalism Practice*. Joseph examines the way in which Garner deals with the ethics of telling a story when key players will not cooperate to grant an interview.[12]

In *Literary Journalism Studies*, Christine Isager investigates the work of Danish literary journalist Morten Sabroe, who has been accused of following too closely the style of Hunter S. Thompson. Using rhetorical theory, she shows how Sabroe's use of imitation, not unlike Thompson's process of self-education, has led to an original, destabilizing perspective.[13]

Writing in *ariel*, Jeffrey Mather examines Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza* from an architectural perspective. Mather argues that this context reveals how spatial and visual elements are used to convey conceptual ideas of history and politics.[14]

National/Regional Studies

The role of literary journalism techniques in fashioning black identity in South Africa during the 1950s is the focus of an article by Lesley Cowling in *Literary Journalism Studies*. Writers for the magazine *Drum* are shown using these tools to describe township life.[15]

Alejandro Barranquero Carretero and Garbiñe Jaurrieta Bariain, writing in *Journalism Practice*, examine the emergence of what is known as "slow journalism" in Spain. They focus on a particular publication as an example of

a sustainable model based on long-form narrative and immersive reporting.[16] In *Journalism Studies*, Eleanor K. O'Keeffe examines the use of narrative techniques to encourage a certain kind of recall of the fighting in British regional newspapers after World War I. She describes how articles focused on specific military actions shaped a social and cultural view that reflected positive civic virtues.[17]

The fall issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* is devoted to an analysis of the francophone traditions of the genre. Amélie Chabrier writes about the courtroom journalism of Colette.[18] Paul Aron explores the work of a Belgian writer Marie Gevers.[19] Vanessa Gemis analyses the journalism of Simone Dever, who wrote under the pseudonym Marc Augis.[20] Guillaume Pinson's contribution is a comparison of a work of French Canadian fiction to previous reportage by the author, Gabrielle Roy, and by others.[21] Marie-Ève Thérenty focuses on the work of Françoise Giroud and the specific technique of subjectification.[22] Mélodie Simard-Houde takes on the subject of colonial reportage in the works of Pierre Mille and Félix Dubois.[23] Laure Demougin reviews examples of Indigenous speech in the Algerian colonial press.[24]

Historical Development

David Dowling analyzes the impact of the Iowa Writers' Workshop on the evolution of literary journalism practice in *Literary Jounalism Studies*. He contrasts the work and approaches of Tracy Kidder and John D'Agata to trace the development of a new style of creative nonfiction.[25]

Rebecca Roach, writing in *Textual Practice*, focuses on a series of interviews by the American journalist Louise Morgan to study topics such as privacy and the profession of writing during the 1930s. Roach is interested in the interview as a form of journalism and autobiography that creates a sense of access that is largely fictional.[26]

Slow Journalism

Erik Neveu, writing in *Journalism Practice*, delves into the developing theory and application of slow journalism and suggests that the term is not as simple as it may first appear. Instead he argues that researchers need to recognize that the approach can be applied, and should be studied in distinct, if overlapping, categories.[27]

Also writing in *Journalism Practice*, Matthew Ricketson argues that slow journalism has been underappreciated for its contributions to public understanding of complex issues, a situation that he says is slowly beginning to change. His analysis focuses on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and the American invasion of Iraq.[28]

In the same issue of *Journalism Practice*, Susan L. Greenberg turns her

attention to the importance of the editing process in producing slow journalism. In exploring the restrictions imposed by the editing process, she argues that such constraints can have both positive and negative consequences.[29]

An issue of *Digital Journalism* was also devoted to slow journalism. Mike Ananny raised the question of how fast, or slow, journalism should be. His analysis works across four related topics: work routines, platform pacings, algorithmic computations, and regulatory issues.[30]

Benjamin Ball, also in *Digital Journalism*, proposes a process-based definition of slow journalism and argues that multimedia journalism occupies an ideal placement, since it can combine some of the best qualities of rapid and of in-depth reporting.[31]

A case study of a transmedia experience looking behind the scenes at the 2014 Winter Olympics is used by Renira Rampazzo Gambarato in *Digital Journalism* to argue that slow journalism may be best suited for new technology. The transmedia work, known as *The Sochi Project*, combines interactive documentary, print, digital publications, and an exhibition.[32]

Stuart Davis makes the case in *Digital Journalism* that slow journalism is a powerful alternative to mainstream approaches to covering the US–Mexico border. He identifies two complementary strategies, one based on ethnography and the other based on visualizations created from large datasets.[33]

The Dutch website *De Correspondent* is analyzed in *Digital Journalism* by Frank Harbers, who argues that its writers are openly subjective and yet rely on empirical approaches and transparency in telling their stories. Thus the website is said to be an example of slow journalism that works to combine both modernist and postmodernist approaches to truth claims.[34]

Slow journalism as a viable economic model for journalism is examined by David Dowling in *Digital Journalism*. His research focuses on four companies that have sought alternatives to display advertising as their major funding source.[35]

Teaching slow journalism in the classroom is one of the topics covered by Don Belt and Jeff South in their article in *Digital Journalism* about *National Geographic's* Out of Eden Walk. They show how this project, based on a trek around the world by a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner, used contemporary digital tools to convey an ancient story.[36]

Digital Technology

Susan Jacobson, Jacqueline Marino, and Robert E. Gutsche, writing in *Journalism*, analyzed fifty long-form journalism projects that were produced on the web and argued that these works represent a new phase in the evolution of literary journalism. "Such digital storytelling encompasses

more than the fragmented, de-centered, hypertextual blocks of the Web and furthers the field's understandings of the Web's potential for dramatic and immersive journalism."[37]

Writing in *Literary Journalism Studies*, Marino presented the results of an eye-tracking study of how a group of millenials read examples of digital literary journalism that included multimedia elements. A key finding was that participants in the study did pay attention to text and not just the photos and videos.[38]

In *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, Travis Vogan and David Dowling examine the way that ESPN built upon the literary journalism of its former star columnist Bill Simmons to develop its cross-platform brand. Based on research before the departure of Simmons from ESPN, this article highlights the importance and prestige of print traditions in the construction of a digital brand.[39]

Ethics

Writing in *Journalism*, Lindsay Morton analyzes two books of literary journalism, Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and Adrian LeBlanc's *Random Family*, from the perspective of epistemology, specifically the ways in which the authors make and support truth claims. The article draws on the concept of epistemic location developed by Lorraine Code.[40]

In *Literary Journalism Studies*, Morton further explores the matter of epistemic responsibility as envisioned by Code. Here she focuses her attention on what might be considered an opposite example, John D'Agata's and Jim Fingal's *The Lifespan of a Fact*.[41]

James Aucoin argues for a personal form of journalism as a way of achieving a higher level of ethical practice and epistemic soundness compared to the impersonal, objective approach. Writing in *Journalism*, he examines James Agee's reflexivity in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.[42]

Narrative Theory

The interaction between voice and point of view becomes a new way of considering the traditional split between objectivity and subjectivity in an article published by Cecilia Aare in *Literary Journalism Studies*. She calls into question the idea that first-person reportage is necessarily more subjective than third-person reportage.[43]

In *Genre* Marla Zubel focuses on two interwar movements, German New Objectivity and Russian Factography, to examine how the distinctions between object and fact can be blurred. The article discusses reportage by Joseph Roth, Ilya Ehrenburg, Siegfried Krakauer, and Walter Benjamin.[44]

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Miles Maguire is the author of Advanced Reporting: Essential Skills for Twenty-first Century Journalism *(Routledge, 2014). He teaches reporting, editing, and online journalism at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.*

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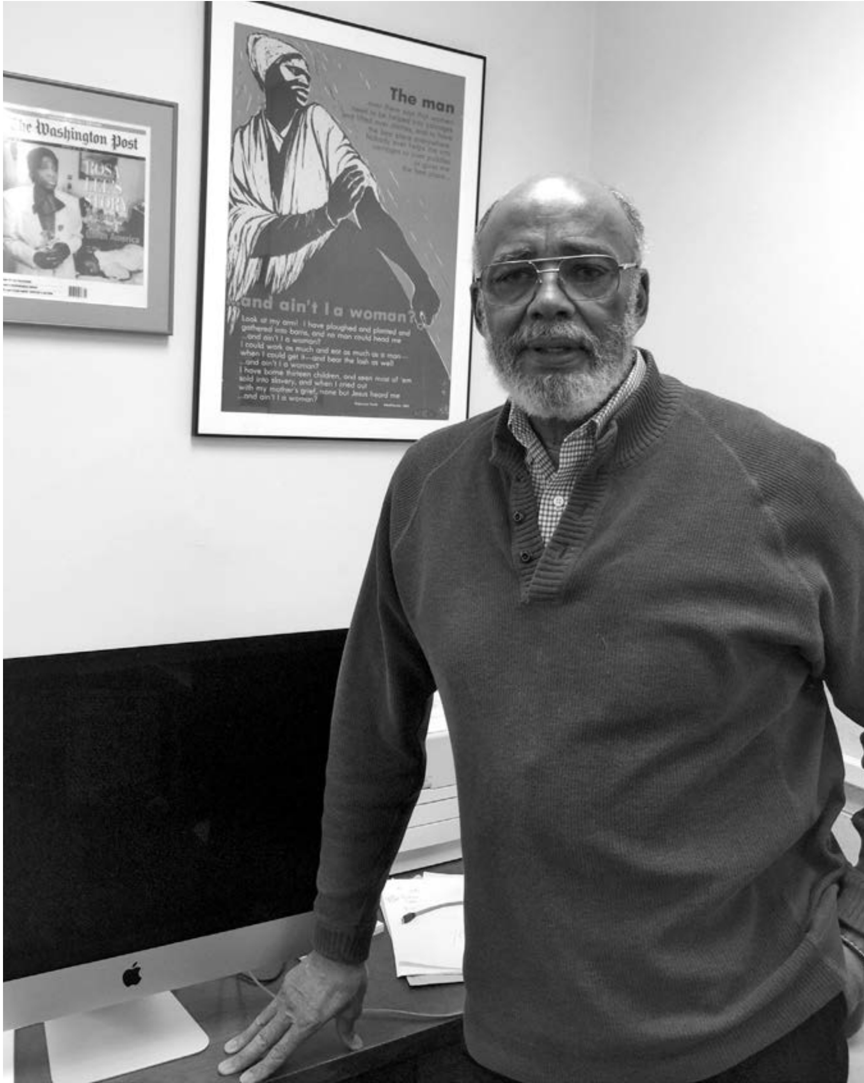

Photo of Leon Dash by Kate McQueen

Scholar Practitioner Q+A . . .

An Interview with Leon Dash

Kate McQueen
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, United States

Leon Dash won a Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Journalism in 1995 for "Rosa Lee: Poverty and Survival in Washington," an eight-part *Washington Post* series that profiled a grandmother from the capitol's underclass, caught in a cycle of drug addiction, prostitution, and petty crime. Within a year, Dash developed the series into a well-received book, *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America* (1996). And by 1999, Rosa Lee was named one of New York University's top 100 examples of reporting in the twentieth century.

It's easy to credit the depth, nuance, and ultimate success of *Rosa Lee* to Dash's persistent style of immersion journalism. He spent four years with Rosa Lee Cunningham and her family, observing and interviewing them through a careful methodology designed to penetrate what Dash calls a subject's "public mask."

Dash spent more than three decades developing this particular brand of reporting. Born in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1944 and raised in New York City, Dash began working at the *Post* in the mid-1960s while a student at Howard University. He moved up the ranks from copy aide to general assignment reporter, foreign correspondent, and West African Bureau Chief, before landing a position on Bob Woodward's prestigious Project Unit in 1984.

There Dash was able to focus on long-term projects that explored controversial intersections of race and poverty in America. For his first project—a six-part series on adolescent childbearing—Dash spent a year living in D.C.'s poverty-stricken Washington Heights neighborhood, cultivating relationships with dozens of young parents and their families in order to understand the motivations for childbirth among poor, black inner-city teens. The series was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and later developed into the book, *When*

Children Want Children: The Urban Crisis of Teenage Childbearing (1989). It paved the way for projects on other controversial subjects—drug use by D.C. prison guards, the evolution of young male killers, and intergenerational criminal activity, as reported in *Rosa Lee*.

In 1998, Dash left the *Post* to take a joint faculty position in journalism and Afro-American Studies at the University of Illinois. He also holds affiliations with the Center for Advanced Study, the Center for African Studies, the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, the College of Law, and a Swanlund Chair, the university's highest endowed title.

I interviewed Dash in person in at the University of Illinois on February 27, 2017, about the nature of doing journalism in academia and the development of long-term immersion projects, including his current book. As one of his former students, it was a unique pleasure to turn the audio recorder in his direction. Our conversation has been edited for length.

McQueen: It's been a while since we've had a book from you, but I happen to know that you are currently working on a new project with the working title *Defining Moments in Black and White,* about the American sense of ethnicity. Can you tell me more about it?

Dash: That's the aggravating thing about working in academe. You can only work in spurts. I did a lot of interviewing over the winter break. And then classes began and we need to meet about this, we need to meet about that—can't we just do it on email? I always structure my classes at the end of the week, Thursday and Friday, so I can go out of town Saturday and get some interviewing done, and come back Wednesday. But there's no sense leaving town because Monday you've got a meeting at noon. All these meetings. Academic life is nice, I shouldn't even be complaining about it. I have a chair that allows me to travel and do the research. But I can't get out of town. I'm always squeezing in an interview here and an interview there.

The idea for the book comes from an interview I did with Judith Williams Lyles, a black woman in Charleston, Illinois. She has since retired but at the time she was a professor at Eastern Illinois University. She was born in Mattoon, Illinois, which is just sixteen miles west of Charleston. She talked about being the only black girl in the local Girl Scout troop. She had always been popular growing up, with both black and white people in the town. And she worked at being popular—she was the president of the Girl Scout troop. This would have been around 1951.

They went on a hiking trip in the fall, and needed to collect firewood to cook and keep warm with. And one of the girls jumped up and said, "Last one back is a nigger." And of course the scout mistress was embarrassed

and Judy was embarrassed. The scout mistress said, “You know you just used an epithet that embarrassed the president of the troop.” And the girl said, “Why?” And the mistress said, “Well, ‘nigger’ is an epithet that describes African Americans.” And she said, “Oh, I didn’t know that.” She had always heard people in her family talk about niggers but she didn’t know that it applied to black people as a negative term. But, at any rate, Judy said that for her it was a defining moment because she understood that being assimilated fully into American society was not possible. She would always be the Other.

McQueen: How did you pick the other participants?

Dash: By snowballing. I don’t have any survey structure in place. But I’ve interviewed many people about their defining moment. That moment would tell you something about where you stood in American society in terms of privilege. There are many people in the project but their narratives are not strong. And for this genre, you need strong narratives. So I’m thinking of four or six narratives. I haven’t settled on a number yet.

So right now the main people in the study are a white southern couple [from Virginia] and a black woman in Savannah, Georgia who did research that qualified her to be admitted into the United Daughters of the Confederacy. And was admitted. So she’s an active member of the Savannah chapter. And Melvin Douglass is a retired professor with a Ph.D. and four Master’s degrees. He’s doing a fifth Master’s degree beginning this fall at Harvard University in anthropology. Much of his drive comes out of the fact that he’s black-skinned. The light-skinned members of his family shunned him because they felt that he was too dark, in terms of American colorism. Well, that’s a fascinating story. And Lee Ann Bell, a white woman who just recently retired from Barnard College in New York. She’s done work in documentary filmmaking, about blacks and whites who went through integration together in small-town Mississippi. Bell is also interesting because she’s trained teachers who, some of them, were sent to the elementary school I went to in Harlem. So there’s an affinity there.

The couple is important to me. The man is the great-great grandson of Edmund Ruffin, who was a prominent Confederate officer during the Civil War. And reportedly—I don’t know if this is true, it may be apocryphal—fired the first cannon shot at Fort Sumter that started the Civil War. At the end of the war, he wrapped himself in a Confederate flag and committed suicide. Ruffin lost everything except the privilege of white skin and access to education. And one can argue that although [his family] lost everything, they were able to recoup because they had education and status in American society. So I’m going to have to broach that with [the great-great grandson] and ask him to grapple with it.

McQueen: It sounds like the structure of the project might look in some ways like *When Children Want Children*.

Dash: I don't know. I don't know if I should write a chapter about each person, and maybe an opening chapter that deals with many of the other people, who had significant developments in their lives but whose moment hadn't generated the same kind of reaction that it did for the others.

McQueen: At what point you do start thinking about structure? Is that something you have in mind from the beginning, or do you wait until you've done the bulk of your interviewing?

Dash: It evolves. When I woke up this morning I was sitting at the breakfast table thinking about the structure. And I said, it's too broad. You know it's too broad. And the other people don't have a strong narrative. And they're a mention, an anecdote that describes their defining moment but in terms of strong narrative, *these* are the people you need. I was also thinking I'm going to be in it, because with each prominent person not only do I have their narrative but I have strong dialogue.

McQueen: So you're going to put yourself in the book. Are you going to talk about your own family history? I know you've done a lot of genealogical research.

Dash: I'm going to tell my defining moment, when I understood where I stood in American society, when I was fifteen years old. Yeah, all of that will go in.

In interacting with them, I have to share that story with them so they're comfortable sharing with me. I'm thinking dialogue with all the principle persons, between me and them, is the best way to go. Not me just describing like some distant reporter, because I'm not. I'm working to establish a relationship with them so they will recognize that I am a journalist who will keep the professional barrier but also someone they feel comfortable with, and will share things that they haven't shared with other people. I'm asking them to be intimate, so I have to be intimate.

McQueen: You have a history degree from Howard. Both *Rosa Lee* and *When Children Want Children*—and it sounds like your latest project—take a long view on the social issues that you investigate. I'm wondering how you think history plays into the work of journalism?

Dash: Often [journalists] don't have time to write about the history. Often we just give people a snapshot of the current situation. I remember I did a two-part series on young male killers. And I went into great depth into the family's history. The young killers came from the same family and I spent a lot of time interviewing their mother—she had three boys and two girls—about the way she had grown up in South Carolina in a sharecropping fam-

ily, always kept in perpetual poverty and so on, and finally breaking free and moving to Washington, D.C. with hope for a better life. She was upset that her three sons, when I met her, were in prison. Both of her daughters were doing fine; they weren't involved in criminal activity. And she didn't understand that was there is a history to that. Much like what you will find in *When Children Want Children* in the family of Lillian Williams, coming from North Carolina, with a history of sexual abuse in the family. And in *Rosa Lee*, where getting an education was secondary to getting a job.

So the point I wanted to make was that the criticism of that series was for perpetuating stereotypes. That's the type of criticism that I get from the black middle class. And my argument is that the daily stories of young men arrested for murder produce the stereotype, not my series. With my series you understand the arc of history, and you understand how they ended up in that situation. Poverty was the main factor in becoming drug dealers and with drug dealing, particularly post–crack epidemic of 1985, you don't go into dealing crack, you're interested in dealing crack for money but you can't go into the crack trade unless you're willing to kill. People will set you up to be robbed, both your drugs and your money. If they know that you are carrying a gun but are unwilling to use it then you're just a target.

It's the daily reporting. They don't have time for history. They also rely on experts that they can use to report on rather than do the work themselves. But they can do it themselves. I had a lot of luxury to do this. Most reporters at the *Washington Post* were not given that luxury. I was working on a small unit when I was working on those long-form pieces. And so I was fortunate that I had the time and the support of my editors to do it.

McQueen: You made a move from standard reporting to the Project Unit. What was that transition like for you?

Dash: I had already done some long-form reporting, when I lived with guerillas in Angola. I lived with guerillas twice. I was invited to live with UNITA [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola] gorillas in Angola in 1973. I went and lived with them for two or three months, and did a four- or five-part series that ran in the *Post* during the Christmas holidays in 1973.

Then civil war broke out in Angola, when the Portuguese handed the government over to the MPLA [People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola]. Before UNITA were fighting a guerilla war against the Portuguese and now they were fighting to unseat an African government. My editor approached me in the early fall of '76. He said we got a message from the UNITA guerillas and they'd like you to come back and spend time with them. Now they're back to fighting and they've got some captured Cuban soldiers

that were fighting for the government that you can interview. And I said, "Oh, that's interesting."

McQueen: How long were you there?

Dash: Seven and a half months. I traveled 2,100 miles on foot in the war zone, along the Bié Plateau. That was where I did multiple interviews with the guerillas. I was trying to get past the rhetoric that they were told to tell me about why they were fighting, down to some of their real reasons. There were long periods when I was traveling on foot up, where we'd come to a guerilla camp, where we'd stay for a week or more. I'd find somebody to interact with and I'd interview them. I used the same methodology I taught you—repeated interviews. It all came down to ethnic fear of being dominated by another ethnic group. Pro-Soviet, Pro-Western, that had nothing to do with it. And that was the point I wanted to bring home when I wrote that series.

So then I covered a political campaign, a three-way race in Washington, D.C. in '78, and by the end of the campaign the executive editor told me that I was assigned to open a news bureau in Africa. So I selected to open a bureau in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. I was there from '79 to '84. When I came back I was supposed to do education on the national desk. Well, I'm not that interested in education. You didn't catch me on that.

But I'll tell you what happened. I was in a conversation with a lady friend of mine, and she told me that 53 per cent of all black children born in America were born to single mothers. And over a third of those were adolescent girls growing up in poverty. Well, I was skeptical. I went to Wendy Baldwin, who was a demographer at the National Institute of Health, who followed human populations in the US, and she told me, no, my friend's figures were right. The numbers, the rates were climbing. When I got that information I went back to the *Post*. Now I was working as the assistant foreign editor. That's boring. You're at the copy desk and you're editing correspondent's copy. I went to the managing editor and I said I'd really like to do a project of multiple interviews [on adolescent child bearing]. He said, well you can't do that on the foreign desk, so you need to move to Bob Woodward's Projects Desk. So that's how it evolved. So I was seeking to get off the foreign desk but I also was genuinely interested in looking at the phenomenon.

McQueen: And this particular unit let you do the kind of reporting that you excelled at, that people now call immersion journalism. Was it a term used at the time?

Dash: I never used it. It was an anthropological approach. I understood that. But other people gave it that name.

McQueen: Another thing that is associated with this style of journalism is an emphasis on narrative structure, and the use of first person.

Dash: My editors insisted on that. The first time I used first person was in the adolescent childbearing series, where the opening piece is all about why I selected the area I moved into, why I lived there for a year, how I approached families.

McQueen: I remember. I found it quite funny.

Dash: The roach-infested basement apartment.

McQueen: And the conversations you had within the *Post* office.

Dash: With Woodward. Yeah, I stopped speaking to him. I would send messages through his assistant, Barbara Feinman [now Feinman Todd].

McQueen: Right. And with *Rosa Lee* it's even more pronounced. There's a persona of Leon Dash in the books. And this character is somehow helpful for the reader, in order to understand the milieu in which you are operating. Was that something you did consciously?

Dash: No. Initially it was not something I wanted to do. My editors insisted on it in the series. When I did the adolescent childbearing series I was nervous. It was risky. I wasn't sure it was going to be successful. Once I did it in the series, I did it more so in the books. By that time I was comfortable with it.

McQueen: Were there other people in Woodward's unit doing similar projects?

Dash: There were nine investigative reporters and two editors. It was top-heavy. That was a lot of resources for nine reporters. Sometimes we'd drop down to six, but always two editors. That's a lot of investment.

McQueen: Besides having Woodward pushing you in one particular direction, were you drawing on any books, or other printed works, for inspiration?

Dash: No. I went in cold. I did not know what we were going to do. Let me repeat some of the process. When I met the adolescents I always went immediately to meet their adults. I was a forty-year-old man hanging out with boys and girls. I knew immediately people were going to think I was some sort of pedophile pretending to be journalist. So I immediately would go meet the parents, or parent, and I would explain what the project was about. It was based on their decisions. So, out of twenty-two families I approached, nine said no. That left me with thirteen families. And I saw it as too much. In two of the families there were eleven children each. So I kept one family, Lillian Williams's, and dropped the other. And with the other families, I made the decision based on their receptiveness to me. And the six that were the most receptive to what I was doing wound up being the six families I profiled.

McQueen: The sort of heightened authorial presence in your books is one of the hallmarks of what people now call literary journalism.

Dash: Oh, really?

McQueen: I was wondering if you ever thought about your writing as a specifically literary practice.

Dash: I see it as literary journalism. I didn't know that the emphasis on the author's presence was part of it. Is it seen as a positive or a negative quality, or just a quality?

McQueen: It's a quality that has pros and cons.

Dash: Okay, well, I've not studied literary journalism. Authorial presence can be overindulgent, so you have to be careful. I taught last semester a class that Walter Harrington had been teaching, Great Books of Journalism. One book was James Agee's *Let Us Know Praise Famous Men*, and I thought he was so indulgent with his own anguish. I sort of liked his detail, long descriptions of the poverty of the white sharecroppers that he was interviewing. But all that material about himself really annoyed me. I thought, *Oh this guy is really telling us too much about himself.*

McQueen: Did you keep much of Harrington's reading list?

Dash: I didn't. I changed it significantly. My list came from NYU's 1999 100 best works of journalism of the twentieth century.

McQueen: Which you are also on.

Dash: My book was one of them. Okay, so I did *Hiroshima*, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *In Cold Blood*, *The Fire Next Time*, *All the President's Men*, and *Rosa Lee*. And I let the students pick one book off the list. They picked Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. When they told me I said, "Oh Lord, what is wrong with you?!" So I was forced to read it too. I had to push myself but I got into it.

McQueen: One last question. What do you think the future holds for immersion journalism?

Dash: The possibilities for immersion journalism are open for all venues. I don't think long form is going away. I'm not sure many newspapers will invest in immersion journalism. When I did the adolescent childbearing series, the *Post* invested in an apartment, because I moved to that community. That's the best way to do it. That was Woodward's argument: You can't go in and out, you have to move there and be a part of the community. And that was the right choice. But I didn't do that with *Rosa Lee*. I just followed her around the city, wherever she was.

McQueen: Do you think those kinds of long pieces that require so much time and money are more likely to be done outside of newspapers in the future, like in the academy or in institutions that provide fellowships? I guess that's a question about funding.

Dash: That's hard to say. I don't know. Newspapers are doing a bit better

financially now, so I don't know.

McQueen: Even back then, in order to write your books you still had to find external funding.

Dash: Sure, particularly when I went on leave. I went on leave without pay. I didn't have the resources to support myself and my family without extra support. I had applied to twenty-five different foundations—that's the nature of it. I don't know whether many people will be able to do this—maybe people who have already done a book and been successful.

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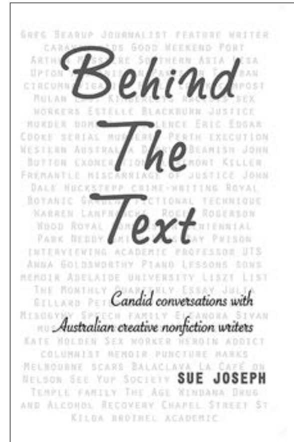
Australian literary journalism scholar Sue Joseph. Photography by Hans Bool

The Implications of Genre in Nonfiction

Behind the Text: Candid Conversations with Australian Creative Nonfiction Writers
By Sue Joseph. Melbourne: Hybrid Publishers. Paperback, 250 pp., AUD$29 (US$22)

Reviewed by Martha Nandorfy, University of Guelph, Canada



This new book of interviews featuring ten writers (twelve, counting a couple of writing partners) aims to fill a gap Sue Joseph sees in Australian thinking about the genre of creative nonfiction, and while the conversations specifically address that practice and reception in decidedly Australian terms, they potentially all contain something of interest to readers, practitioners, teachers, and critics of nonfiction everywhere. Joseph describes her approach to crafting the story of these conversations as meta-narrative, "a creative nonfiction rendering of research about and interviews conducted with the authors (x)." She structures the interviews around a central question: do authors think their work belongs to the genre of creative nonfiction and, if not, can she get them to acknowledge the usefulness of doing so? Now, a non-Australian interviewer might have been discouraged by the flak and even belligerent responses to these questions, but Joseph seems to anticipate the rift between academics' and practitioners' objectives, and with unflagging good humor and stamina she pursues this line of questioning even as she repeatedly hits the same wall. The good thing is that she ricochets off on fascinating tangents that, given her grace and intuition, allow her subjects to explore their ideas, however tentatively. Since she pretty much demands an answer to this question, her subjects cannot easily fall into simply repeating what they are accustomed to saying about their work.

In her introduction, Joseph considers how influential American critics like Norman Sims and John Hartsock trace the evolution of categories such as literary journalism, narrative literary journalism, narrative descriptive journalism, terms often coined by the writers themselves as Capote and Wolfe did to publicize their own inventiveness. This cultural comparison really captures the Australian difference since all of Joseph's subjects resist being labeled, most charging that categories only serve academics. Joseph, however, will not be dissuaded: "I make no apologies—I am an academic. But I enjoy very much the term 'creative nonfiction.' I know what it is, and I champion it as a term to be recognized and regarded in Australia," though she also asserts that these writings are already highly regarded despite lacking a label (xvi). She draws from her classroom experience to find shared reader response as the basis for categorizing this genre: she asks students to think of nonfiction stories they've read

and to consider "which ones evoke a narrative that they can remember because of its cinematic qualities; which can they remember as a film in their heads," leading her to assert: "I believe it is the experience of reading that defines nonfiction as literary and creative (xvi)." This might suggest that Joseph's methodology of interviewing practitioners rather than readers is skewed from the start, but true to her stated meta-narrative style, she allows her thinking to roam and evolve across the pages instead of editing out any contradictions. And so on the very next page, she switches her focus to the power of writing that elicits this reader response: "I believe it is writing that envelops intellect, analysis, empathy and grace. An open mind that is able to analyse impartially; empathy of the author. Empathy with grace, leaving judgement behind . . . but it must be met with rigorous fact checking and analysis to make it verifiable and credible (xvii)." And here, I should self-identify as a literary critic and theorist, since the interdisciplinary nature of our interests is what makes reviews and conferences productive. From my perspective, it would be worthwhile to examine how the specific writing strategies and techniques of this genre elicit reader responses, instead of just jumping from one idea to another and leaving fragmentary impressions but, admittedly, these do accumulate from chapter to chapter forming a cogent if not definitive sense of genre.

Joseph clearly maps out how genres relate to each other, and I find her introductory statement particularly helpful for understanding the difference between literary journalism and creative nonfiction even as the actual writings evolve, become hybridized, and are always several steps ahead of criticism and theory. She says: "So my model is that the umbrella term of creative nonfiction sits at the top, below which are the sub-genres: true crime writing, memoir, profile, essay, literary journalism, historical nonfiction, journal writing, food writing, travel writing, found poetry (nonfiction poetry), documemoir (xvii)." While I like how inclusive Joseph's paradigm is, she does not include "life writing," which in the case of younger writers, especially, might be more appropriate than "memoir" and also captures the process of writing about/in the present, and can include food and travel, which in themselves seem too narrow.

One substantially different interview is with Aboriginal writer Doris Pilkington Garimara (whose work many around the globe know from the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*). Unfortunately, this conversation doesn't flesh out the particularly important insights of Aboriginal storytelling around truthfulness (as opposed to Truth), collective memory, and autohistory. In other words, Aboriginal storytelling is not just an ethnic variant of nonfiction but has a long history as the source and vehicle of all knowledge and teaching in oral and written/pictorial forms, also imbued with the power of healing and worldmaking. It is clear that Joseph conducted preliminary research on this writer and her community, perhaps Aboriginal–white settler histories, and also pondered how to approach what she sees as ultimately a story about mothers and daughters. Pilkington Garimara's response to Joseph's central query about the terms "creative non-fiction," "literary journalism," and "long-form narrative" suggests that for this storyteller, the question of genre is more irrelevant than it is to most of the other practitioners: "'I don't know,' she says, trying not to disappoint me, 'but I've been an Indigenous or an Aboriginal writer for years. I'm honoured to

carry that label because it's what I'm known by overseas: the Aboriginal writer, or the Indigenous writer that's from Australia. That's me' (40)." This is a very different kind of life story given the Aboriginal experience of colonization and cultural and literal genocide. As Margaret Simons notes in another interview, "One of the things I learned through Hindmarsh Island and elsewhere with Aboriginal people is you have to take much more time and allow them to interview you before you try and ask any direct questions . . . the whole idea of asking a question and expecting to be entitled to an honest answer is sort of culturally strange to them (124)." This interview would have been more compelling had Joseph's preliminary research also prepared her to encounter the kinds of stories that exceed European limitations of reason and realism. Allowing Pilkington Garimara to set the parameters around Aboriginal storytelling, which embodies many complex ideas that can be theorized in relation to genre, might have led to more pertinent questions about the relationship among stories, land (country as they say in Australia), and collective experience.

Though the focus is always on the writer, Joseph's gaze and voice situates her in each interview. Her personality shines through in the acuteness of her observations, her humor and ability to register silences and read between the interviewees' lines and body language. For example, she starts the first interview story *in medias res*, that is, we don't know right away that she and her class are skyping Paul McGeough in Kabul, Afghanistan: "He looms on the screen at the front of the classroom, bleary-eyed and scruffy. His hair is dishevelled and since I saw him last, he has grown a sizeable beard—greyish and wild. He is wearing a grey T-shirt which he has obviously slept in, and it seems we woke him up (1)." She alternates this kind of immediate contact with narrating her approach to a particular location, especially if it is off the beaten tracks of urban centers. In those cases, she paints the landscape, inviting us to imagine that we accompany her, Tessa, her daughter who often joins her, and the always present but surreptitious "Dutchman" with the camera, Hans Bool, Joseph's significant other (as we only find out in the acknowledgments). An interesting strategy that Joseph uses to get more insight out of her interviewees is to let them choose the meeting place, which always reveals something about their sense of place, a scene they might belong to, their taste in food and drink. For example, the Pepper Café, where she meets with Simons, also reveals an odd historical detail given that above its threshold are the words: "Girdwood's Hygienic Library," harking back to the nineteenth-century belief that books carried disease, hence this former library's practice of wiping them down with formaldehyde.

McGeough, the first writer interviewed in *Behind the Text*, sets the challenge Joseph will face from here on in. He seems not to understand the question of whether he is writing creative nonfiction or literary journalism, or at least fails to see it as relevant. After Joseph reminds him of his vivid description of running toward the 9/11 explosions, he says, perplexed, "But that's just reporting. . . ." Joseph humors her reader, saying that "He seems intent on being obtuse. . . (5)." But McGeough will not be cowed into admitting that his writing is more artful than journalistic reportage, and furthermore he attributes this to an Australian cultural attitude that smacks of macho pragmatism: ". . .when you say are you a literary journalist, you think 'Give

me a fuckin' break,' you know, because some people will never accept that journalism is an art; they will tell you it's a craft. I think the sense amongst Australian journalists, if you dare to sit down on any bar stool in this country and say: 'Well, actually I'm a literary journalist,' is that you'd get hit, so you wouldn't do it." In slightly less threatening terms, he suggests "you'd be laughed off the floor (8)." Here we start to get a sense of an Australian attitude that Joseph locks horns with. She's determined to make "creative nonfiction" stick, a determination that must also be an Australian attitude, but it all makes for good fun and yields fascinating insights into relationships and writing. Instead of becoming frustrated or reading something into McGeough's obtuse practicality, Joseph exercises her meta-narrative technique to underscore just how practical McGeough has to be to get his job done. Most readers are probably with her when she has to ask him what a Pelican box is. His answer says much more than the objects he enumerates: "What's in the Pelican boxes? Let me see . . . all sorts of shit." After listing electronic devices, a bulletproof vest, and the various jerry-rigging uses of baggage straps, he says, "If I'm in a high-rise hotel and I've got to fashion a platform that hangs off the balcony or out the window to put the satellite on. . . (18)." Joseph ends this section without comment, a loud silence inviting her reader to speculate on why such a reporter/writer might not give too much thought to theorizing genre.

While David Leser's career covers different kinds of journalism, including documentary film, he is well known as a profile writer. It is in this third chapter that it dawns on me that Joseph is also writing profiles. I remember that often I unconsciously start to imitate the style of the author I write about, and think that in an interview situation, that empathetic contagion must be even stronger. In Leser's case, Joseph foregrounds an action that gives insight into his personality and priorities: phone calls from his daughter that he always takes, interrupting the interviews, and speaking warmly to her. He stresses his parenting role and how it determined where to settle in order to be a full-on father in what he calls a working/home environment. In an unusual (creative?) move for an interviewer, Joseph actually tells Leser about how during her own cadetship in the *Daily Telegraph* newsroom, Leser was perceived to be a shoo-in because of his father's status as a media mogul. She reveals having some kind of history with other interviewees as well, showing in a performative way how integrity works through this kind of honest disclosure. Again, classifying texts into genres is seen as overthinking, though Leser figures that critics' need to do this in order to organize anthologies can't be a bad thing. He outright challenges Joseph, refusing to think about himself as categorized in creative nonfiction: "I just think of myself as a journalist and a storyteller," which the persistent Joseph thinks "seems to be the end of that discussion, for the moment (50–51)." Leser chooses another question as key, given that, as he says, the older he gets the more he realizes the importance of relationships and community: "Does the story you are telling serve that (53)?" This conversation takes us from formal conventions and literary techniques to consider political community engagement as a criterion, progressively opening up the complexity triggered by Joseph's question, as we take this Australian tour with her.

One of the best interviews is with Kate Holden, author of the memoir *In My Skin*, which is about her five-year experience of being addicted to heroin and support-

ing her habit through sex work. In the first lines of this profile, Joseph notes impressions that delve below the surface: "There is a gentle fragility surrounding author Kate Holden. Or perhaps a canny wariness. It is not directed outward but rather inwards, towards herself. At herself (67)." Given that Holden writes "regularly and seemingly affectionately" about her needle marks, Joseph starts the interview by bluntly asking to see them. She refrains from explaining this move to her reader, and while it's a gamble to charge at Holden's fragile countenance, yet it seems to work. Sequencing the stages of information gathering, it turns out that Joseph had already "confessed" to Holden, on first contact over the phone, that she grew up with a heroin addict (though she doesn't identify the family member). Again, Joseph's rejection of the pretense of distanced objectivity in favor of empathetic understanding is clearly productive.

Holden consciously deviates from memoirs "about absolution or resolving shame," instead invoking her authorial control over reality: "This is what it's like, this is what happened to me and I'm not ashamed about it (86)." This interview includes an extended conversation about the differences between memoir and autobiography, and the reasons for writing about what others might assume to be negative experiences related to some kind of failure: "I really strongly believe that you don't disavow what happens to you (71)." This is also one of the most philosophical interviews, given that Holden doesn't "really believe in the plausibility of the world. So for me it's all material, it's all like looking at a book (76)." She gives insights into why there is such a demand for this kind of nonfiction, although her terms are ambiguous—"sense of the authentic"; "what appears to be authentic"—which demonstrate Holden's suspicions about authenticity without analyzing them further. She does broaden the scope, however, from the reader's need to identify with the writer's experiences to thinking about how in a culture of artifice and political misinformation, where people feel atomized, nonfiction gives a sense of corroboration and collaboration with other people (85). Having written in explicit detail about her sex work raises questions about protecting her family from knowledge that might traumatize them. Fortunately for Holden, her parents' lasting reaction to her writing is not shame or disavowal but pride in their daughter. In answer to Joseph's burning question of genre, Holden is uncertain about the modifier "creative." Though she doesn't have a better one, she dislikes its association with "made-up" and wishes for a term to capture how her writing "is more engaged with the exploratory nature of that kind of nonfiction (85)." The unexpected aspects of situations we might not have much knowledge about make this particular interview especially surprising. For example, our unexamined assumptions about sex workers might be rattled by the fact that Holden was sacked from both her jobs in brothels "for being a union loudmouth, for standing up for the rights of the workers," and recalling this with infectious joy and laughter shared with Joseph.

At the beginning of her conversation with John Dale, Joseph is implicated as actor and not interviewer. This colleague, mentor, boss, and friend gives a speech to launch one of her previous books, *Speaking Secrets*. Here Joseph draws the reader's attention to how she sequences events for narrative impact: "But this launch was after I interviewed him for this text. Our interview was blunt—possibly because we have a history—and I now wonder about what he says about betrayal during his

launch speech as I begin this chapter (94).” What Dale says about betrayal relates to the dynamics of the interview in general, and how the writer controls and arranges language in the retelling: “words are omitted, intentions changed, adjectives added or embellished” can seem like a betrayal. This segment of Dale’s speech is ambivalent because he draws no direct connection between representation (how the interviewer narrates or stories the interview instead of transcribing the dialogue verbatim), and the interviewer’s integrity and honesty as a writer.

Joseph’s question about defining the category of creative nonfiction is understood by Dale (the only interviewee to do so!), given his academic background. He gives a good historical overview of Wolfe’s and Capote’s influence in the United States on defining genres that they publicized as their own creation. Dale offers the suggestive insight that there is no big distinction between fiction and nonfiction. He defines narrative as “a story. Something being told of worth, that continues on (98),” which could be related to the Aboriginal understanding of what makes a story meaningful. He does, however, delineate some restrictions in journalistic writing, like “when you start ascribing thoughts to your real characters.” Joseph and Dale get into a nitty-gritty discussion about representing a character’s actions imagined by the writer. That is, “I’m showing an action which is quite common and I’m sure she would have done that sort of action,” an assertion that Dale defends (unnecessarily?) with “I checked it with her sister (99).” Joseph cleverly pushes his buttons to fully draw out the ethical implications of narrating details to construct a story, that necessarily requires some imaginative visualizing of a character’s actions. Dale thinks that “a literary writer does something different every time,” in contrast to a genre writer who is confined by genre. Even after a long discussion they do not see eye to eye on creative nonfiction, which Joseph clearly considers a more expansive category than the example of a genre like “crime writing,” and I would agree with her. Joseph’s humor disarms Dale as he remembers exactly when he started to write, and she asks, “You’re kidding—you can remember? . . . Why? Were you in jail or something (107)?”

Simons responds to Joseph’s question of whether her writing can be described as creative nonfiction with “I hate that term (132).” Again, this opens up the conversation instead of shutting it down. Simons explains her irritation with defining a genre through negation, preferring such terms as “dirty journalism,” “disinterested journalism,” and even “objectivity with bullshit (132).” (And I find myself wondering if such course titles might actually increase student enrolments). By now, I start to see that Joseph’s problem is that she envisions an expansive genre that could accommodate many different forms of expression but each interviewee focuses only on their own approach and so, to that extent, the writer is never quite talking about the same outcome or process. I find myself also wondering how the interviewees would see each other included in this book under the unifying banner of creative nonfiction. How would a war correspondent identify with cookbook writers Greg Malouf and Lucy Rushbrook, however culturally rich the storytelling behind the recipes, and vice versa? How would Garimara respond to Greg Bearup when he says about Aboriginal people that “they’ve been unable to adapt to our system (158)?” And when he rails against the white people he sees as overprotective of Aboriginal stories gathered

and retold by outsiders like himself? Maybe these questions are precisely what make Joseph's book so engaging, besides opening up the possibility of teaching so many unexamined and un-theorized forms of writing within the academic framework that necessarily categorizes texts and types of discourse.

For a non-Australian like myself, *Behind the Text* also gives me myriad views on Australia, its history, and its varied landscape and people. Bearup's book *Caravanstan* might at first seem like travel writing, but the trip he makes with his life and writing partner Lisa Upton and their young son is a good example of how stories usually exceed neat categories. While his title references a common mode of vacationing in Australia, driving from beach to beach and sleeping in a camper van, Bearup writes about much more diverse and less comfortable sojourns, joking that his son might end up suing him when he grows up (reminding me of my eldest daughter's exaggerated complaint that instead of taking the family to nice resorts, we always traveled to slums). Though I haven't read this book it is now on my list. It promises to be another great introduction to Australia, not based on sameness but rather on diversity, painful histories, and culture clash.

The last three chapters of *Behind the Text* underscore the stark differences Joseph's genre category tries to accommodate. Joseph opens the conversation with Estelle Blackburn by candidly exposing this writer's personal experience of abuse at the hands of her ex, drawing the uncanny parallel between her true crime text, *Broken Lives*, about a murder and two innocent men falsely convicted, and her memoir *The End of Innocence*. As I said before, we learn so much about different experiences in Joseph's conversations, and how all kinds of relationships work. Here, Blackburn ponders the nature of abuse in an intimate relationship—something so easy to blame on the victim for putting up with it, but her intelligent, articulate insights clarify how one instance of forgiveness can seal one's fate: "When he was gorgeous he was gorgeous (Aussie for 'generous, loving, kind')—so they get you into that gambling thing of, well, hang on, that's a one-off, he's under a lot of stress . . . that's the trouble though, as the doctor said, once you've given in once, they've got you (173)."

It is even possible that Blackburn's abusive ex may have been the serial "Claremont Killer," since the deaths of three young girls remain unsolved. This is a difficult conversation for interviewer and interviewee but compellingly illustrates Leser's claim that women are more interesting than men: "there are places you can go with women. There are places that you can investigate—the corners of the psyche and the soul and the heart—and these are more possible to navigate with women than with men (61)." Is it this kind of place that Joseph and Blackburn investigate together, although it's a terrifying place for women: "Her enthusiasm and sparkle die down momentarily. The reality of her suspicions—and the deep irony of her professional life intersecting with her private life in such a clear parallel, has clearly taken its toll." Joseph does not hold back and speculates openly about a plausible connection: "it is almost as if by investigating the horrors Eric Edgar Cooke perpetrated, she channeled his energies and manifested her own version in her own life." While it is unclear whether Joseph actually voiced this in the interview, Blackburn nevertheless seems to respond directly: "In a way, the blessing of it all was it certainly helped me understand (175)."

Blackburn considers the question of genre in the academic context of accepting a scholarship to write a Ph.D. on how she wrote *Broken Lives*: "So then I understood. There's literary journalism, they're trying to legitimize it as a genre; it just came absolutely naturally to me (176)." Joseph pushes Blackburn to examine the contentious issue of the internal narrative she attributes to the murderer Eric Edgar Cooke, which she didn't put in italics but did base on Cooke's confessions that she was advised against including as appendices (177). Selecting a quote from their interview, Joseph offers insight into Blackburn's unfounded lack of self-esteem, perhaps another reason why she gave her abuser another chance, and then another. The implicit connections Joseph draws through shaping the story suggest that maybe it is not just forgiveness, maybe Blackburn doesn't trust her own instincts of self-preservation and lacks a sense of self-worth: "So I don't think I'm a good writer. I am just a journo but obviously somewhere along the track I can tune in somewhere and get something down. Really, that's all I am—I'm a journo that pretends to be a real writer (186)."

The conversation with chef Greg Malouf and Lucy Rushbrooke is probably the most contentious in terms of establishing (or erasing?) the parameters of genre. On the one hand, I agree with Joseph's impulse to consider hybrid texts: "These books are not just cookbooks; nor are they just travel books. They are a journey of culturally rich information . . . a hybrid of literary journalism, of historical writing, of wonderful recipes and the tastes and the senses and the smells of the food (198)." On the other hand, I wonder about the limitations placed on these authors by marketing criteria and objectives. The interview doesn't revolve entirely around food but neither does it explore problems of writing in nearly the same detail and depth as the other chapters. Malouf likens his and Rushbrooke's writing to reportage, "But I guess nonfiction writers, without kind of breaking them down into any sub-category, they write about what they know; it's an area of expertise, whether it's academic writing or technical writing or about a particular discipline (212)." Which is true enough, but most technical or academic writing does not aspire to creative nonfiction. And surely the prime objective of contextualizing recipes with however interesting stories precludes writing about many aspects of a given place from the publisher's perspective, not due to lack of knowledge but to the constraints of the sub-category of food travel. Rushbrooke seems aware of this limitation: "There have probably been things that people have told me that would have added some colour to the story, but because there's very much a clear agenda to what we're writing about that kind of stuff doesn't necessarily have a place in the story. . . (214)." Joseph responds by suggesting that this relates to ethical journalism, which is again a stretch, and overlooks the far more obvious constraints of marketing.

Perhaps because this interview troubles her genre of creative nonfiction, Joseph pursues a subtext about how this couple who have split up, remain friends and colleagues, how they speak openly about the time their relationship hit the rocks during the most stressful phase of producing their first book together: ". . . and we decided to separate. 'So, Greg, did you move home?' she asks him . . . 'I can't remember where I went . . . I think I lived in the car,' Malouf says with a small, plaintive smile (197)." We never find out why they split up as a couple. If Joseph knows, she doesn't let on.

Instead she writes a profile piece focusing on how they negotiate their differences, and their shared passion for travel, food, and imbibing other cultures.

For her last conversation, Joseph visits Anna Goldsworthy, an award-winning author and pianist, in her Adelaide home. They discuss her biography *Piano Lessons* and the famous essay, "Unfinished Business, Sex, Freedom and Misogyny," about former Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Australian sexism. Joseph admires the beauty of this long-form piece of writing, in which Goldsworthy "seemingly celebrates Gillard's Misogyny Speech as a breakaway from the safe and anodyne endurance of endemic sexism, rampant throughout Australia (225)." Upon discussing *Welcome to Your New Life*, about Goldsworthy's pregnancy and birth of her son, Joseph discovers that Goldsworthy crafted composite characters and then explores the ethical question of not revealing this with a disclaimer. Joseph expresses concern but in a non-judgmental way, suggesting that "flagging this technique with her readers before they read, would position her more strongly. Perhaps next time (231)." This resonates with some of the previous interviews, in that writers of creative nonfiction (or whatever label they prefer or reject all together) are not always fully conscious of all writing decisions they make but learn through dialogue with readers, critics, and theorists, who put them into conversations with other writers as Joseph does in this book. And together we ponder different storytelling techniques and their ethical implications.

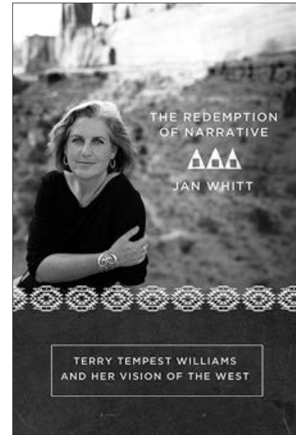
Since *Behind the Text* ends without an epilogue or conclusion, the words that stick in Joseph's mind spoken to her by Goldsworthy end up perhaps carrying more weight than intended. Or maybe sequencing the interviews with Goldsworthy as the concluding chapter does intentionally draw the reader's attention to the words appearing in italics: "It's the difference between seeing and looking, I guess; the difference between hearing and listening (244)." Goldsworthy's words are drawn from a long quote on the same page about how an artist interprets experience, "making it real, not just giving information but actually embodying it." This observation is probably more clearly about the genre Joseph wants to categorize as creative nonfiction.

I'm of two minds about the lack of a "post mortem." While the ideas and performative strategies in these ten conversations accrue in support of Joseph's umbrella category of creative nonfiction, I'm not sure why she avoids theorizing them. Isn't that how we extrapolate concepts from one context to another relevant one? But maybe it is just this avoidance of nailing down the genre that Joseph considers generative of hybrid forms of writing. *Behind the Text* has helped me to understand the restrictions of literary journalism, because of journalism's conventions and journalists' formation. Like many others in the field of nonfiction, I'm tired of the debate "between those who believe storytelling distorts the truth, and those who see narrative as a particularly effective way of conveying truth (xiv)," even if we must weigh these factors on a case-by-case basis. Ironically (given that Joseph sees herself as a member of the tribe of IALJS, and book review editor of this publication requested a review of her book), *Behind the Text* proposes to those of us who are not journalists and write about texts that exceed the restrictions of even "literary" journalism to consider other venues identified with creative nonfiction. In any event, Joseph's book of conversations is sure to generate many more fertile conversations within the tribe and beyond.

Redeeming Narrative, or Narrative as Redeemer?

The Redemption of Narrative: Terry Tempest Williams and Her Vision of the West
by Jan Whitt. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2016. Hardcover, 254 pp., $29

Reviewed by Doug Cumming, Washington & Lee University, United States



A colleague in another department, the English Department, told me I should read a book by Terry Tempest Williams called *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place.* I found it in the Science Library. It was a work of radiant insight, autobiographical and political and poetic all at once. The book, published in 1991, begins with a poem by Mary Oliver and a naturalist's map of Great Salt Lake in Utah. Thirty-six chapters each bear the name of a bird, most of them observed by the author in the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, and each begins with the exact, weirdly fluctuating level of the adjacent Great Salt Lake at the time of her observation (to a hundredth of an inch). This is scrupulous science writing, but each chapter is also a mini-essay made of journal entries in the old Emersonian tradition. The book's elegant structure is alloyed with woman-wildness.

The final, thirty-seventh chapter, "The Clan of the One-Breasted Women," describes the testing of atomic bombs that occurred in Nevada, upwind of Mormon settlements in Utah, between 1951 and 1962. Williams, after her mother's death from cancer, told her father about a recurring dream from childhood, a flash of light over the mesas of a desert. "You did see it," he told her. "The bomb. The cloud." The Tempest family had been driving home from California an hour before dawn in 1957 when they saw and felt one of the bomb tests, which rained light ash on the car. The writer, one of ten women in her family who had mastectomies, cannot say whether the bomb tests are to blame for creating this clan of one-breasted women. But her questioning of Cold War patriotism, along with her questioning of the authority of her Mormon Church leaders, inducts her into another clan of ten women—protesters who trespassed onto the Nevada Test Site to be arrested. A female officer who frisked her finds a pen and paper tucked in one of Williams's boots. "And these?" she asks. "Weapons," the writer says with a smile.

The copy of *Refuge* that I borrowed from the Science Library a couple of years ago lists seven other books she had also written by the time of this edition in 2000. Why had I never heard of her, this Annie Dillard of the West, or any of these books? I have found the answer to that question in this critical study of Terry Tempest Williams by Jan Whitt, a professor of journalism, literature, and media studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Whitt, who has published critical studies around

what she calls the "borderland" between fiction and nonfiction, makes it clear that Williams inhabits a borderland all her own.

Being inspired by Whitt's book, I went looking for writings by Williams in the university's main library. There were forty-four separate titles containing her work. These were scattered all over the place, mostly as essays in edited collections around various categories, such as women writers on the environment, eccentric ideas for wilderness preservation, a sense of place, and writers of the West. The problem, for literary critics anyway, is that she eludes genres, and does so deliberately. "When we separate, segregate, and sequester ourselves into boxes, compartments, and genres, we are allowed to fall asleep," she tells Whitt in an email interview near the end of *The Redemption of Narrative*. "We are all diminished by categories. We flourish in an open landscape of the imagination."

Williams also pushed against the conventional category of professor at the University of Utah, where she has taught in the Environmental Humanities graduate program that she founded. The university apparently didn't appreciate her teaching students in the desert rather than on campus, so last year she ended some slogging negotiations over her contract and quit.

Whitt addresses the problem of categorization by placing eight of Williams's books into four thematic chapters: narrative, allegory, activism as phenomenology, and apocalyptic revelation. The themes are woven around Eliot's "Four Quartets," the familiar first lines of each of these poems quoted as a chapter head. One of the pleasures of this critical study is passing through the warm sunlight of long passages from Eliot as well as from Williams. The second half of the book places Williams in the company of literary journalists and animal-rights activists, or rather three allegorical texts by Hemingway, Orwell, and Roger Rosenblatt about the killing of an animal.

Provoking us to read and appreciate Williams, Whitt's book provides a valuable service. It reminds us that literary journalism, or whatever label we want to give well-crafted nonfiction, can be about more than characters caught in the public affairs of the day or some human complication—although Williams's grief over the treatment of earth, animals, and habitable communities is as current and compelling as any journalism. Williams goes much deeper, into the metaphorical signs of the world, whether in the Great Basin of her home state, or a seven-year study of Hieronymus Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* in the Prado of Madrid, or the unfamiliar wonders of the Serengeti.

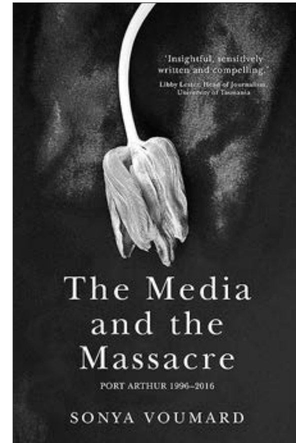
For an academic book to parse the meaning of all this rich work of "meaning-making" is hugely challenging, especially when it draws on a great many literary comparisons and five previous works by Whitt. The book feels oddly repetitive and free of criticism, with many disconcerting references to its own own chapters and to its title, becoming literally a self-referential text.

The book is more an appreciation than an analysis. The title leaves us with an interesting ambiguity. Is Williams redeeming the art of narrative with her Transcendentalist storytelling, or is she using narrative to redeem something in the world—or in herself, or in the reader? *The Redemption of Narrative* invites the reader to try on all these meanings.

The Journalism and the Murderer

The Media and the Massacre: Port Arthur 1996–2016
by Sonya Voumard. Melbourne: Transit Lounge Publishing, 2016. Paperback, 224 pp., AUD$29 (US$22)

Reviewed by Rosemary Armao, State University of New York at Albany, United States



Journalist Sonya Voumard did not write *The Media and the Massacre* for an American audience, but her book ought to stir the same guilt and raise the same uncomfortable questions for her colleagues in that country as they have in Australia. The massacre of the title refers to a 1996 mass shooting in Tasmania at a one-time Port Arthur prison colony turned tourist attraction that left thirty-five people dead and twenty-three injured. It was the worst shooting ever in Australia, and led to massive gun law reforms, as well as to the 1,035-year prison sentence shooter Martin Bryant continues to serve. Mass killings and the coverage of them, meanwhile, have continued unabated in this country with death tolls near or surpassing Port Arthur's (thirty-two in Blacksburg, Virginia in 2007; twenty-seven in Newtown, Connecticut in 2012; forty-nine in Orlando this year). Voumard's insights may, in fact, be even more needed in America than at home.

What exactly should journalists be allowed to go after in pursuing stories about violence and mass death? Where does public interest leave off and torment for a city or a region begin? Where does privacy begin and end for the survivors, for relatives of victims, and especially for relatives of the shooters? What care should we take in talking to victims and survivors of trauma? When people have complaints about how we do with the story we tell, what happens then? Who listens to them and mediates? In short, what is the relationship between reporter and source, and which one owns the story being told? Voumard's view about the essential deception at the heart of most journalism is reminiscent of Janet Malcolm's *The Journalist and the Murderer*. "We will tell your story," we attempt to bribe the people we want to turn into sources. "We understand you and will make others see you in the way you want to be seen."

Critics have consistently noted one flaw in *The Media and the Massacre* and that is Voumard's focus for too much of the book on the how married journalists Robert Wainwright and Paolo Totaro appear to have cheated Bryant's mother, Carleen Bryant in writing their 2009 book *Born or Bred*. The writers made a deal to tell the mother's story. They wanted to get at the good question of what led the shooter to act, but they ended the partnership after the mother steadfastly held that her son was innocent. They wrote their own book but used long excerpts of a manuscript the mother wrote and shared with them when she thought they'd be partners. In effect,

they used her own words to damn her as the creator of a killer. Carleen Bryant won a legal settlement it sounds like she richly deserved. They so plainly did wrong that Voumard might have dispatched it quickly as an extreme case and gotten back to less well-defined wrongs journalists too often commit in telling great stories.

Journalists covering riveting sociopathic events would do well to think about their motivation. Are they out to titillate, to out-scoop competitors on details no one else has, to gain access to the suffering and wrongdoings no one else has? Why? Do they purely want to make a name for themselves? Because this is a work of literary nonfiction, Voumard turns us into reporters along with her. This is a smart method for getting into the profound ethical issues she is tackling here. She began with her dissertation but transformed a dry academic tome into an easy-to-read nonfiction narrative that puts us into the shoes of journalist. We listen to her interview colleagues and scholars while interrogating her own motives as a journalist and a news consumer. She allows us to accompany her as she digs into public records when rebuffed by people who don't want to be interviewed. The Port Arthur killings occurred as Voumard started her first job as a cub reporter, explaining how it came to inspire this in-depth ethical reexamination.

In recent times, as the guns have continued to blaze, journalists have attempted to do better. Anderson Cooper and the *New York Times* have made headlines by telling the stories of victims in as rich detail as the biographies of perpetrators. The Dart Center at Columbia University has led the way in sensitively interviewing victims of crime, war, and dislocation so that information does not come at the cost of further trauma. Reporters ask themselves whether they are perpetuating violence by glorifying and reveling in stories about massacre.

It's hard to say if that is sufficient. The relevance to my work of what I was reading came to me before I finished the book. I received a message via Facebook from a woman asking if I were the same journalist who had written about her mother thirty-five years ago in Youngstown, Ohio. Rosalie Grant had been convicted of burning up her two toddler sons in order to collect insurance she'd taken out on them. The woman calling me, a third child, had lived with her grandmother and had come to believe that while her mother held some responsibility for her brothers' deaths, the real culprit was a drug dealer out to get some cash.

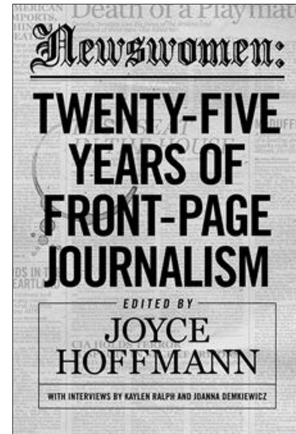
I had two immediate reactions. One was guilt that while it was certainly my byline I had no independent memory of writing about Rosalie Grant or hearing her defiant denial of guilt in the courthouse. To my messenger, like the residents of Tasmania, it was a traumatic event that changed her life; to me it was just old news. I didn't care like she did. My second reaction was glee at what a cool story it would be to go back and revisit anew a sensational case from the viewpoint of a sorrowful daughter who had children of her own now. Awful news that changes people is opportunity for journalists.

Voumard's book had at least enough effect on me that I insisted the daughter tell me what she hoped to accomplish by turning over information to me, especially as I warned her that I didn't think her mother was innocent. "I just want the whole story," she said, "wherever the facts leads." There you have it—sources trust you to tell their story even when you warn them it might not turn out as they think. Just be objective, they instruct. And that is easier said than done.

Long-form, Investigative, Prize-winning Women

Newswomen: Twenty-Five Years of Front-Page Journalism
edited by Joyce Hoffmann. La Jolla, California: Sager Group, 2015. Paperback, 304 pp., $24.

Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts, State University of New York at Albany, United States



Where are the women? Students of literary journalism often used to ask this question after encountering anthologies of mostly male writers. Recent scholarship has helped shine a light on women literary journalists previously overlooked, such as this journal's special issue devoted to the subject in Spring 2015 ("Women and Literary Journalism," vol. 7, No. 1). Now, thanks to the staff of the *Riveter*, a magazine and website showcasing long-form nonfiction written by women, and The Sager Group, there's an entire splendid anthology of long-form journalism written by seventeen women investigative and literary reporters at major newspapers and alternative weeklies. *Newswomen: Twenty-Five Years of Front-Page Journalism* includes selections by Edna Buchanan, the legendary *Miami Herald* crime reporter, and other Pulitzer Prize winners such as Jacqui Banaszynski, Teresa Carpenter, Amy Harmon, Loretta Tofani, and Deborah Blum.

Each chapter includes a selected piece, bookended by a short biography and an author's afterword that is original to this book. This works well to provide a contextual depth for stories that command immediate interest. After reading Carpenter's compelling account of the 1982 murder of *Playboy* centerfold Dorothy Stratten, we want to know how and why the author undertook such immersion research. She was curious about "what *really* happened," she explains; indeed, that is the mantra that guides all of her reporting. This curiosity inspired the exhaustive research that led to her conclusion that Stratten's murderer, her estranged pimp husband, could not forgive himself for "his unforgivable sin" of "being small-time."

A similar intense curiosity to understand why and how seems to motivate most if not all of the other journalists featured in *Newswomen*. As Banaszynski reflects in her afterword, "I was an overly curious little girl growing up in the 1950s and '60s in rural, old-world America. Who knows if you're born with curiosity or you're introduced to it, but I remember my mother always telling me I asked too many questions, and I remember my father paying me a quarter if I would stop talking for fifteen minutes at a time." Banaszynski went on to earn a Pulitzer for her path-breaking series about a gay Minnesota farm couple dying of AIDS in 1988. She begins: "Death is no stranger to the heartland. It is as natural as the seasons, as inevitable as farm machinery break-

ing down and farmers' bodies giving out after too many years of too much work.

"But when death comes in the guise of AIDS, it is a disturbingly unfamiliar visitor, one better known in the gay districts and drug houses of the big cities, one that shows no respect for the usual order of life in the country." Through extensive research that includes intimate interviews with the couple and others, Banaszynski revealed a much more nuanced picture of the disease's consequences than the widespread public panic of that time twenty-five years ago had allowed.

Tofani, a staff writer for the *Washington Post* and then the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, exemplifies the important role of the literary journalist as a social conscience. Her selection, "American Imports, Chinese Deaths," details the gruesome occupational illnesses suffered by Chinese factory workers who help make cheap products for export. "With each new report of lead detected on a made-in-China toy, Americans express outrage: These toys could poison children. But Chinese workers making the toys—and countless products for America—touch and inhale carcinogenic materials very day, all day long. Benzene. Lead. Cadmium. Toluene. Nickel. Mercury." Tofani's research showed that "the toxins and hazards exist in virtually every industry including furniture, shoes, car parts, electronic items, jewelry, clothes, toys, and batteries." Her straightforward, declarative sentences build a picture of catastrophe and death lurking in plain sight, if we would only look.

Like many of the anthology's other writers, Tofani notes her early attraction to journalism as "a means of exploration and adventure, a way to be able to see things for myself." Her professors at Fordham helped her "to understand the responsibility of journalism as a sort of moral mission" and this, she says, "sparked my fire for investigative reporting."

Harmon, a *New York Times* reporter, is represented by her piece about a young woman who undergoes genetic testing that confirms she will eventually fall victim to Huntington's disease. Another fine example of literary science journalism is Blum's "Monkey Wars," which takes the reader into the center of an ethical debate about the use of monkeys in research to benefit humans.

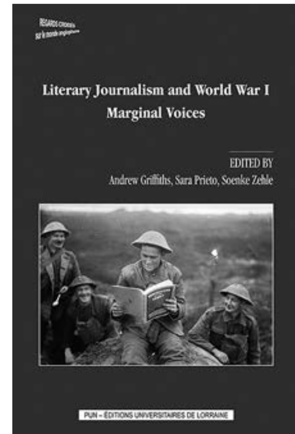
Other writers included in *Newswomen* are: Christine Brennan, Athelia Knight, Corinne Reilly, Lane DeGregory, Diana Henriques, Julia Keller, Dana Priest, Anne Hull, Christine Pelisek, Eileen Welsome, and Andrea Elliott. The latter journalist's "A Muslim Leader in Brooklyn," first published in the *New York Times* in 2006, remains a fresh evocation of the challenges an American imam faces in the post-9/11 world.

Editor Joyce Hoffmann, a journalism professor at Old Dominion University and the author of *On Their Own: Women Journalists and the American Experience in Vietnam*, should be commended for her efforts as should the Sager Group, which plans two additional, affordable anthologies of literary long-form writing by women. *Newswomen* is an excellent start to catch us up on where the women are and what they've been doing all these years, namely, writing award-winning literary journalism that can inspire our students.

Recovering Great War Reportages

Literary Journalism and World War I: Marginal Voices
edited by Andrew Griffiths, Sara Prieto, and Soenke Zehle. Nancy, France: Presses Universitaires de Nancy–Éditions Universitaires de Lorraine, 2016. Paperback, 270 pp., €14 (US$17)

Reviewed by Brian Gabrial, Concordia University, Canada



Most good research is either an act of discovery or of recovery. The edited collection *Literary Journalism and World War I: Marginal Voices* falls into the latter category. It seems that a conflict that left millions dead and wounded would inspire countless true, journalistic stories with strong literary values, but that was not so. In the book's eight main sections, its contributors revisit works of literary journalism, both written and visual, that survived not only the war but also the heavy government censorship placed upon them and their creators. Such restrictions generated reporting that often left readers "only partially aware of the true human cost of the war." However, by shining an intense light on this journalism again, the editors assert a purpose that will "dispel the lingering sense that the war reportage of the conflict can be dismissed as nothing more than state-sponsored propaganda." The editors succeed—mostly.

Naturally, the centenary of any major, cataclysmic event is sure to produce renewed interest in it. As the one hundredth anniversary of the November 11, 1918, armistice nears, this book reacquaints us with the important work of World War I literary journalists, many of whom emerged from the late nineteenth-century "new journalism" tradition. They could be what John Bak observes in his examination of trench war journals: "proto" literary journalists, because the writings "just don't tell, they show." These World War I journalists, in some respects, trod a path later walked on by mid- to late-twentieth-century New Journalists because they also pushed back against the constraints of their time, place, and professional practice.

Each of the book's eight sections follows a structure that contains three elements. First, the reader is introduced to selected samples of literary journalistic production, followed by a "contextual gloss" that situates the work within frames of circumstances at the point of origination. (As a critique, it would have been more useful to have the "contextual gloss" precede these samples because, without it I found myself challenging editorial choices about including some of these selections.) Following the gloss is an in-depth, scholarly analysis. These analyses present arguments justifying the work's literary merit while providing more information about the writer or artist.

Taken together, this trio—sample, gloss, and scholarship—"highlight[s] the range of effects produced by the combination of literary techniques with factual reportage" that, according to the editors, can on the surface seem propagandistic but really might be subversive.

What make this collection especially valuable to the literary journalism scholar are various explorations into geographical expansions of the genre that highlight discrete national (journalistic and literary) traditions while challenging the reader to think differently about what constitutes literary journalism. This geographic range includes writers from Argentina, Catalonia, Sweden, and the United States, among others. Their experiences and backgrounds also varied. For example, one writer, John Buchan, was an English aristocrat who eventually became the Governor-General of Canada; another, Velona Pilcher, the only woman whose work is included here, became a noted playwright.

Overall, the majority of the book's scholarly analyses present a similar thesis about literary journalism, which is twofold: 1) inclusion and 2) expansion. The argument for inclusion is simple in that the scholar hopes that the reader will be convinced of the literary merits of the journalism. So, when Andrew Griffiths writes, "Buchan's observations do not simply describe the objects and scenes he encountered but invite us to share his responses to them," it is not much different from what Jane Ekstam argues about Gustaf Hellström: "Hellström's war articles invited the reader to participate in rather than merely observe events." When Charlotte Purkis, who examined Velona Pilcher's war journalism, observes that the war was a "catalyst for the liberation of Pilcher's writing from documentary critical reporting to imaginative writing capable of allying experience, aesthetics and belief," her comment could be said about all of the writers in this volume.

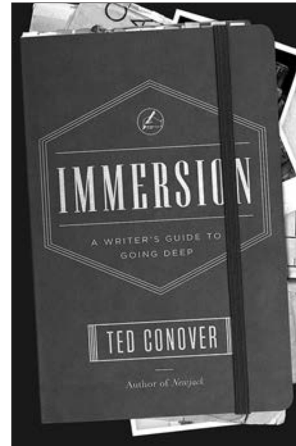
I noted at the outset that the book "mostly" achieves its ends. While the scholarship is useful, some is presented in such dry fashion that it nearly diminishes the value of the subject matter. In some cases, arguments barely hit their mark. Still, the majority of the research substantively and adequately accentuates the literary qualities of the journalism. Thus, the secondary material, while sometimes repetitive, provides a good review of current literary journalism theory.

Finally, in his look at the Catalan journalists covering World War I, Xavier Pla uses Austrian writer Stefan Zweig's phrase "world of yesterday" to denote how, by the war's end, a way of life, especially in Europe, had forever disappeared. Zweig's "world of yesterday" reminded me of another observation, this one by Willa Cather, who wrote that the "world broke in two" after World War I. Cather suggested that the war's violence left individuals and society unable to reconcile a past left in ruins to the present. In the 100-plus years since the Great War began, that reconciliation is ongoing because so many post-war decisions set up the world for future calamity. Thus, the resurrected literary journalism highlighted in *Literary Journalism and World War I: Marginal Voices* reminds us how war affects those on and near the front lines and how repressing talk about those effects can only lead to an uncertain future.

Immersion Tips from a Master

Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep
by Ted Conover. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Paperback, 192 pp., $18

Reviewed by Patrick Walters, Kutztown University, United States



As Ted Conover has developed a reputation for his immersion journalism over the past four decades, he has often been asked for advice on his reporting and storytelling techniques. People want to know just how he went about delving into the worlds of railway hoboes (*Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails with America's Hoboes*), illegal immigrants (*Coyotes: A Journey Across Borders with America's Illegal Migrants*), and corrections officers (*Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing*). In recent years, Conover, who teaches at New York University, came to the realization he should put some of his advice down on paper. That effort became *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep*, which he calls "the book I wish I had in hand when I set off to ride the rails" for *Rolling Nowhere*, which began as his undergraduate anthropology thesis at Amherst College. He writes this new book, he says in his introduction, for "younger versions of me" and "for anyone who might want to give such a project a try."

In this project, Conover uses the approach of a veteran writer giving advice to aspiring immersion journalists. But it is sprinkled with something more, his reflective analysis helping to take it beyond being so simply defined. He weaves in thoughtful contemplation of which types of work constitute immersion journalism, and which types don't. He begins by exploring the different immersive approaches of classic practitioners such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, and George Plimpton. He also examines more modern ones, including Barbara Ehrenreich, Adrian Nicole Leblanc, and Bill Buford. In Chapter 2, he takes a strong stand on pursuits he doesn't consider immersion journalism, such as virtual reality, memoir, and projects where "a writer concocts a conceit," the last a category in which he refers to books such as A. J. Jacobs's *The Year of Living Biblically*. In this way, Conover sets up parameters for immersion that are purely journalistic, and carry the weight of his own body of work, giving the book much more authority than Robin Hemley's *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing: Memoir, Journalism and Travel* (2012), for example, which was far more permissive in labeling different types of work as immersion.

Conover uses the voice of a friendly and knowledgeable narrator to guide a prospective immersion journalist through such a project, starting with purely practical

advice about "Choosing a Subject and Gaining Access" (Chapter 2), and how writers should conduct themselves "Once Inside" (Chapter 3). From a writer's standpoint, this book provides valuable advice for both budding and experienced writers. It is an everyman's approach in which Conover acknowledges the cultural value of immersion journalism as something "that has huge potential for sowing empathy in the world" (Introduction). His writing here builds on his interview for Robert S. Boynton's *The New New Journalism* (2005), particularly on the subject of not "going native." He explores the establishment of a writer's voice and the boundaries of the reportorial persona, addressing the tension between reportorial distance and the required intimate knowledge of the subject. "Have I left my skin for someone else's? That's not how I look at it," he writes. Later, he emphasizes the fairly elementary advice that "The writer's first duty is to the integrity of the writing, not to the relationship with the source (Chapter 3)." Conover is using his professorial voice here, first and foremost, and this book is meant even for a novice writer.

While this is primarily a "how-to" book, it is also one written by a practitioner who shows a scholar's eye, one that provides insight as to how we define the form and what rules it should follow. As Conover explores the risk-reward calculus of "undercover" reporting, he of course addresses his own time spent as a corrections officer in *Newjack*, including a caution that undercover can be seen as the "easy way out (Chapter 4)." And when he gets down to addressing the techniques of actually *writing* immersion journalism, he reflects on his use of the first person and why he's found it to work best: "Often, if not usually, questions can accompany an author's choice of subject and his relationship to it. If he is a character in the story, these questions become even more significant . . . (Chapter 5)." He speaks here not only as an educator instructing on how-to, but also as a scholar who is stepping back to take a look at his own work.

The main question is one of audience. *Immersion* is primarily a text for aspiring journalists of all ages, one that could be used in a graduate or upper-level undergraduate journalism or literary journalism course. Its advice is straightforward and assumes nothing. The book is meant to be accessible to all. But, interspersed among these details are key bits of analysis that also serve to assess and analyze the form, setting parameters, exploring ethical dilemmas and examining the use of the first-person in immersion, and how it differs from other forms such as memoir. In this way, it also provides a fresh perspective on the question of what immersion means today.

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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