

# Literary Journalism Studies

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## SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

Email submission (as a Microsoft Word attachment) is mandatory. A cover page indicating the title of the paper, the author's name, institutional affiliation, and contact information, along with an abstract (250 words), should accompany all submissions. The cover page should be sent as a separate attachment from the abstract and submission to facilitate distribution to readers. No identification should appear linking the author to the submission or abstract. All submissions must be in English Microsoft Word and follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* (Humanities endnote style) <[http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)>. All submissions will be blind reviewed. Send submissions to the editor at <[literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com](mailto:literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com)>.

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**B**OOK 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](mailto:nroberts@albany.edu)>

## Note from the Editor . . .



In his 2007 book, *True Stories*, Norman Sims lamented the complexity of chasing down the origin story for literary journalism in nineteenth-century United States. “Tracing the history of literary journalism backward from the twentieth century into the 1800s,” he wrote, “I find that it vanishes into a maze of local publications” (43). Further, Sims declared that while it may have been easy to lose oneself in such a maze of local stories and facts, it was also the case that “[t]he core of nineteenth-century literary journalism can be found in a simple, widespread prose device used in the newspapers—the sketch. . . . It permitted newspaper reporters to be writers, playing with voice and perspective and challenging readers to evaluate the text” (44).

In this issue’s lead research essay, “Nineteenth-Century Women Writers and the Sentimental Roots of Literary Journalism,” Jonathan Fitzgerald of Northeastern University takes up the challenge of going further back than the sketch. He wants us to land at an earlier origin period for literary journalism, one when the line between sentimentalism and realism was not well defined. (This was true of sketches, too, of course, as they were not necessarily written strictly according to the facts. Rather, the priority was to entertain the reader.) Fitzgerald’s idea, which he sets up to show in his essay, is that in an earlier era of nineteenth-century writing—when journalism and fiction writing were a fair distance from being professionalized into Journalism and English departments—it was women writing in the sentimental mode who were pushing toward what we have come to know as literary journalism. Fascinating, important stuff.

Also fascinating is “The Orgy Next Door,” a timely examination of two texts written by Gay Talese, *Thy Neighbor’s Wife* (1981) and *The Voyeur’s Motel* (2016) by Julie Wheelwright of University College London. Wheelwright originally had focused on the former book, but when controversy began to swirl around Talese’s methodology for his latest work, it was inevitable that her critique of the literary journalist’s ethical stance when dealing with topics of a sexual nature needed to be expanded. When reporting on experiences of a sexual nature, normal issues for the literary journalist—the ongoing, developing relationship between the author and subject, for instance, become that much more heightened. Wheelwright explores the limits a literary journalist might place on personal professional behavior when observing sexual practices, or reporting on sexual activity, or on one’s own sexual activity (or not),

especially in consideration of what constitutes building a vicarious experience for readers.

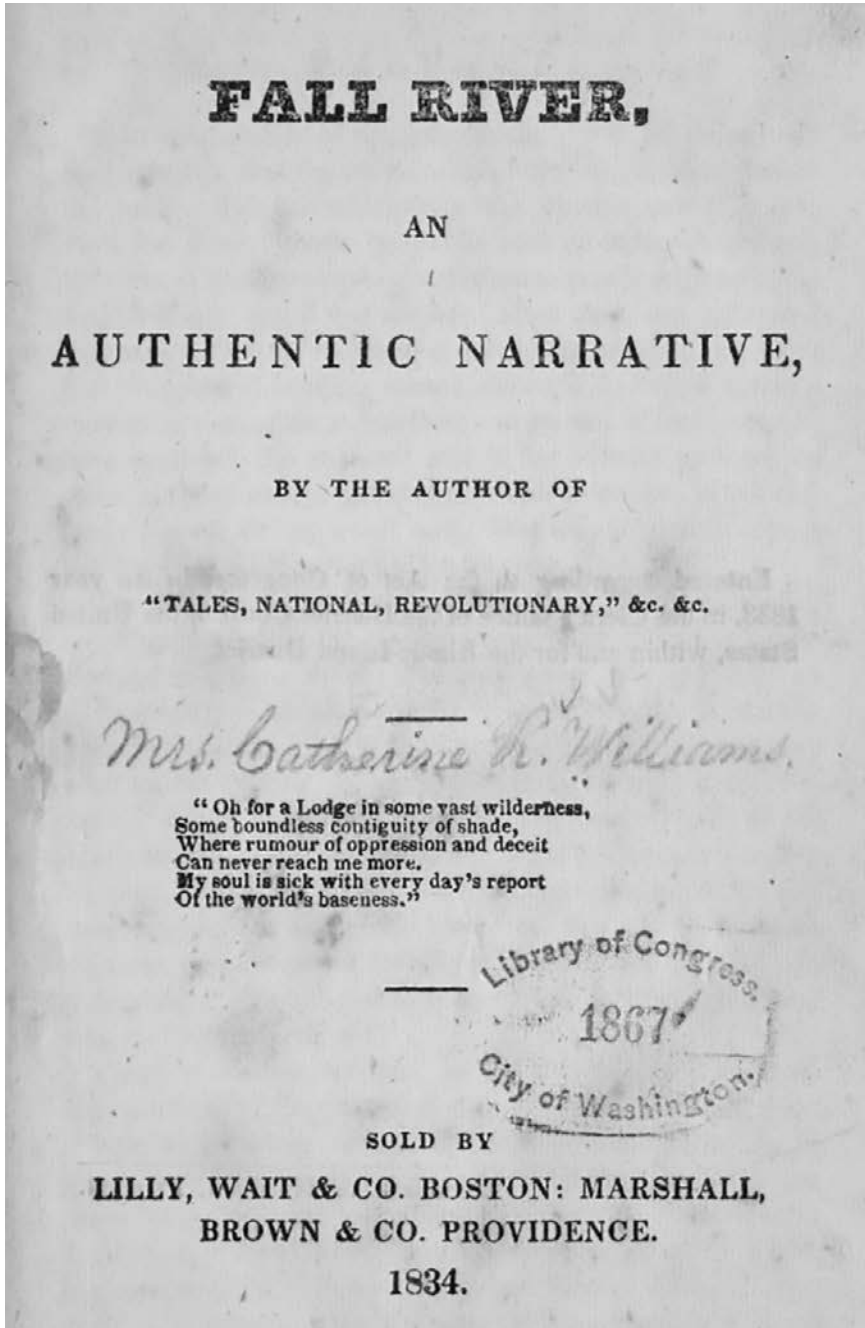
Our third essay discusses the work of another major American literary journalist, but from a fairly unusual angle. In “Writing Men on the Margins,” Peter Ferry of University of Stavanger, Norway dissects the work of *New Yorker* writer Joseph Mitchell through the lens masculinity studies. Ferry concentrates on three crucial Mitchell texts—“The Old House at Home” (1939), “The Mohawks in High Steel” (1949), and “Mr. Hunter’s Grave” (1956)—in his discussion of homosocial relations of men on the margins of society, that is, immigrants, Indigenous people, and African Americans. The recasting of Mitchell as the flâneur, a wandering investigator of subcultures in New York City, allows us to better absorb the importance of his role in elucidating the changing role of masculinity in the twentieth century.

In our continuing series of essays about the frontier of digital literary journalism, Australians Fiona Giles of the University of Sydney and Georgia Hitch of the Australian Broadcasting Company review several examples of long-form multimedia storytelling to explore what properties of a journalistic presentation are required in multimedia format for it to be seen as a work of literary journalism. Employing John Hartsock’s ideal of the narra-descriptive text, Giles and Hitch propose three categories of narrative-based multimedia—multimedia-enhanced literary journalism, integrated multimedia feature, and interactive multimedia—noting that only one of this trio truly leverages the digital realm to produce multimedia literary journalism.

As is our custom, we are pleased to present in text form the keynote address from our most recent annual conference, which was held at University of King’s College, Halifax, Canada, this past May. Portugal’s Alice Trindade discusses the internationality of literary journalism, especially the Portuguese version and its ties to both Spanish and English literary journalism—writing histories that have, at certain points over the past centuries, intertwined and influenced one other.

Finally, the format of our Scholar-Practitioner Q+A this issue is a little curious (but quite charming). “Searching for the Perfect Title” is a variation on the theme of a scholar interviewing a practitioner about his or her work. Instead, David Abrahamson and Alison Pelczar of Northwestern University enlisted six literary journalists from the United States and Canada to write about how they came to choose their book titles. Amy Wilentz, Ted Conover, Deborah Campbell, Pamela Newkirk, Michael Norman, and Madeleine Blais have provided us with varied responses: from needing a title to begin a book, to listening the Mom’s suggestions, to remembering the exact moment in

space and time in the physical world when the lightning bolt carrying the title struck, to even withholding from the interviewers a discarded title because, well, it may come in handy next time.



The title page of Catherine Williams's *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* (1834).  
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# Nineteenth-century Women Writers and the Sentimental Roots of Literary Journalism

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**Abstract:** Tracing the origins of literary journalism in the nineteenth century can be a daunting task because, as Norman Sims writes, the trail of literary journalism “vanishes into a maze of local publications.” And yet it is widely accepted that the trail indeed begins there, in a time when distinctions between literature and journalism were not as clearly defined as they are today. Eventually, however, forces such as the rise of the ideal of objectivity in journalism, the shift from sentimentalism to realism in literature, and the institutionalization of both fields ensured that the two would, by the end of the century, be wrenched apart. And yet, amidst this fracturing, the hybrid genre of literary journalism was simultaneously being born. Sims points to the journalistic sketch as the origin of literary journalism in the nineteenth century, and in so doing privileges realism in his creation story. But, as this study illustrates, the story goes back a bit further, into the height of sentimentalism and a time before literature and journalism became distinct genres. This inquiry revisits this origin story with a particular eye to the role that women, writing in the sentimental mode, played in the creation of literary journalism.

**Keywords:** nineteenth century – literary journalism – women writers – sentimentalism – Rebecca Harding Davis – Margaret Fuller – Nellie Bly – Fanny Fern – Harriet Beecher Stowe – Catherine Williams – literary history

“Looking for literary journalism in the nineteenth century seems daunting,” writes Norman Sims in his 2007 history of literary journalism, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*, “but it was incubating and would emerge in the large-circulation urban newspapers at the end of the century.”<sup>1</sup> The task is daunting, Sims notes, because the trail of literary journalism “vanishes into a maze of local publications.”<sup>2</sup> This challenge opens Sims’s chapter on nineteenth-century newspaper sketches, to which Sims points as the origin of literary journalism, and with broad brush strokes he describes a transition from the often fanciful newspaper sketch to the kind of realist literary journalism readers might recognize today. While Sims’s assertion is correct that the roots of literary journalism lie in the nineteenth century, his origin story only hints at a much more complicated set of circumstances that both set the stage for what would become literary journalism and ensured that its significance for readers and scholars would be obscured for much of the twentieth century.

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a tumultuous time in the history of both literature and journalism, a period in which the two forms, which had up to that point been considered synonymous, would become, first, distinct from and, eventually, at odds with, one another. A variety of circumstances, including the enshrining of the ideal of objectivity in journalism, the decline of romanticism and sentimentalism, and the rise of realism, led to this breach. And, even as literature and journalism were wrenched apart, literary journalism, a hybrid form that Thomas B. Connery calls “a third way to tell a story,”<sup>3</sup> emerged. While Sims points to the *sketch* as the seed that spawned literary journalism, his choice of examples of writers of the form—Washington Irving, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, George Ade, and others<sup>4</sup>—misses important contributions by women and writers of color who used the sketch and other journalistic styles of the time to perform what John C. Hartsock identifies as one of the main features of literary journalism, narrowing the gap between the subjectivities of reader and subject.<sup>5</sup>

### **From the New Journalism to the Ideal of Objectivity**

The nineteenth century saw the evolution of journalism in the United States from the partisan press model, which held sway in the early decades of the 1800s, through the advent of the penny presses, which opened the door for sensational or yellow journalism and the so-called new journalism, through to the rise of a professionalized, objective journalism. While each shift proved dramatic, none was more so than the move toward an ideal of objectivity, a transition that happened relatively quickly and one that was deeply embedded in an overall swing in U.S. culture toward a modern

epistemology that saw reason and science as the bedrock of all knowledge. After over a hundred years of this kind of thinking manifest in U.S. national news media, it can be difficult to imagine a time before objectivity's reign, a time when the hard distinctions between fact and fiction, journalism and literature, were not nearly as important as they are today.

Kathy Roberts Forde and Katherine A. Foss note that “while writers and readers certainly understood news and fiction to be different genres, they generally did not insist on a firm line of demarcation between the two as categories either of public communication or of authorship.”<sup>6</sup> In their essay, Forde and Foss survey nineteenth-century journalism trade publications in an effort to get a sense of the changing culture around journalism at the fin de siècle. But it wasn't just that nineteenth-century readers were less concerned with the difference between fact and fiction; even the cleavage between literature and journalism would have been a foreign concept to them. Forde and Foss note that, in 1886, the *Journalist*, one of the most prominent trade publications, “identified itself as the first trade publication for not only ‘newspaper-men’ but also ‘the twin professions of literature and journalism’.”<sup>7</sup> The understanding here is that literature and journalism were “socially recognized modes of cultural expression and bureaucratized production sharing the same parentage and DNA.”<sup>8</sup>

Much of the newspaper writing that Forde and Foss discuss was part of the nineteenth century's new journalism movement, not to be confused with the twentieth century's New Journalism, which rose to prominence in the 1960s. The nineteenth century new journalism, though often sensational in nature, adhered to what is sometimes called a “story” model of journalism, emphasizing elements of narrative over the transmission of facts, and it stood in contrast to the emerging “information” model, which strove for and idealized objectivity.<sup>9</sup> While sensationalism was not new in nineteenth-century newspapers, near the end of the nineteenth century, sensationalism merged with the story model and the new journalism was born. It became the dominant newspaper form, and it enjoyed literary status.

Matthew Arnold coined the phrase “new journalism” in 1887 as a not altogether favorable description of the kind of writing emerging from urban newspapers and particularly Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and its competitors the *New York Sun* and *New York Journal*. Arnold commented that this new journalism “has much to recommend it; it is full of ability, novelty, variety, sensation, sympathy, generous instincts; its one great fault is that it is *feather-brained*.”<sup>10</sup> Though Arnold targeted an entire emerging brand of journalism, his particular target was W. T. Stead, early practitioner of investigative journalism, editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and author of *If Christ Came to Chicago* (1894), among other books. Chapter two of Stead's *If Christ Came*

to *Chicago*, “Maggie Darling,” which tells the tale of a Chicago prostitute, is paradigmatic of the kind of journalism Arnold criticized. The subject matter is bawdy enough, but Stead dares to give voice to Maggie Darling. After she has made an effort to reform but is discovered as a former prostitute and sent out of the respectable house she had been working in, she tells Stead, “And now it is no use. No use, never any more, I have taken dope, I drink. I’m lost. I’m only a \_\_\_\_\_. I shall never by anything else. I’m far worse than I ever was, and am going to the devil as fast as I can.”<sup>11</sup> In his introduction to “Maggie Darling,” Jeff Sharlet, editor of *Radiant Truths: Essential Dispatches, Reports, Confessions, and Other Essays on American Belief*, writes that Stead’s new journalism offered “contact with the realness of things” and notes that, at least in a literary sense, this brand of “sensationalism would prove revolutionary.”<sup>12</sup>

Karen Roggenkamp points out “new journalism was much more closely tied to American fiction than scholars have traditionally recognized or than most readers would assume today.”<sup>13</sup> Roggenkamp notes, as others have, that many aspiring authors got their start in journalism. “A natural and fluid connection existed between literature and journalism in terms of style and profession . . . the pages of the newspaper contained within them a particular literary aesthetic,”<sup>14</sup> Roggenkamp writes. Roggenkamp traces the roots of the new journalism to the advent of the penny press, so-called because innovations in printing technology as well as an increase in advertising revenue allowed publishers to sell their newspapers for a fraction of the price of other contemporary newspapers. As a result, the penny papers were aimed at a wider audience, including the lower classes who were all but excluded from the more expensive papers. In the penny papers, nonfictional news items could be printed alongside fictional stories, poetry, jokes, trivia, recipes, advice, and sermons, and it was for the readers to determine the genres of the pieces they were reading—or not. Roggenkamp posits, “readers of penny papers did not draw fundamental distinctions between the ‘journalistic’ and the ‘literary’.”<sup>15</sup> While evidence of this amalgamation can be found in practically any nineteenth-century newspaper chosen at random, the front page of the November 4, 1868, issue of the *Raftsmen’s Journal*, published in Clearfield, Pennsylvania, provides a good example. There, readers would find poetry, fiction, vignettes, advice, jokes, and religious affirmations.<sup>16</sup>

The trends that started in the penny presses of the early nineteenth century carried through to the new journalism of the 1890s, embodied perhaps most fully in Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World*. Roggenkamp notes that “the paper teemed with stories that read nearly like fiction, with vivid characters, evocative settings, narrative presence, and descriptive language.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the *World* was known for the human-interest story which, according to George

Juergens, “becomes at its best more than a device to please the masses and takes on many of the characteristics of literature.”<sup>18</sup>

Pulitzer’s influence extended beyond the *World* to other urban publications, but competition was already brewing. In 1896, Adolph Ochs bought the *New York Times*, and, as Forde and Foss write, Ochs “differentiated his journalism from that of the yellow journals by vigorously promoting an objective-voiced, fact-centered form of news report that focused on business news and public affairs.”<sup>19</sup> Whereas the penny papers democratized information by making it accessible to all, Ochs’s *Times* aimed to be the choice paper of the elite. Ultimately, the *Times* rose to prominence and became the most respected newspaper in the country, and with it, the objective brand of journalism it touted became the benchmark to which other newspapers aspired.

Another side effect of the trend toward objectivity in American journalism of the late nineteenth century, which will come to bear more significantly in the latter half of this study, is the association of masculinity and journalism. As Forde and Foss note, “Underlying the preoccupation with scientific thinking and facts at the turn of the century—and the concurrent development of a bureaucratic organization of newspaper production—was the widespread sense that masculinity was in crisis.”<sup>20</sup> The project to recover masculinity from the genteel and sentimental journalism that dominated most of the nineteenth century gave us the trope of the intrepid (male) reporter who would risk life and limb to report the news. This masculinizing of the role of reporter resulted also in a masculinizing of the news report itself and contributed greatly to the institution of the objective ideal as the gold standard of news reporting.

This shift was palpable in the trade publications from the era. Forde and Foss note, “In the last few years of the nineteenth century, a line of demarcation between journalism and literature emerged.”<sup>21</sup> The trade publications became obsessed with defining news against the “fluidity among expressive forms” that “had characterized the preceding decades.”<sup>22</sup> But the rise of the ideal of objectivity is only a part of the story of how literature and journalism came to be understood as necessarily disparate forms. Fully understanding this cleavage requires looking also at the rise of realism against the previously dominant romanticism and sentimentalism at the end of the nineteenth century.

### From Sentimentalism to Realism

Much has been written about the perfect storm of cultural shifts that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century that led to the ascendancy of realism both as a major literary mode, but even more broadly as an epistemological lens through which all life was viewed. In his book *Journalism and Realism*, Connery surveys the landscape, pointing to

industrialization and urbanization, westward expansion and immigration, the rise of the consumer culture, and major technological innovations including the telegraph and photography.<sup>23</sup> These, combined with a greater reliance on the scientific method and observable fact, paved the way for realism to take hold. And, Connery writes, “throughout the nineteenth century a tension existed between the real and ideal,” and journalism “provided the place where a realism-idealism discourse would be ongoing.”<sup>24</sup> In short, while realism was rising to prominence in nearly every aspect of American life, the newspapers and magazines of the time provided the most prominent stages on which this transition was performed.

The newspaper of the early to mid-nineteenth century embodied the ideals of romanticism. In the diversity of genres—the intermingling of poetry and news stories, for example—or the sentimental language employed across genres, or the ambiguity of fact, there was little emphasis on what Roggenkamp, borrowing from Stephen Crane, calls “the real thing.”<sup>25</sup> And, even as popular interest turned toward the real thing, the romantic strain could still be found in the large urban newspapers. As late as 1897, with the Spanish-American War on the horizon, William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* produced what Roggenkamp calls “one of the greatest romances of the late nineteenth century.”<sup>26</sup> By combining elements of romance fiction with actual events, the *Journal* presented the story of Evangelina Cisneros, a young Cuban woman imprisoned in Cuba on charges of conspiracy to assassinate a Spanish official. But to Hearst’s *Journal*, Cisneros was the perfect damsel-in-distress, and he dispatched reporter Karl Decker (pen name Charles Duval) to rescue her and bring her to the United States. For months, the reading public was entranced by the story of Cisneros’s rescue, which, as it turns out, was in many ways a sensationalized fabrication.

However, as Forde and Foss note, “By the 1880s and 1890s, realism had displaced idealism as the dominant mode of American thought and cultural expression. . . . A fascination with experience and facts infused American society and culture, a product of the new faith in, and fervor for, the scientific method and related scientific discoveries.”<sup>27</sup> Connery identifies this shift by way of contrast when he describes the more “realistic” sketches of Crane or Upton Sinclair that would proliferate toward the end of the century, and then notes that “during much of the first half of the century such representations would have been unusual or subsumed in a romantic and idealized context.”<sup>28</sup>

The relationship between the rise of realism and the fates of journalism and literature are complicated. In some respects, and as Connery argues in *Journalism and Realism*, the decline of sentimentalism was good both for journalism as a profession and, ultimately, for the genre that would become

literary journalism. That is, journalism shifted, but so did literature and, for a while at least, it seemed they were moving the same direction. It is widely accepted that, among the markers of realism's influence on literature, starker and sparer prose came to dominate for much of the first half of the twentieth century. Likewise, journalism adopted a more basic prose style that, although it has in some ways gone out of fashion in literature, remains in journalism. Forde and Foss write, "The friendly, intimate, first-person narrator that characterized many forms of print expression in the previous era—the narrator who addressed the reader as 'friend' and self-consciously attempted to cultivate moral and social values in the reading audience—was now a relic."<sup>29</sup> They seem to be referring to the voice often found, among other places, in nineteenth-century newspaper vignettes, short prose stories that often include a moral lesson; the stories purport to be true but offer no concrete evidence of their factuality. For example, a piece reprinted in the *Raftsmen's Journal* begins, "There is a story about an English geologist now 'going the rounds'. . ." and concludes "The moral for geologists is evident. . ."<sup>30</sup> These vignettes, which read more like folk tales than reportage, went out of fashion by the end of the nineteenth century, replaced, in large part, by the kind of sketches to which Connery refers.

Even as literature and journalism shared in the shift toward realism, however, this similar path led to some of the early problems that would eventually grow into a full-blown rift. On one hand, the fact that realistic fiction and narrative newspaper writing looked similar led to a sense of competition between the two. Roggenkamp writes, "The emphasis placed on documenting life and producing works that could almost stand alone as fact meant that the fictions that realists produced could be virtually indistinguishable from the stories newspaper reporters created."<sup>31</sup> Forde and Foss add, "As the objective narrator became the preferred narrative perspective across journalism and literature, and as a preference for the 'fact' and the 'real' defined both expressive forms, it might have seemed that journalism and literature were more alike than ever before in American print culture."<sup>32</sup> And yet there was a major difference, at least as far as fiction writers were concerned. Journalists' work, as opposed to being timeless as literature is presumed to be, was first and foremost timely. As Phyllis Frus notes in the preface of her book, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative*, the contemporary notion of literature as "a privileged realm of works embodying timeless truth and transcendent virtues"—a conception of literature she ascribes to Raymond Williams—"developed its current meaning by the end of the nineteenth century."<sup>33</sup> Journalism, in the 1890s, might have shared realist literature's emphasis on depicting real life using sparse prose, but by its nature—concerned with the presumed ephemera of day-to-day life—could not be literature.



Here, too, the distinction that would become much more important in the twentieth century between highbrow and lowbrow begins to become visible. As realism came to replace romantic idealism, so did the notion that progress depended on an ordered society. The newspaper, which dominated most of the nineteenth century with its hodgepodge of genres, mixing fact, fiction, and poetry, flew in the face of this ordering. “What had been a broadly democratic concept of culture in the early nineteenth century, a sense that the arts were for the appreciation of a broad range of social classes, both high and low, became the crabbed notion that artistic expression was the province of the intellectually and socially elite,”<sup>34</sup> write Forde and Foss. This new hierarchal view led to major changes in the press itself, but also, and more broadly, across literary genres, so that journalism could no longer be considered on par with what was coming to be considered highbrow literature. And, within journalism, the more personal and less overtly factual style that had dominated—and that would eventually emerge as literary journalism—was the lowest of the low.

As with the rise of objectivity, this shift too was highly gendered. The sentimental style, which came to be rejected in both literature and journalism, was associated with feminine tastes, whereas the new terser and more “realistic” style that came to dominate was considered more masculine. Sari Edelstein writes, “Cultural commentators repeatedly associated factuality and truth with masculinity and sentiment with women.”<sup>35</sup> Even within journalism itself, the notion that a reporter would embellish a news story with “literary” detail came to be frowned upon in favor of the more objective, disembodied narrator. It is clear that while journalism was the victim of prejudice from the literary, the concept of *literary* was held to be deeply suspect by journalists. This notion accounts for the migration of literary journalism from newspapers to magazines, which had already come to be associated with feminine tastes. Edelstein notes, “As the field of journalism evolved, an emphasis on hard-nosed reportage and masculine grit consigned most female journalists to the society pages and other specialized realms.”<sup>36</sup>

In concert with the above shifts—the rise of objectivity and the move from sentimentalism to realism—the institutionalization of both journalism and literature dealt the final blow to the hybridized notion of the two. That is, as journalism sought to distinguish itself from literature and to move from a trade to a profession, journalism programs began to spring up at colleges and universities around the country. In 1902, Joseph Pulitzer endowed the School of Journalism at Columbia University, which opened in 1912, four years after the University of Missouri created the nation’s first journalism school. Betty Houchin Winfield writes “that 1908 marks a watershed year for



a modern, professionalized mass media, originating after the fits and starts of late nineteenth-century state press associations' educational efforts and culminating with formalized university education in journalism."<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the end of the nineteenth century also saw the creation of English departments at a number of colleges and universities. Forde and Foss write, "The emergence and growth of journalism higher education in the twentieth century, as well as the continued professionalization of the academic discipline of literary studies . . . contributed to the ultimate separation of journalism and literature as distinct and different forms of public expression, professions in the print marketplace, and academic disciplines."<sup>38</sup>

The rise of an ideal of objectivity in journalism, the shift from sentimentalism to realism, and the professionalization of both journalism and literary studies, led to an almost irreconcilable rupture between literature and journalism, which had previously been considered two sides of the same coin. According to W. Joseph Campbell, "Eighteen ninety-seven was the year when American journalism came face-to-face with a choice among three rival and incompatible versions, or paradigms, for the profession's future."<sup>39</sup> To the two paradigms already noted—the new journalism, which Campbell sometimes refers to interchangeably as "yellow journalism," and the objective model, often ascribed to the reemerging *New York Times*—Campbell adds a third that he describes as "non-journalistic, even anti-journalistic."<sup>40</sup> This is the "literary approach pursued by Lincoln Steffens,"<sup>41</sup> or what would come to be known as literary journalism. Ultimately, as Campbell notes and as history has shown, the *Times* model of "objective" journalism would win the day, and with it the fates of literature and journalism would be dramatically cleaved. And yet, midst this fracturing, a hybrid genre was simultaneously being born, literary journalism. Sims points to the journalistic sketch as the origin of literary journalism in the nineteenth century, and in so doing privileges realism in his creation story. But, the story goes back a bit further, into the height of sentimentalism, back to a time before literature and journalism became distinct genres. The next section will revisit this origin story with a particular eye to the role that women played in the creation of literary journalism.

### Women Writers and the Emergence of Literary Journalism

The farther one goes back into the nineteenth century, the less contemporary definitions of literary journalism seem to hold. Scholars of literary journalism often expend large quantities of words defining the field and delineating its qualities, particularly for what is "literary" about literary journalism. For example, Sims offers a list of characteristics that a story must possess in order to be considered literary journalism: "immersion reporting,

complicated structures in the prose, accuracy, voice, responsibility, and attention to the symbolic realities of a story . . . access, attention to ordinary lives, and the social qualities of a writer's connection to the subjects."<sup>42</sup> Others insist that works of literary journalism must be timely and verifiably accurate. All agree that literary journalism must be nonfictional. But a genre that has existed for over a hundred years, and one that has mutated as standards of both literature and journalism have changed, is difficult to pin down—a reality that most scholars of literary journalism acknowledge. And it is precisely this reality that makes Hartsock's criterion of literary journalism preferable over others. Hartsock writes that the common thread that connects twentieth-century literary journalists to their predecessors is "the writers' subjectivity and the motivation to narrow the distance between subject and object."<sup>43</sup> That is, journalism is literary when it goes beyond reporting the news to purposefully portraying subjects in such a way that they can be more fully understood by readers. In the nineteenth century, before the descriptors *literature* and *journalism* were codified as distinct entities, the lines between fact and fiction were often blurred, and yet scholars of literary journalism agree that therein lie the roots of the genre. Using Hartsock's criterion allows us to see those roots free of presentism and to understand the ways in which the genre materialized in the twentieth century.

With this criterion in mind, it is surprising that other scholars of the genre have failed to notice that consistently, and for a number of reasons that will be explored, women writers—journalists and novelists—of the nineteenth century figure prominently among the forerunners of literary journalism. The reasons these writers' role may have been obscured are tied to the very forces that led to the subjugation of women as writers and of journalism as a literary form. Edelstein writes, "In spite of the fact that the distinctions between these discourses were not consistent or clear-cut, cultural commentators repeatedly associated factuality and truth with masculinity and sentiment with women, and the preference for 'fact' and 'real science' over sentiment worked to suppress the significance of women's political voice."<sup>44</sup>

As her book's title suggests, Edelstein positions nineteenth-century women's writing "between the novel and the news." Edelstein's project is a complicated one, which says much about the shifting natures of literature and journalism in the nineteenth century. In her introduction, she writes, "American women's writing emerged through a dynamic, often critical, relationship with mainstream journalism."<sup>45</sup> She notes that because of this relationship, the female literary tradition is "deeply attentive to the politics of truth discourses, suspicious of objectivity, and invested in spreading alternative kinds of news."<sup>46</sup> For example, Edelstein describes Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in*

*the Iron Mills* as a “strange and unclassifiable kind of art that forces readers to inhabit a position of edifying uncertainty.”<sup>47</sup> The work “evades mainstream journalism and challenges the reflexive ways in which readers make sense of the world.”<sup>48</sup> That is, though it is typically read as a work of fiction, *Life in the Iron Mills* fits perfectly Hartssock’s criterion of literary journalism.

At the fin de siècle, a scientific, “objective” understanding of the world began to take hold in literature. Meanwhile, sentimentalism, which had been the popular form for most of the nineteenth century but was on the decline, reasserted itself as a truer means of understanding reality. That is, the tail end of the nineteenth century was marked by a battle over how to best represent reality. Roggenkamp notes, “Somewhat paradoxically, medievalism, with its ‘romantic’ literary sheen, served as part of the broader push toward ‘the real thing’ in American culture.”<sup>49</sup> Romantic writing called on readers to look beyond the triviality of everyday life for the deeper truths embedded therein. The new journalism, in many ways, was an attempt to bridge these modes by presenting stories that were true in the sense that they were drawn from real life, but told in a sentimental style. And certainly some woman journalists, such as Nellie Bly, Fanny Fern, and Margaret Fuller, operated within this mode in their journalism. But the new journalism moment in the nineteenth century was short-lived, and other writers, not typically considered part of the new journalism—such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Catherine Williams—also used this method of telling true stories in sentimental novels.

As Edelstein points out, women writers were working against the prevailing winds that would ultimately dictate the relationship between literature and journalism precisely by standing between the two forms. Neither literature nor journalism was telling the story that these women wanted to tell in the way they wanted to tell it, and so they forged their own way, which proved to be revolutionary both in terms of subject matter and style. As literature moved away from sentimentalism, and as journalism moved toward an ideal of objectivity, women like Davis, Fuller, Bly, Fern, Stowe, and Williams—among others—used sentimentalism against the objective ideal to tell the stories of those people whose stories had been untold: mill workers, slaves, the mentally ill, and, above all, women. Indeed, this hybridization of genres proved productive for women writers in the nineteenth century. Judith Fetterley observes, “Writers who wished to avoid . . . conceptual dependency or who wished to experiment with artistic form might well have chosen to work in genres less formalized, less pretentious, and less predetermined, and therefore more open, fluid, and malleable to their uses.”<sup>50</sup> Because considering each writer and her work is beyond the scope of this study, what follows

is a thematic survey to build the case that, in their newspaper columns and novels, the writers used elements of journalism and sentimentalism to bridge the gap between the subjectivities of their subjects and readers.<sup>51</sup>

As the “sibling rivalry,”<sup>52</sup> as Mark Canada calls it, between literature and journalism was ramping up, women writers were inventing a hybrid genre—simultaneously sentimental and subjective—that, for the next century, would stand in the gap between the two. Hybridization is indeed one of the elements that marked women’s journalism in the nineteenth century. Though other writers were experimenting with forms that filled the rapidly opening space between literature and journalism, because of the way their roles were changing in society, women writers were particularly adept at hybridization. Discussing the relationship between Fanny Fern’s various writings, Claire C. Pettengill notes that “Fern’s columns and novels, fiction and nonfiction, often blur generic distinctions; what is striking about Fern’s works, from a generic perspective, is how ‘porous’ they are.”<sup>53</sup>

Further, Roggenkamp sees Bly’s famous journalistic stunt—in which she attempted to beat the fictional record for circumnavigating the globe in Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*—as a competition not just against Verne but against the elevated status of fiction. Roggenkamp writes, “Pulitzer [Bly’s editor at the *New York World*] anticipated that the race around the world and against time would become a race against the very idea of fictionality as well; the newspaper, if successful, would emerge as the superior medium for a revision of Verne’s romance.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, in their introduction to a collection of Margaret Fuller’s dispatches from Italy, Larry J. Reynolds and Susan Belasco Smith note that Fuller’s work represented a “new eclectic genre . . . overfull, excessive, extravagant in the original sense of the term.”<sup>55</sup> Her dis-



Portrait of Nellie Bly by H. J. Myers, circa 1890. Sourced from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Collection. Public domain.

patches, they write, “wander far outside the boundaries of conventional travel writing and take on the qualities of the history, the sermon, the political manifesto, the historical romance, and especially the diary.”<sup>56</sup> In each case, these are women journalists working against the emergence of what would become contemporary journalistic conventions using the sentimentalism of old to create something new.

But it wasn't just those writing for newspapers who occupied this middle ground between journalism and literature, fact and fiction. Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is, of course, a novel, but when challenged over the veracity of the events she described, Stowe published a follow-up book in which she compiled first-hand accounts to affirm her novel's truth. She called it *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin: Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon Which the Story Is Founded*. In the first chapter, Stowe defends the factuality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: “This work, more, perhaps, than any other work of fiction that ever was written, has been a collection and arrangement of real incidents,—of actions really performed, of words and expressions really uttered,—grouped together with reference to a general result, in the same manner that the mosaic artist groups his fragments of various stones into one general picture.”<sup>57</sup> She calls *Uncle Tom's Cabin* “a mosaic of facts.”<sup>58</sup> The purpose of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* is to provide the sources of those facts and her method, as she writes at the end of the first chapter, is to “proceed along the course of the story, from the first page onward, and develop, as far as possible, the incidents by which different parts were suggested.”<sup>59</sup>

Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*, published first in the *Atlantic Monthly*, is today considered a short story or novella, but might better be understood, as Sharon M. Harris writes, as “a startlingly new experiment in literature and a pioneering document in American literature's transition from romanticism to realism.”<sup>60</sup> It is, in short, a hybrid work the legacy of which would influence American literature as a whole, and literary journalism specifically. Harris argues that Davis was intentional about this hybridization in *Life in the Iron Mills*, “Davis is herself questioning the old forms and creating a new genre in American literature.”<sup>61</sup>

One final, much less read example of the hybrid nature of nineteenth-century women's writing is Williams's *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative*, published in 1833. *Fall River* tells the true story of Sarah Maria Cornell, a factory worker who was seduced, raped, and ultimately killed by a Methodist minister, Ephraim Avery. Williams's account is an effort to set the record straight, as it were. Avery was found not guilty of the murder, and the press sensationalized the story with the effect of ultimately dehumanizing Cornell. To tell the story, Williams employs many novelistic features, as well as some

journalistic qualities. Edelstein writes, “In its mix of first-person narration and actual correspondence, *Fall River* is both emphatic about its authenticity and laced with sentimentality.”<sup>62</sup> Williams, much like Stowe, affirms the factuality of her account, writing in her preface, “With respect to embellishment in this book, no person acquainted with the facts, who has seen it, pretends to say there is any.”<sup>63</sup> The women writers highlighted here indeed used hybrid styles, but they did so, again, to narrow the subjectivities between their subjects and their readers. Stowe writes in *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that the reason she wrote *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was “to bring this subject of slavery, as a moral and religious question, before the minds of all those who profess to be followers of Christ, in this country.”<sup>64</sup> Of Fern, Pettengill writes that in her novels and columns Fern was engaged in a project “to ‘subjectivize’ both women’s consciousness and the culture’s consciousness of women.”<sup>65</sup>

Harris contrasts this impetus, so evident in Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills*, with the work of Davis’s male contemporaries, who also operated in a kind of hybrid, proto-literary journalistic style. She writes, “both [Jacob] Riis and Stephen Crane wrote from ‘a curiously asocial perspective’”; Davis, however, “does not allow readers the distance of a ‘vicarious’ experience.”<sup>66</sup> In fact, early in her story, as Davis paints the picture of a smoky mill town, she offers an invitation to the reader, “This is what I want you to do. I want you to hide your disgust, take no heed to your clean clothes, and come right down with me,—here, into the thickest of the fog and mud and foul effluvia. I want you to hear this story.”<sup>67</sup> The invitation to “come down with me” to hear the story of life in the iron mills is an invitation to the reader to join her subjectivity with those of the characters in Davis’s story.

Similarly, Fuller, who lived abroad and sent her dispatches to the *New York Daily Tribune* from Europe, imagined her readers as a kind of community. Annamaria Formichella Elsdén notes that Fuller’s “translocation to Italy ignited in her a camaraderie with the Italian people . . . in addition, the epistolary nature of her dispatches invited a certain intimacy between herself and her readers.”<sup>68</sup> Elsdén ascribes to Fuller a “vision of a literary and political collective,”<sup>69</sup> which she tried to accomplish through her dispatches. Katrina J. Quinn calls this “epistolary journalism” and defines it as “a form that assimilates traditions of journalistic writing and the discursive functionality of personal correspondence.”<sup>70</sup> She further notes that this form “corresponds significantly to contemporary scholars’ expectations for literary journalism.”<sup>71</sup> It also corresponds with the rise of the epistolary novel in the nineteenth century. And indeed, Fuller often signed off from her columns as if she were writing to a dear friend, often promising more letters to follow or offering a kind of blessing or benediction, as in her January 1, 1848, dispatch, which she

concludes, “To these, the heart of my country, a Happy New Year . . . something of true love must be in these lines—receive them kindly, my friends; it is, by itself, some merit for printed words to be sincere.”<sup>72</sup>

Though sentimentalism was on the wane as the nineteenth century progressed toward the twentieth, these women writers, experimenting with hybrid styles to give voice to their (and their subject’s) hybrid lives, used elements of romanticism and sentimentalism to great effect in narrowing the gap between the subjectivities of their readers and subjects. In the remaining years of the nineteenth century other writers—women and men—would employ the rising realism to similar aims, but they, and the genre of literary journalism that was emerging, are indebted to the work of women, who include Rebecca Harding Davis, Margaret Fuller, Nellie Bly, Fanny Fern, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Catherine Williams. Some of these women’s works have been forgotten, or only recently remembered. Others are caricatured. Most are hardly considered at all in the context of literary studies. Yet, exceptional as they are, they are not exceptions; they are representative of a larger trend in the mid- to late-nineteenth century that merits further study. Here I follow Barbara Friedman and her co-authors in encouraging scholars to “rethink our finding”; to ask, “If we’ve found this exception, might there be others? Might common sense be wrong?”<sup>73</sup> These scholars caution against the “add women and stir”<sup>74</sup> approach to integrating women’s experiences into the study of media history. They continue, “We need to resist the common historical urge to understand people as slices or snapshots of achievement. This is especially true of how we historicize successful women and minorities, because we do tend to think of them as exceptions.”<sup>75</sup> The woman writers discussed here represent a growing movement that would lead not just to the further integration of women into the newsroom in the twentieth century, but, along with their male counterparts, to the birth of the genre we call literary journalism.

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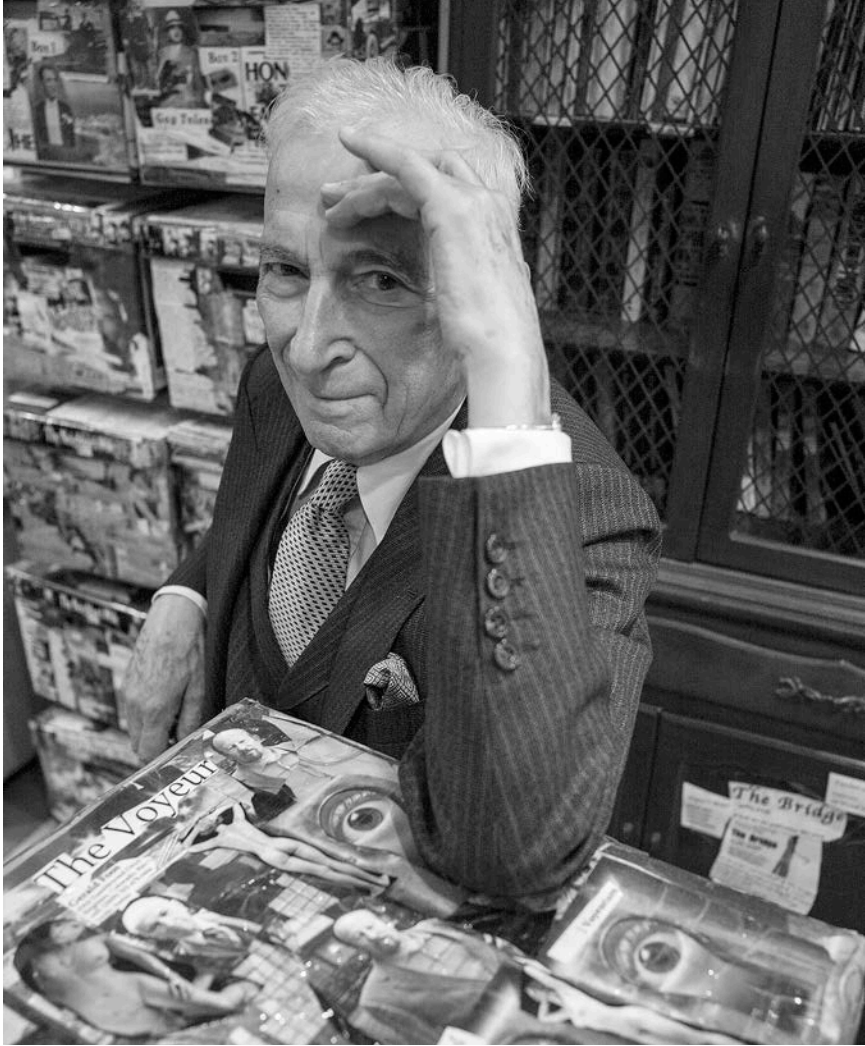
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## Notes

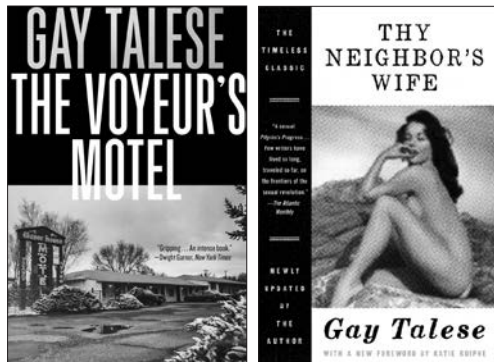
- <sup>1</sup> Sims, *True Stories*, 44.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.
- <sup>3</sup> Connery, "A Third Way to Tell the Story," 3–20.
- <sup>4</sup> Sims, *True Stories*, 44.
- <sup>5</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 198.
- <sup>6</sup> Forde and Foss, "'The Facts—the Color!—the Facts,'" 128–29.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. 132–38.
- <sup>10</sup> Arnold, “Up to Easter,” 638 (emphasis in the original); see also Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges*, 95.
- <sup>11</sup> Stead, “Maggie Darling,” 67–68.
- <sup>12</sup> Sharlet, “‘1894,’ introduction to “Maggie Darling,” 52.
- <sup>13</sup> Roggenkamp, introduction to *Narrating the News*, xiv.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 18.
- <sup>16</sup> Cordell, Mullen, and Fitzgerald, “A ‘Stunning’ Love Letter to Viral Texts.”
- <sup>17</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 29.
- <sup>18</sup> Juergens, “Sensationalism,” 85.
- <sup>19</sup> Forde and Foss, “The Facts—the Color!—the Facts,” 138.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 134.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 136.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Connery, *Journalism and Realism*, 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 20.
- <sup>26</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 90.
- <sup>27</sup> Forde and Foss, “The Facts—the Color!—the Facts,” 129.
- <sup>28</sup> Connery, “Searching for the Real and Actual,” *Journalism and Realism*, 13.
- <sup>29</sup> Forde and Foss, “The Facts—the Color!—the Facts,” 131.
- <sup>30</sup> Cordell, Mullen, and Fitzgerald, “A ‘Stunning’ Love Letter.”
- <sup>31</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 24.
- <sup>32</sup> Forde and Foss, “The Facts—the Color!—the Facts,” 138.
- <sup>33</sup> Frus, preface to *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative*, x; see also Williams, “Literature,” in *Marxism and Literature*.
- <sup>34</sup> Forde and Foss, “The Facts—the Color!—the Facts,” 127.
- <sup>35</sup> Edelstein, *Between the Novel and the News*, 64.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., 111.
- <sup>37</sup> Winfield, ed., “Emerging Professionalism and Modernity,” 1.
- <sup>38</sup> Forde and Foss, “The Facts—the Color!—the Facts,” 140.
- <sup>39</sup> Campbell, introduction to *The Year That Defined American Journalism*, 5.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Sims, *True Stories*, 12.
- <sup>43</sup> Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 198.
- <sup>44</sup> Edelstein, *Between the Novel and the News*, 64.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 2.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., 6.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 104.
- <sup>50</sup> Fetterley, ed., introduction to *Provisions*, 15.

- <sup>51</sup> For further exploration of these writers' works, see Fitzgerald, "Setting the Record Straight."
- <sup>52</sup> Canada, "A Sibling Rivalry in American Letters," 1–7.
- <sup>53</sup> Pettengill, "Against Novels," 61–91.
- <sup>54</sup> Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*, 26.
- <sup>55</sup> Reynolds and Smith, introduction to *These Sad but Glorious Days*, by Margaret Fuller, 8.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>57</sup> Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 5.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>60</sup> Harris, "Rebecca Harding Davis: From Romanticism to Realism," 4.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>62</sup> Edelstein, *Between the Novel and the News*, 49.
- <sup>63</sup> Williams, *Fall River*, viii.
- <sup>64</sup> Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, iii–iv.
- <sup>65</sup> Pettengill, "Against Novels," 85.
- <sup>66</sup> Harris, "Rebecca Harding Davis," 9.
- <sup>67</sup> Davis, *Life in the Iron Mills*, 13.
- <sup>68</sup> Elsdon, "Margaret Fuller's Tribune Dispatches," 33.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>70</sup> Quinn, "Exploring an Early Version of Literary Journalism," 33.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–34.
- <sup>72</sup> Fuller, *These Sad but Glorious Days*, 166.
- <sup>73</sup> Friedman, et al. "Stirred, Not Yet Shaken." 162.
- <sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.
- <sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.



Gay Talese, by Rachel Cobb, 2016.  
Courtesy Grove Atlantic, Inc.



# The Orgy Next Door: An Exploration of Ethical Relationships in Gay Talese's *Thy Neighbor's Wife* and *The Voyeur's Motel*

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**Abstract:** Gay Talese, credited as the founder of the New Journalism by Tom Wolfe, has long been revered among literary journalists and cited as an exemplar of the long-haul investigation, “the Art of Hanging Around,” where the writer immerses him- or herself into the lives of the subjects. However, in 2016 his reputation and methods came under public scrutiny when media reports revealed that the subject of his new work of immersive journalism, *The Voyeur's Motel*, had falsified his testimony. As critics questioned Talese's suspension of critical judgment, doubt was also cast on his lack of appropriate research methods and clear ethical guidelines. This article explores concerns about theories and methods that literary journalists and ethnographers share as those affect the relationship between the researcher and the subject, the impact of the researcher on the community or individuals studied, and how conflicting loyalties may mitigate against wider ethical considerations. These concerns include a questioning of the limits a literary journalist must place on personal professional behavior, notably sexual experiences or the observation of sexual practices, when using such encounters to provide a vicarious experience for the reader. These issues are investigated through a critical analysis of Talese's two works that take sexuality as their subject matter, *The Voyeur's Motel* (2016) and *Thy Neighbor's Wife* (1980). This essay offers insight for contemporary literary journalism in considering the balance between loyalty to the reader and to the investigated subject, the test of genuine public interest and the writer's personal agenda, and the need for self-awareness.

**Keywords:** Gay Talese – immersive journalism – ethnographic journalism – journalistic ethics – *Thy Neighbor's Wife* – *The Voyeur's Motel* – narrating sexual stories

In the summer of 2016, Gay Talese, who has been credited by Tom Wolfe as the founder of the New Journalism,<sup>1</sup> appeared at the center of a controversy. The author of fourteen books, including such literary journalism classics as *The Kingdom and the Power* (1969), *Honor Thy Father* (1971), *Thy Neighbor's Wife* (1980), and the magazine article some consider to be the best ever, "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" (*Esquire*, April 1966), Talese's reputation had a long way to fall. Novelist Mario Puzo declared him "the best nonfiction writer in America,"<sup>2</sup> Barbara Lounsberry called him "a reporter's reporter who is revered by fellow writers,"<sup>3</sup> and Robert Boynton declared him the "poet of the commonplace" who has demonstrated "that one could write great literary nonfiction about the 'ordinary.'"<sup>4</sup> Lad Tobin has praised Talese's approach to his deeply investigated subjects, which involve "an industriousness and integrity too often missing in the work of the new generation of writers of creative nonfiction."<sup>5</sup> In particular, Talese has been cited as an exemplar of the long-haul investigation, "the Art of Hanging Around,"<sup>6</sup> where the writer immerses him- or herself into the lives of subjects.

All of Talese's lauded journalistic accomplishments, however, were called into question over his latest investigative work, *The Voyeur's Motel*, published in 2016. Based on the journals of the self-confessed voyeur of the title,<sup>7</sup> the book claimed to chronicle Gerald Foos's observations of copulating couples from a viewing platform in the Aurora, Colorado, motel that he purported to own from 1965 to 1995. Foos also recorded witnessing criminal behavior: domestic abuse, drug dealing, an episode of incest, and even a murder. A long extract appeared in the *New Yorker* in April 2016,<sup>8</sup> attracting widespread media attention, with producer-director Steven Spielberg purchasing the film rights, and a planned national book tour.

However, a *Washington Post* investigation, conducted shortly after the *New Yorker* article appeared, revealed major discrepancies between events in *The Voyeur's Motel* and information found in public records. Foos had, in fact, sold the Colorado motel in 1980 and only reacquired it eight years later. The *Post* also uncovered that the murder Foos recorded in his journal bore a striking resemblance to the unsolved case of Irene Cruz, who was murdered in November 1977, not in Foos's motel but in a Denver hotel.<sup>9</sup> These inconsistencies cast doubt on Foos as a narrator even though Talese had, in part, verified his claims by joining him on the viewing platform during a research trip to the motel in January 1980. Confronted with these discrepancies, Talese told the *Post*, "I should not have believed a word he said," adding that he would not promote the book because its "credibility was down the toilet."<sup>10</sup> However, Talese quickly retracted his public regret in a statement from his publisher: "I am not disavowing the book, and neither is my publisher," it

read. “If, down the line, there are details to correct in later editions, we’ll do that.”<sup>11</sup>

Aside from the factual inaccuracies in the book, criticism also focused on concerns about the ethics of including Foos’s observations of the couples without their consent.<sup>12</sup> If Talese, this exemplar of the form—whose books belong to the canon of literary journalism—admits to the fallibility of his methods, questions may then arise about what we can learn from his mistakes. Inevitably, further questions arise about the enduring value of his previous works. Even the method, the “fine art of hanging out,” might be called into question. Or perhaps Talese, for once, had merely let down his guard and provided valuable insight into his approach.

Reviewers had raised similar questions in 1981 about the narrative reliability and lack of ethical boundaries in Talese’s research and writing of *Thy Neighbor’s Wife*,<sup>13</sup> a social history of America’s sexual revolution. In an epilogue to this 512-page volume, Talese admitted both to having sexual relationships with female subjects interviewed during his investigation and to managing a Manhattan massage parlor. Fellow journalists, authors, and feminists were excoriating in their comments. Talese said of the experience, “I was made to feel like I was an essentially wicked, perverted person. . . . It was my version of a scarlet letter.”<sup>14</sup> However, despite this critical lambasting of his process and its final product, Talese returned to the subject of sexual practice in *The Voyeur’s Motel*. Here he included the journals in which Foos recorded his own voyeuristic experiences, some of which Talese had originally considered including in *Thy Neighbor’s Wife*. While Talese questions his reactions to the material throughout the 2016 book, even pondering his own voyeurism in *Thy Neighbor’s Wife*, he proceeded to publish descriptions of the couples, without their knowledge, and whose consent could have been sought because Foos possessed their real names and addresses. Another concern was whether Talese had been complicit in Foos’s crimes, not only by failing to report them but by providing the voyeur with a media platform and thereby escalating his compulsive behavior.<sup>15</sup> While *Thy Neighbor’s Wife* was a much longer, more considered—albeit problematic—book, *The Voyeur’s Motel*, while a complement in subject, fails the test of being in the public interest. Moreover, both may have caused harm to the investigated subjects.

There are lessons here for literary journalists and scholars of literary journalism interested in the practices and ethics of immersion. Broadly, they are issues related to the necessity for a journalist to consider the impact that a journalist’s status and behavior may have on the subjects of investigation. If the journalist is not transparent about how his or her very presence frames the relationship to the group or individuals studied, the result may be an unreli-



able text. If the motives are falsified, the testimony may become manipulative and the resulting narrative may fail that of public interest. Both *Thy Neighbor's Wife* and *The Voyeur's Motel* faced fierce criticism that, I will argue, was rooted in a perception that these problems were inadequately addressed. Before turning to the details of these two volumes, however, it is instructive to examine how journalists describe their practice and how immersion reporting relates to the field of classical or traditional ethnography, a form of social science research that explicitly draws upon journalistic practice but with its own shared, ethical consensus.

### Immersive Journalism

Walt Harrington describes journalists as the “junkyard dogs of ethnography,” and while the suspicion may be mutual, these respective practices share many characteristics,<sup>16</sup> and a history. Robert Parks, the former journalist turned sociologist, employed journalistic techniques to develop his pioneering center for participant/observer-based fieldwork at the University of Chicago.<sup>17</sup> The traditional approach to ethnography that grew out of this hybrid tradition is defined as “a practice in which researchers spend long periods living within a culture in order to study it.”<sup>18</sup> Journalists who employ immersive techniques also involve themselves in the on-location lives and events of their subjects. Wolfe identified this emerging trend in 1973, of which Talese was the exemplar, where writers provided their readers with a “full objective description” but added details about “the subjective or emotional life of the characters.”<sup>19</sup> According to Sims, writing a decade later, the immersive process “begins with emotional connection” and “in its simplest form, [it] means time spent on the job,” “trying to learn all [you can] about a subject,” and is “the journalism of everyday life.”<sup>20</sup> The method includes the writer living with his or her subjects, letting the action unfold naturally, collecting material through the observation of sensory details, recording overheard dialogue and watching for small events and details that evoke their stories’ themes.<sup>21</sup> However, despite the intimacy of the experience, according to Hull, the journalist must “minimize your presence,” remembering that “you are not one of them,” “you are ever the infidel” who must preserve the need to “check people out.”<sup>22</sup>

In acknowledging these shared principles, new hybrid terms were developed, such as *ethnographic journalism*,<sup>23</sup> *anthro-journalism*,<sup>24</sup> *literary documentary journalism*,<sup>25</sup> and *cultural journalism*.<sup>26</sup> Hermann argues for the seemingly inherent relationship between long-form literary reportage and public ethnography, with journalists employing social-scientific immersion strategies and, in the process, remodelling journalism’s epistemic norms.<sup>27</sup> Boyer, however, notes that while journalists and ethnographers share many charac-



teristics, they operate under different institutional and temporal conditions that influence their working practice.<sup>28</sup>

Although literary journalists' reflections on their approach are insightful, the development of an agreed set of ethics to accompany this practice is more elusive. As Sims has argued, writers in this genre "follow their own set of rules"<sup>29</sup> to produce long-form narratives that focus on their specific experiences and encounters with subjects. Meanwhile, Hemley and others, while acknowledging the individual aspect of this practice, argue that the immersive writer must still pass the test of public interest in making decisions about his or her process and in gauging its potential consequences for subjects upon publication.<sup>30</sup> Underpinning the public interest justification is an understanding that the journalist's primary responsibility is to the reader and to the author's employer, rather than to the investigated subject. This is a crucial distinction, as ethnographers (who normally remain anonymous in their research reports) employ similar practices but define their responsibility as primarily to their subjects, which, in turn, justifies the intimacy of their access. This creates a complex set of decisions, as journalists may regard their loyalties as split, especially where subjects make themselves vulnerable through disclosure, through actions witnessed by the journalist, or through their interactions with them.

**A**nother critical difference arises from the role of the narrator, or narrative voice. The journalist searches for meaning on the reader's behalf, through what is experienced, and therefore operates as a "stand-in for the countless souls whose everyday existence she is investigating."<sup>31</sup> The writer's access to the subject is usually contingent, temporary, and circumscribed by being insulated from the consequences of publication. The journalist relies on scenic description rather than the "thick description" of the ethnographer, leaving the readers to draw their own conclusions rather than continuously probing for meaning.<sup>32</sup> Instead of representing the views of a given group or community, journalists aim to accurately report on what they have heard and seen.

Throughout an immersive journalistic investigation, a writer will attempt to preserve a formal distance (Hull's notion of remaining "ever the infidel") in order to construct the narrative. In this scenario the writer must become separate from the subject in order to view the experience for the consumption of the imagined reader. Hermann challenges this assumption of distance, however, arguing that the journalist in the field "cannot remain a detached observer and narrator, but must become an immersed partaker."<sup>33</sup> The hybrid of "ethnographic reporters" inevitably transcends "not only professional conventions and reporting habits but also their own demographic profiles" by "exchanging the traditional skeptical attitude with an empathetic one."<sup>34</sup> This

may feed the sense of divided loyalties for journalists left to patrol their own ethical boundaries. According to Harrington:

When you add the word literary to journalism or documentary or ethnography, you cross a line. You are no longer attempting only to describe other people's experiences. You are now taking responsibility for describing them through your own sense of those other people's experiences. The egoist in us emerges because we now take pride in the way we tell a story, in the cleverness of our inquiry, the uniqueness of our insight.<sup>35</sup>

Harrington articulates perfectly the tensions inherent in a participatory investigation where journalists must balance a respect for their subjects' vulnerabilities while retaining control over the final copy: the journalists' version of what they witnessed, how they have understood it, and what it means. As writers grapple with these questions, they must also ask whether their presence, like that of an ethnographer, has changed the story itself.

Talese reflects on his process of immersion in his essay, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer."<sup>36</sup> Here he describes how a childhood spent observing his mother's exchanges with her female customers at her dress boutique in Ocean City, New Jersey, provided the impetus for his journalistic career. The shop was "a kind of talk show," he writes, where his mother's "engaging manner and well-timed questions" drew out intimate confessions from her clients. Talese "used to pause and eavesdrop . . . to listen with patience and care, and never to interrupt," techniques which he later parlayed into interviews.<sup>37</sup> His mother also exemplified the "trustworthy individual" in whom her customers could confide. Taking this exchange as his model, Talese writes that he is motivated by his curiosity about "'ordinary' people" and analyzes their behavior through the lens of "a small-town American outsider whose exploratory view of the world is accompanied by the essence of the people and place I left behind."<sup>38</sup> Immersion, for Talese, involves both a considerable amount of time and the writer's physical presence. "I also believe people will reveal more of themselves to you if you are physically present; and the more sincere you are in your interest, the better will be your chances of obtaining that person's cooperation."<sup>39</sup> Once consent is obtained and subjects agree to have their real names used, Talese is free to describe a group or individual's behavior through his own idiosyncratic perspective rather than as a representative of the subject or group.

Turning to the two books in question, there are several examples where Talese's description of his immersive process seems to contradict his subjects' experience of it. Their critical responses reveal challenges inherent to the immersive process for a journalist with Talese's high public profile, and to his apparent lack of transparency about his approach to research and reporting.

As a celebrity journalist Talese was an asset to the Sandstone community, a 'growth centre' in Topanga Canyon, California, which he visited in 1973 while researching *Thy Neighbor's Wife* and whose managers were hoping to boost their membership.<sup>40</sup> In the case of Gerald Foos, the voyeur's desire to access the vast readership that a writing collaboration with Talese would offer may have driven him to falsify his journal entries. In these cases, the ambiguous nature of the relationships Talese fostered with his subjects raises questions about what he actually observed and his motives for observing it. Criticism, expressed in the form of contemporary reviews and critical articles, also suggests that the lack of self-reflection and transparency about his methods may have led readers to question his reliability as a narrator and to cast the process of immersive journalism into doubt.

### *Thy Neighbor's Wife* (1981)

At the time *Thy Neighbor's Wife* was published, Talese enjoyed an enviable public profile among Manhattan's literary elite, both as a writer and as the husband of Nan Talese, one of New York's most powerful publishers.<sup>41</sup> A trawl through issues of the *New York Times* of 1980 shows him mentioned in gossip columns, quoted in articles, and endorsing books in publishers' ads, and by 1981 even reported as appearing as the aptly-named "sexual adventurer" in Gary Trudeau's "Doonesbury" comic strip.<sup>42</sup> His financial ranking was also newsworthy. Following *The Kingdom and the Power* (1969), his "human history"<sup>43</sup> of the *New York Times*; and his expose of a New York mafia family in *Honor Thy Father* (1971); Talese's publisher Doubleday paid him a \$1.2 million advance for a two-book deal, of which *Thy Neighbor's Wife* was the first. In October 1979, United Artists offered Talese the then-record sum of \$2.5 million for film rights to the book.<sup>44</sup>

Expected to be what Clarence Petersen of the *Chicago Tribune* called "the most controversial book of the year, and one of the most provocative books about sex since the first Kinsey report,"<sup>45</sup> it was also, Peterson reported Talese as saying, "the most important story I've ever written."<sup>46</sup> The author, however, seemed unprepared for an onslaught of negative reviews, including Peterson's reports of John Yardley's description of it in the *Washington Star* as "a genuinely dreadful book" and "a slimy exercise,"<sup>47</sup> and, in the *New Republic*, Barbara Grizzuti Harrison's dismissing it as "boring . . . pious and self-righteous."<sup>48</sup> Harrison's sentiment was echoed by novelist Mordecai Richler: "*Thy Neighbor's Wife* is an impoverished book; it succeeds like no other I know of in making of sex a mechanical bore."<sup>49</sup> It was as deep as a "skin-flick," according to Joan Beck in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>50</sup> And in the *Washington Post*, Robert Sherrill decried it as "constructed mostly from the sort of intellectual plywood

you find in most neighborhood bars: part voyeurism, part amateur psychoanalysis, part six-pack philosophy.”<sup>51</sup> Aside from their misgivings about the book’s literary qualities, some critics thought the subject, borne of the counterculture, by 1980 had arrived too late for serious consideration. The party was over.<sup>52</sup> The critics’ objections to the book’s potted social history, however, were mild in comparison to their comments about Talese’s revelation that he had enjoyed sexual encounters at the nudist Sandstone Retreat in Topanga Canyon. For several chapters in *Thy Neighbor’s Wife* he describes a nirvana where ordinary middle-class couples experimented with unconventional (and largely heterosexual) relationships.<sup>53</sup> There are graphic descriptions in *Thy Neighbor’s Wife* of orgies, and of couplings, that reveal the subjects at their most publicly uninhibited. This theme of “freedom” runs throughout the book with many characters described as having escaped from puritanical parents and restricted childhoods, from poverty and from oppressive ideologies. Sex operates as a form of rebellion against orthodoxy, against restrictions and religious control, while the Sandstone residents seek enlightenment through new philosophies, such as Abraham Maslow’s concept of self-actualization.<sup>54</sup>

Given the sensitivity of the investigation, Talese explains his approach in an author’s note at the end of *Thy Neighbor’s Wife*. He describes how he conducted hundreds of interviews, with some subjects more than fifty times, and established “such trusting relationships with the interviewees that they would allow the use of their names in connection with the intimate stories they told me about themselves.”<sup>55</sup> Talese assured his subjects that their stories would be relayed accurately and in “the same nonjudgemental tone that characterized my previous work.”<sup>56</sup> Despite this neutral tone, Talese discloses only in a final chapter,<sup>57</sup> in which he writes about himself in the third person, that he engaged in a sexual relationship with Sandstone’s cofounder Barbara Williamson. By concluding, rather than opening the book with this admission, Talese obfuscates the reality of his role in the story and his methods for obtaining information about his subjects. The book is, quite simply, read differently without this knowledge.

The descriptions of the residents’ sexual libertinism are written in a tone of detached interest that enables Talese to maintain his “small-town American outsider perspective.”<sup>58</sup> In this passage, he gives an eye-witness account of the basement “ball-room,” the regular Saturday night party where residents, and guests, were granted entry to a pleasure-seeker’s parlor”:

There were triads, foursomes, a few bisexuals: bodies that could belong to high-fashion models, linebackers, Wagnerian sopranos, speed swimmers, flabby academicians; tattooed arms, peace beads, ankle bracelets, ankhs, thin gold chains around waists, hefty penises, noodles, curly female pubes,

fine, bushy, trimmed, dark, blond, red valentines. . . . Everything that Puritan America had ever tried to outlaw, to censor, to conceal behind locked bedroom doors, was on display in this adult playroom, where men often saw for the first time another man's erection, and where many couples became alternately stimulated, shocked, gladdened, or saddened by the sight of their spouse interlocked with a new lover.<sup>59</sup>

On the floor above the "ball-room," prominent literary and counterculture guests gathered, ranging from the psychologists Phyllis and Eberhard Kronhausen, to *New York Post* columnist Max Lerner, actor Bernie Casey and the former Rand Corporation employees responsible for the Pentagon Papers, Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo.<sup>60</sup> Cofounder John Williamson's vision for the community's eventual membership was a "cross-section of upper-income California businessmen, artists, actors, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and people with a creative drive."<sup>61</sup> According to Barbara Williamson's records, only five percent of Sandstone's membership was "blue-collar" and ninety percent "upper-middle class."<sup>62</sup> This suggests, along with Talese's list of prominent guests, that far from offering an outlet for "ordinary" people—the neighbors of the book's title<sup>63</sup>—Sandstone's real aim was to attract those with high status and money.

Talese arrived at the community as a "big-shot very prominent journalist" Williamson hoped would publicize their cause and continue to attract an elite membership.<sup>64</sup> After Talese's initial visit in 1974, he provided Sandstone with national television coverage by promoting its lifestyle on Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show*. He later appeared at a public event for Sandstone, along with the author of *The Joy of Sex* (1972), Dr. Alex Comfort, *Playboy* magazine's managing editor Nat Lehrman, and *Screw* magazine publisher Al Goldstein.<sup>65</sup> Talese gave numerous radio and print interviews about Sandstone, most notably to Aaron Latham for *New York* magazine:

Sandstone had institutionalized the orgy so that it was always there when you needed it. Sandstone stood as a monument to prostate power. Many of the openly copulating residents practiced the reverse of fidelity: they were strict about not making love to anyone to whom they had made love to before . . . . Gay told a reporter for *Coast* magazine, "I'm not that young anymore, and lately the most I've been doing is about once a day. But I've been engaged at least four times a day since I've been here. After a hundred times, it gets a little wearing."<sup>66</sup>

Although Talese indulged his sexual fantasies on his first visit, when he returned for a longer research period he was committed to becoming "part of the family."<sup>67</sup> But his refusal to share domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning set him apart from the group and reinforced his celebrity status.

Hatfield claims the writer spent his days playing tennis, interested only in interviewing the Williamsons and participating in the Saturday night parties where “he took women into his own bedroom,” violating the community’s rules.<sup>68</sup>

Williamson realized that Talese was struggling to establish a rapport with the other residents and describes him as someone “used to getting his own way” and sulking because the other residents refused to speak with him. To remedy the situation, Williamson describes in her memoir how she visited his cabin one afternoon. In Talese’s version, Williamson was “a sexually aggressive woman” who demanded his sexual favors in return for an interview.<sup>69</sup> “After she had finished, *and only after she had finished* [italics in original], Barbara Williamson began to talk freely, confiding in him for the first time since he had arrived at Sandstone . . .”<sup>70</sup> Thus he appears to justify his sexual experience as an extension of his journalistic method, an argument he continued to make in 2009 following the re-publication of *Thy Neighbor’s Wife*. As he explained to Katie Roiphe (who wrote the preface for the new edition) in an interview for the *Paris Review*:

I also wanted to emphasize [in the final chapter of *Thy Neighbor’s Wife*] my distance from the events surrounding me, even when I was within them. I might be in a sauna, but I’m also apart from that sauna. I’m always thinking what it looks like from across the street, or I’m eavesdropping on other conversations. As a reporter I disassociate. It seemed the most obvious way to put myself into the book. I am an observer at all times.<sup>71</sup>

Williamson, however, contradicts Talese’s account, claiming she initiated sex to soothe Talese’s “crushed ego” and that her seduction was calculated to salvage his pride. She led him to the bedroom saying, “Come on, let’s get you better.”<sup>72</sup> Their physical exchange also casts doubt on Talese’s insistence that he remained an ever-vigilant observer, an idea that ignores what Plummer describes as “the complex social processes” involved in the telling of sexual stories.<sup>73</sup>

In the Roiphe interview, Talese, reflecting on Sandstone, justified shedding his clothes and engaging in sex as a means to establish trust with his subjects. “The point is that they had to trust me and I had to trust them. I couldn’t have done it any other way.”<sup>74</sup> But Talese struggled to establish a rapport with John Williamson, partly by insisting on interviewing him at a Malibu Beach restaurant rather than at Sandstone, a demand the Williamsons perceived as a “power play.”<sup>75</sup> Since John Williamson was such a key figure, Talese asked Cynthia Sears, “a well-respected female writer,” to conduct the interview. Barbara Williamson noticed a marked difference in their styles. “[Sears’s] whole approach was a radical departure from Gay’s journalis-

tic sense of propriety, his macho pushiness, and John's response was instantly positive. . . . Throughout the entire interview, Gay wore an expression of disbelief.<sup>76</sup> Sears is credited in Talese's book only as his "research associate" who "tape recorded my conversations" with the Williamsons and "carefully transcribed these dialogues that gave me an additional record so that I could play back and hear again what was said about events and emotions involved."<sup>77</sup> Barbara recalls that other members found Talese's interviewing style "overly aggressive, pushy,"<sup>78</sup> which suggests that despite the months living in the community Talese had failed to establish the trust vital to an immersive investigation.

Another contrast between Talese's articulation of his method and his subject's experience of it arises in considering his attitude towards the female residents. In *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, he claims that the Saturday night parties provided women with a safe space in which they could experiment sexually. As he describes the scene:

There was no need for coquetry or traditional feminine coyness at Sandstone, no thoughts about one's "reputation" nor the legitimate concerns that most women had about their physical safety whenever conversing with male strangers in bars or other public places . . . women were protected by those around them from being victim of one man's hostility.<sup>79</sup>

However, while Williamson shared Talese's conviction that the orgies were liberating for women, she resented the way he rejected any lover who became emotionally attached and his tendency "to treat women as objects, denying them their full expression as individuals."<sup>80</sup> One woman commented, "he treats women like paper towels: tear one off, use it and throw it away."<sup>81</sup> Hatfield even remembers a female guest making a rape allegation against "an honorary member," with Talese as the prime suspect and who, when confronted, "became very angry and accused me [Hatfield] of "power tripping."<sup>82</sup>

Talese's lack of clarity about the extent to which he engaged in sexual relationships seems an important oversight in the construction of this narrative. Had he used the first person throughout the Sandstone chapters, the reader would have been alerted to the highly subjective mode in which he was writing and this in itself would have offered greater insight into his stated objectives. By including only a highly edited version of his experience and leaving this crucial information to a final chapter, he obscures and distorts the story. The narrator's reliability is cast even further into doubt when the Sandstone residents' memoirs are considered. Talese's high-profile status and volatile temper also appear to complicate his role as a "part of the family,"<sup>83</sup> raising doubts about his acceptance by and his ability to understand, meaningfully, the community and its individual members.



*The Voyeur's Motel* (2016)

Despite the opprobrium heaped upon Talese for *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, it became a bestseller and was the topic of television and radio talk shows across the country. Talese's experiment with inserting himself into the text prompted him to employ this technique in a memoir about his Italian heritage, *Unto the Sons*, published in 1992. In his essay, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," he writes that the memoir enabled him "to expose . . . myself and my past influences, without changing the names of the people or the place that shaped my character."<sup>84</sup> His turn to a deeply personal story anticipated the memoir boom, which, by the early twenty-first century, saw "more than 150,000 new titles [released] every year."<sup>85</sup> In keeping with the trend towards a first-person narrative, where the writer provides greater transparency about his or her methods, Talese, in his most recent book, offers more detail about his practice, writes in the first person, and is reflective throughout. Because Foos originally contracted Talese as a possible subject for *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, it might be regarded as a companion volume that deals with the same intimate subject matter. If these rhetorical devices address the concerns voiced by past critics of *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, they fail, however, to satisfy fully a fresh set of ethical concerns.

## Meeting the Voyeur

Voyeurism was not a novel theme for Talese. He made reference to it in *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, summing up his observations of how the different genders consume sex, in Europe and in the United States: "Men were natural voyeurs; women were exhibitors. Women sold sexual pleasure; men bought it."<sup>86</sup> In *The Voyeur's Motel* he compares his journalistic motives and methods in *Thy Neighbor's Wife* to those of the voyeur, making the distinction that "the people I observed and reported on had given me their consent."<sup>87</sup> He makes a comparison, perhaps unconscious, in "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," where he describes himself as "overhear[ing] many people discussing candidly with my mother what they had earlier avoided" in the dress shop, another form of observant watching that is central to his evolving identity as a journalist.<sup>88</sup>

With the link between voyeurism and journalistic investigation firmly established at the outset of the book, Talese describes how, after receiving a letter from Foos, he agrees to meet him in Denver on January 23, 1980, as a possible subject for *Thy Neighbor's Wife*.<sup>89</sup> Here Talese describes how he translates his curiosity about—and reactions to—a subject into prose. After their first meeting, Talese writes up his daily impressions about his encounters, a long-established practice.<sup>90</sup> He provides a detailed physical description of Foos, his mannerisms, and his character, even though Talese wonders, "What could I



see in his attic that I had not already seen as the researching writer of *Thy Neighbor's Wife* and a frequenter of Sandstone's swinging couples' ballroom?"<sup>91</sup>

Just as Talese is present as a first-person narrator, describing his investigation techniques in detail, he is also self-reflective about his process and his relationship with Foos. There are several examples where he contemplates the ethics of publishing Foos's observations of his guests from the platform in his motel, justified by Talese as his subject "indulging his curiosity within the boundaries of his own property, and since his guests were unaware of his voyeurism, they were not affected by it . . . there's no violation of privacy if no one complains."<sup>92</sup> As if emboldened by this justification, Talese joins Foos on the viewing platform (and returns "a number of additional times"), where he observes couples engaged in sex.<sup>93</sup> Talese here admits that this activity is "very illegal" and wonders about his own complicity "in this strange and distasteful project." He eventually decides that because Foos would have to remain anonymous, he cannot use this material<sup>94</sup> and returns to New York to begin his promotional tour for *Thy Neighbor's Wife*.

Between 1980 and 1995, when the motel was sold, Foos sent Talese his journals that documented, in great detail, years of his surreptitious recordings from his attic platform. Over that period, Foos became increasingly frustrated with his inability to share his findings—he compared himself to professional sexologists such as Kinsey, and Masters and Johnson—while his fantasies, and behavior, became more florid. For example, he performed an "experiment" where he planted sexual paraphernalia and pornography in a motel room and recorded whether his "subjects" used them.<sup>95</sup> He also describes occasions when he followed female "subjects" back to their homes, even making inquiries about one from a neighbor.<sup>96</sup> Reading this material, in New York, at a geographical and psychological distance, Talese wonders if "voyeurs sometimes need escape from prolonged solitude by exposing themselves to other people (as Foos had done first with his wife, and later me), and then seek a larger audience as an anonymous scrivener of what they've witnessed?"<sup>97</sup> This statement seems to raise the question of Talese's role in aiding Foos's criminal behavior. The possibility exists that a celebrated writer who considered publishing his accounts—which would satisfy the voyeur's stated desire for "a larger audience"—may have driven Foos to take greater risks with his "subjects."<sup>98</sup>

Critics of *The Voyeur's Motel* argued that the author had, indeed, violated journalistic ethics in his treatment of Foos. Dick Lehr, writing in the *Huffington Post*, in response to the Foos controversy, suggests that while Talese was correct in his refusal to notify the authorities about violations of privacy, the book fails the test of public interest. "Promises reporters make to sources are a

very big deal,” Lehr writes “It’s a matter of trust, a promise so sacrosanct that many reporters would only consider breaking it in the rarest of exceptions.”<sup>99</sup> But, he continues, concerns for the violation of the couples’ privacy should have taken precedence over Talese’s loyalty to his informant. For Lehr, the more troubling aspect of the book is why Talese, who makes repeated references to Fooks’s unreliability, chose to believe him.<sup>100</sup>

The second ethical issue arises over whether Talese, as the voyeur’s constant reader and who holds the promise of an international readership for his “research,” encouraged his criminal behavior. Kim Walsh-Childers argues that by respecting their confidentiality agreement, Talese allows Fooks to subject hundreds, even thousands more guests to his voyeurism, judgment, and scorn. Their years of correspondence affirmed Fooks’s behavior, “helping him maintain the myth that his actions served some higher purpose, some noble societal goal, rather than simply satisfying his own sexual desire.”<sup>101</sup> More disturbing is the possibility that, through Fooks’s reference to his increasing frustrations and references to experiments with his guests in which their privacy is further violated—the sexual paraphernalia planted in their rooms, the stalking of female guests—that his activities escalate. Voyeurism, according to psychologists, is rarely a discrete clinical entity: many studies have found that perpetrators of voyeurism also engage in other forms of sexual deviance, including rape, paedophilia, exhibitionism, and sadism.<sup>102</sup> Earl Ballard, who purchased the Manor House Motel from Fooks in 1980, raised this possibility. He told the *National Post* that during the 1970s Fooks invited him and another man to join him “multiple times” in the annex to look in on guests.<sup>103</sup> This seems consistent with psychologists’ descriptions of voyeurs as suffering “a general deficit of control over deviant sexual behavior”<sup>104</sup> and contradicts Talese’s image of Fooks as suffering from periods of “prolonged solitude.”<sup>105</sup>

Not all of the commentators on the controversy surrounding *The Voyeur’s Motel*, however, agreed that it cast doubt on the genre and practice of New Journalism. David L. Ullin, writing in the *Los Angeles Times*, argues that Talese probably relied too heavily on Fooks as a narrator simply because of the author’s “desire to believe” this “too good not to tell” story.<sup>106</sup> Ladd Tobin, writing more broadly about Talese’s methods in his *Esquire* article, “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold,” also concludes that, however conscious, the author’s fascination and identification with his subject is a primary framing device.<sup>107</sup> I would argue that Talese’s references to his own voyeurism—as a boy in his mother’s shop, as a journalist at Sandstone, with Fooks in the motel—“[seep] into almost everything he sees and says” in the book.<sup>108</sup> Ullin’s view that Talese is motivated by a desire to relay Fooks’s “too good not to tell” story ignores what Tobin uncovers: that the author’s unconscious, over-identification with

his subject causes him to suspend his critical judgment. Moreover, Talese's unresolved and conflicted feelings about his own sexual desires are played out in *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, another case where his ability to maintain distance—and judgment—collapses.

### Conclusion

Tobin's observations are especially helpful in considering the broader lessons to be learned from Talese's immersive techniques in writing about his own, and others', sexual experiences. *Thy Neighbor's Wife* and *The Voyeur's Motel* appeared to be vehicles for the writer to work out his own obsessions, thereby "telling us as much about himself as he does about his subjects."<sup>109</sup> However, if immersive journalism is a practice in which the writer may strip him- or herself bare, then this must be done with brutal honesty; otherwise, the text becomes manipulative and the truth claim with the reader is broken. Talese, I have argued, disappoints by failing to appropriately frame his Sandstone chapters in *Thy Neighbor's Wife* as the experience of a celebrity whose presence colors his intimate relationships with his subjects. The confessional author note, left to the final chapter and written in a distancing third person, seems self-serving and casts doubt on the book's message.

Talese's self-reflective mode in *The Voyeur's Motel*, however, fails to fully address these concerns. Here the ethical questions are even more sharply focused because of Talese's complicity in the crimes perpetuated by the subject and by the possibility that his attention may have prompted the voyeur's sexually deviant behavior to escalate. The unconscious over-identification with the subject, which goes unacknowledged, seems paradoxical given Talese's stated ability to "disassociate" and to remain ever "an observer."<sup>110</sup> Perhaps the most vital message in this exploration of these journalistic investigations into the fraught territory of sexual intimacy is the need for psychological insight and an ability to face up to the brutal honesty of our motivating psyches. As Philip Lopate has written about the essential requirement for good personal writing, "Remorse is often the starting point . . . whose working out brings the necessary self-forgiveness (not to mention self-amusement) that is necessary to help us outgrow shame."<sup>111</sup> Whatever Talese's motivations that lay behind the years he has devoted to writing about sex, perhaps this self-understanding might have been a better, and more ethical starting place.



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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 10–36; see also Talese, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," 171.

<sup>2</sup> Talese, *Sinatra Has a Cold and Other Essays*, back cover.

<sup>3</sup> Lounsbury, introduction to *The Gay Talese Reader*, vii; see also Tobin, "Gay Talese Has a Secret," 139.

<sup>4</sup> Boynton, "Gay Talese," para. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Tobin, "Gay Talese Has a Secret," 138.

<sup>6</sup> Talese, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," 189.

<sup>7</sup> Talese, *The Voyeur's Motel*, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Talese, "The Voyeur's Motel," 40–55.

<sup>9</sup> Farhi, "The Murder the *New Yorker* Never Mentioned."

<sup>10</sup> Farhi, "Gay Talese Renounces His Lurid New Book about a Motel Voyeur," paras. 2–3.

<sup>11</sup> Alter, "Gay Talese Defends 'The Voyeur's Motel,'" para. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Lehr, "Can You Ever Break a Confidentiality Agreement?" para 7.

<sup>13</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 250; page numbers and quotations are from the 1981 U.K. edition.

<sup>14</sup> Roiphe, "Gay Talese," 85, 86.

<sup>15</sup> Walsh-Childers, "An Ethical Bind," para 13.

<sup>16</sup> Harrington, "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography," 90.

<sup>17</sup> Hermann, "Ethnographic Journalism," 261; see also Lindner, *The Reportage of Urban Culture*.

<sup>18</sup> *Qualitative Research Glossary* of the AQR, s.v. "Ethnography."

<sup>19</sup> Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Sims, "The Literary Journalists," 10, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Harrington, "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography," 92–94.

<sup>22</sup> Hull, "Being There," 41, 42.

<sup>23</sup> Cramer and McDevitt, "Ethnographic Journalism," 127–43.

<sup>24</sup> Fillmore, "Anthro-journalism."

<sup>25</sup> Harrington, "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography," 92.

<sup>26</sup> Bird, "The Journalist as Ethnographer?" 302.

<sup>27</sup> Hermann, "Ethnographic Journalism," 261.

<sup>28</sup> Boyer, "Divergent Temporalities," 6, 9.

<sup>29</sup> Sims, "The Literary Journalists," 3.

<sup>30</sup> Hemley, *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing*, 150.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>32</sup> Singer, "Ethnography," 192.



<sup>33</sup> Hermann, "Ethnographic Journalism," 269.

<sup>34</sup> Cramer and McDevitt, "Ethnographic Journalism," 131; Hermann, "Ethnographic Journalism," 269.

<sup>35</sup> Harrington, "What Journalism Can Offer Ethnography," 102–3.

<sup>36</sup> Talese, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," 166–96.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–68.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 172, 173.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>40</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 250.

<sup>41</sup> Schwartz, "The Worlds of Gay Talese," SM9; Petersen, "Sexual Odyssey Over," *Chicago Tribune*, p. 1 Lifestyle, quoted Phillip Nobile as saying of the controversy surrounding *Thy Neighbor's Wife*, "Talese's labor of love has excited hot passions—and why not? The author, already celebrated, has become rich and famous enough to be blurbed by People."

<sup>42</sup> *New York Times* Books advertisement, Travel Section, n.p., Gay Talese endorses Thomas Weyr's nonfiction book, *Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America*; for celebrity gossip see Klemesrud, "A New Role for Male Models: Restaurateur," A2; for Trudeau reference, "Lately, Gay Talese has turned up by name as a 'sexual adventurer,' and David ('Tome') Halberstam has been described as the author of very fat books," Mitgang, "Aging Agitator," 39.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Lounsbury, "Bridging the Silence," 37.

<sup>44</sup> Schwartz, "UA Pays \$2.5 Million for Book by Gay Talese," C9.

<sup>45</sup> Petersen, "Sexual Odyssey Over," 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Richler, "Bad Vibrations," 46, 49.

<sup>50</sup> Beck, "A Skin-deep Peek," 2.

<sup>51</sup> Sherrill, "Selling Sex in America," para. 2.

<sup>52</sup> For example, see Harvey Mindess, quoted in Steven Watts, *Mr. Playboy: Hugh Hefner and the American Dream* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons: 2008), 328, 493n14; 346.

<sup>53</sup> John and Judith Bullaro feature as the typical middle-class couple whose lives are deeply affected by the sexual liberation movement through their involvement with the Sandstone retreat. See Talese, *My Neighbour's Wife*, 123–205. Hatfield noted that rather than your next-door neighbor, as Talese described it, the sexual revolutionaries who made up the community at Sandstone were regarded by their founders as an elite. The community was "a cross-section of upper-income California businessmen, artists, actors, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and people with a creative drive." See Hatfield, introduction to *My Sandstone Experience*, 6.

<sup>54</sup> For insights into Sandstone philosophies, including their interest in Maslow's work, see Hatfield, *My Sandstone Experience*, 1, 66; Yardley, "John Williamson," para. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 496.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 496.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Talese, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," 173.

<sup>59</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 315–16.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>61</sup> Tom Hatfield, introduction to *My Sandstone Experience*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Williamson, *An Extraordinary Life*, 104.

<sup>63</sup> Petersen, quoting Talese, "Sexual Odyssey Over," 1.

<sup>64</sup> Williamson, *An Extraordinary Life*, 50.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 51, 87.

<sup>66</sup> Latham, "An Evening in the Nude," 51.

<sup>67</sup> Hatfield, *My Sandstone Experience*, 97; Robert Rimmer paraphrases Talese from a radio talk show interview with Marty Zitter, describing his reaction to Sandstone as "like being a kid in a candy store," quoted in Hatfield, *My Sandstone Experience*, 15.

<sup>68</sup> Hatfield, *My Sandstone Experience*, 98.

<sup>69</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 490. In Hotchner's profile, "People Are Talking About: Gay Talese," Talese is quoted as asking his dinner guests if they masturbate: "There is some embarrassment, but, with one exception (a woman who maintained it was none of his business), they answer him," 198.

<sup>70</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 490–91.

<sup>71</sup> Roiphe, "Gay Talese," 84.

<sup>72</sup> Williamson, *An Extraordinary Life*, 53.

<sup>73</sup> Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, 13.

<sup>74</sup> Roiphe, "Gay Talese," 83.

<sup>75</sup> Williamson, *An Extraordinary Life*, 57.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>77</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 496.

<sup>78</sup> Williamson, *An Extraordinary Life*, 58.

<sup>79</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 319.

<sup>80</sup> Williamson, *An Extraordinary Life*, 54.

<sup>81</sup> Hatfield, *My Sandstone Experience*, 99.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>84</sup> Talese, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," 175.

<sup>85</sup> Rak, *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> Talese, *Thy Neighbour's Wife*, 481.

<sup>87</sup> Talese, *The Voyeur's Motel*, 5.

<sup>88</sup> Talese, "Origins of a Nonfiction Writer," 168.

<sup>89</sup> Talese, *The Voyeur's Motel*, 8.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 79, 83.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>98</sup> There is also the question of how Foos benefitted financially from this arrangement. Foos, at the time of publication of *The Voyeur's Motel*, was selling off his collection of baseball cards and antique dolls. Talese, also a high profile and well-known sports writer, appears in a YouTube video with Foos, overlooking the collection; see Freiermuth, "The Collections of Gerald and Anita Foos." The Youtube video featuring Foos and Talese with his collection is now private. It is, however, mentioned in an article by Walker, "Gerald Foos, Owner of the Voyeur's Motel."

<sup>99</sup> Lehr, "Can You Ever Break a Confidentiality Agreement?" para. 8.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., para. 12.

<sup>101</sup> Walsh-Childers, "An Ethical Bind," para. 18.

<sup>102</sup> Adams, "Voyeurism," 8:216–18.

<sup>103</sup> Farhi, "Motel Voyeur Tales Face 'Credibility' Questions," para 28.

<sup>104</sup> Adams, "Voyeurism," 8:216–18.

<sup>105</sup> Talese, *The Voyeur's Motel*, 36.

<sup>106</sup> Ulin, "All Manner of Goings-on," F9.

<sup>107</sup> Tobin, "Gay Talese Has a Secret," 143–44.

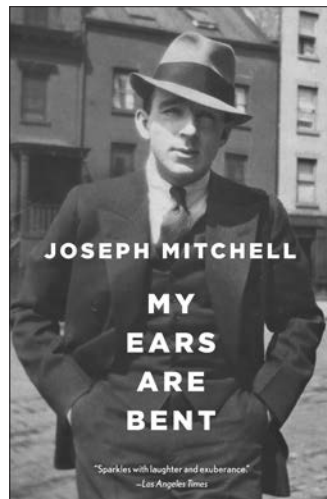
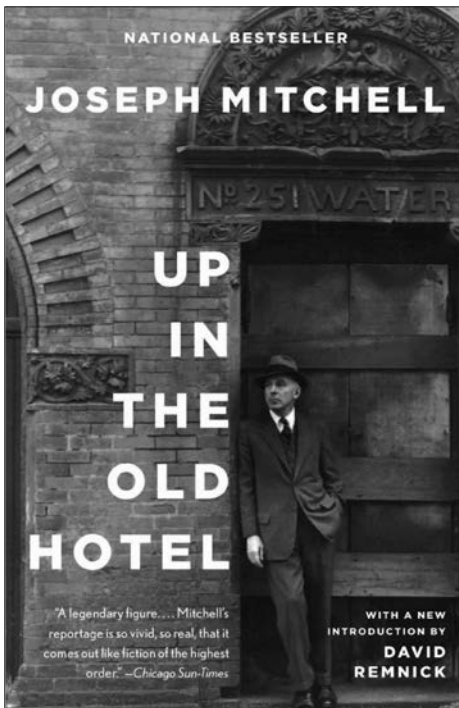
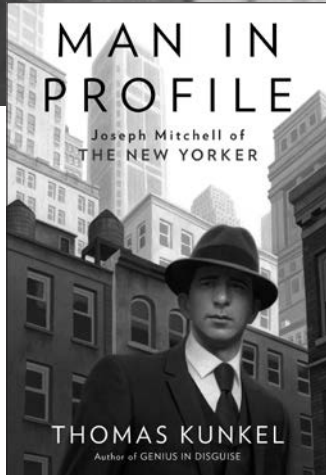
<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Roiphe, "Gay Talese," 84.

<sup>111</sup> Lopate, *To Show and to Tell*, 25.





Joseph Mitchell, his famous books (*Up in the Old Hotel*, 1992, and *My Ears Are Bent*, 1938), and Thomas Kunkel's biography, 2015.

# Writing Men on the Margins: Joseph Mitchell, Masculinity, and the Flâneur

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**Abstract:** This study introduces the philosophies of the *flâneur*—a figure associated with the acts of wandering, observing, and reporting the realities of life on the city streets—to offer a critical reconsideration of a sociological perspective in writings of literary journalism. The study proposes that the literary journalist can be considered as a flâneur, or as a writer who employs the figure of the flâneur as a narrative device, to drive the production of (self-)reflective narratives. This approach is realized with a re-reading of one of New York City’s most widely regarded literary journalists: Joseph Mitchell. Reading Mitchell’s *New Yorker* profiles through a gendered lens, the article identifies Mitchell’s sociologically charged investigations into the everyday experiences of men from the margins—namely immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and African Americans—as they struggle with the conflicts that shape their masculine identities. The central themes that define these conflicts are identified as the struggle with the dominant ideologies of the self-made man and breadwinner roles, the importance of homosocial relations in the shaping of masculine identity. Possibilities of alternative roles for such men appear in Mitchell’s key profiles, “The Old House at Home” (1939), “The Mohawks in High Steel” (1949), and “Mr. Hunter’s Grave” (1956). By re-conceptualizing Mitchell as a flâneur, that is, a wandering investigator, interpreter, and writer of the discourses of New York society during this period, 1930s–1960s, we can begin to appreciate the sociological value of Mitchell’s profiles and the contribution they make to our understanding of the historical development of masculinity in the United States.

**Keywords:** Joseph Mitchell – masculinity – flâneur – literary journalism – New York City

Traditional definitions of the *flâneur*—from the French *flâner*, “to roam or wander”—associate such a figure with dandyism and idleness.<sup>1</sup> But cultural theorists who champion the sociological value of the acts of observation, interpretation, and representation of the everyday have challenged this view. They argue that the *flâneur*, as both a product and producer of the realities of the social environment, is a figure driven by the responsibility to offer a phenomenology of urban experience.<sup>2</sup> Chris Jenks and Thiago Nieves offer a list of characteristics that expound the sociological factors that drive the *flâneur*, the most notable points being “the desire to get to know the ‘underdog,’” “the creation of alternative discourses on social reality,” “the analytic hauteur claimed through distance and superior vision,” “the action/moral imperative that stems from embeddedness and belonging,” and “a continuous reflexivity between perception and knowledge; experience and memory; sight and citation.”<sup>3</sup> While by no means exhaustive, these are useful directions towards a conceptualization of the literary journalist as *flâneur*.

Such an approach offers a subtle shift in how we might understand the role of the literary journalist, moving away from the maxims of such figures meandering at a “reality boundary” to underscore the writer’s sense of duty toward reporting social realities of the every day “powered by a self-defining narrative impulse.”<sup>4</sup> This conceptualization resonates with John Hartsock’s recent reflection on how we might understand the aesthetic and didactic purposes of literary journalism. Tellingly, Hartsock prefers the term “narradesciptive” journalism to describe such writings.<sup>5</sup> Hartsock proposes the idea that the literary journalist considers his or her experience of daily life as “a phenomenal experience that prompts a sensory response, a viewpoint revived in the concept of the aesthetics of the everyday.”<sup>6</sup> Such a definition of the purpose of the literary journalist—driven to produce written pieces of representation and interpretation on the everyday—evokes the *flâneur*. The literary journalist can be seen either as a *flâneur* or as one who employs the figure of the *flâneur* as a narrative device to drive such (self-)reflective narratives. While Hartsock offers a note of caution regarding the modalities related to ethnographic studies in literary journalism, voicing concern about the possibility of slipping into sociological positivism, the issues of legitimacy on which he ruminates—literary legitimacy alongside social-scientific legitimacy—might be better served refocused toward a legitimacy of what is, admittedly, a more abstract notion of narrative truth.<sup>7</sup> The *flâneur*’s purpose is to observe, interpret, and subsequently produce a multi-layered narrative text that offers more than descriptive (social) scientific fact. As Jenks argues, “the *flâneur*, though grounded in everyday life, is an analytic form, a narrative device, an attitude towards knowledge and its social context. It is an image of movement



through the social space of modernity”<sup>8</sup> [italics in original]. The power of the flâneur is the ability to be both ethnographer and literary writer, to be on the street and on the page, to find the narratives that can only be found by navigating between empirical data and the poetry in the everyday, between cold hard statistics and heated human interactions, between objective fact and subjective truth, all of which stem from a sense of social responsibility toward investigation and the subsequent production of texts that may challenge normative discourses or, indeed, may inform or inspire social change. This, of course, problematizes the modalities that inform Hartsock’s discussion of literary journalism, but it should be noted that Hartsock, in his rumination on such modalities, turns to one of the finest New York City flâneurs, E. B. White, as an exemplar of a writer who transcends such deterministic classifications.<sup>9</sup> This reformulation of literary journalist as flâneur brings us to one of White’s contemporaries and one of the key twentieth-century literary journalists.

Joseph Mitchell’s conception as a New York City flâneur can be pinpointed to his exit from the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1938 to join the staff of the *New Yorker*. Mitchell’s editors at the magazine gave him the time to develop his flâneurial skills as both watcher and writer of the lifeblood of New York City: its people. Mitchell wasn’t interested in simply reporting facts—his was a search for the “truth” in the everyday experiences of the underdog, the marginalized, and the forgotten. Mitchell’s main drive was to find the plain truths of city life and present them in the plainest manner: “We would argue endlessly about the ways of writing about New York City. . . . We never thought of ourselves as experimenting. But we were thinking about the best way we could write about the city, without all the literary framework.”<sup>10</sup> As Mitchell remarked, “You can write something and every sentence in it will be a fact, you can pile up facts, but it won’t be true. Inside a fact is another fact, and inside that is another fact. You’ve got to get to the *true* facts.”<sup>11</sup>

The aim of this study is to address the absence of sociological investigation in Mitchell’s writing—an absence that reflects the treatment of gender and masculinity in studies of literary journalism more widely—by identifying and examining the narratives on masculinity that appear in his works. Mitchell was not a reporter of facts but a flâneurial writer of truths, and one of these truths was the experience of marginalized men struggling to live up to the ideals of masculinity in a rapidly changing New York. As James Silas Rogers remarks in his review of Thomas Kunkel’s biography on Mitchell,<sup>12</sup> the revelation of Mitchell’s study of Franz Boas, regarded as “the father of American anthropology,”<sup>13</sup> surely invites a revisiting of Mitchell’s work “as not only ethnographic in tone, but also by design.”<sup>14</sup> Reading Mitchell’s profiles through

a gendered lens underlines the sociological value of his profiles as snapshots of the complex condition of masculinity of those on the fringes of New York society, namely immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and African Americans.

The period in which Mitchell wrote his profiles, the 1930s to the 1960s, was turbulent for men in the United States. In the years following the Great Depression and the Second World War, the lack of job opportunities intensified the pressure upon men from all sections of society to live up to what were by then the established archetypes of manhood: the “self-made man” and the “breadwinner.” The ideal of the “self-made man” appeared during the first half of the nineteenth century during the period of U.S. industrialization, which impelled the male to measure his sense of self against the attainment of social mobility, social status, and wealth. Such a social and cultural evolution signaled the separation of the public and private spheres in U.S. society, with the workplace regarded as a space for the performance and authentication of masculinity, while the home was seen as the place of domesticated and domesticating femininity.<sup>15</sup> This change in the conception of masculinity heralded the birth of the breadwinner,<sup>16</sup> a term coined in 1820 to represent the responsible man who strived toward the hegemonic ideal of self-made manhood with the ultimate purpose of supporting his family. A century later, the idea of masculinity that emerged in the decades following the Great Depression in which Mitchell wrote his profiles was one deeply rooted in patriarchal discourses of masculine power that attempted to patch up the fragile sense of masculinity on a national scale with such neuroses generating a culture of anxiety inherently tied to the security of the United States itself.<sup>17</sup> These neuroses extended, of course, to the parameters of race and ethnicity and the “Other.” Within the context of this history of the discourses on masculinity in the United States, Mitchell, with his profiles focused on everyday people, delved deeper into these truths of people’s individual inner selves and inner lives.<sup>18</sup> The aim of his profiles, therefore, was not merely to entertain *New Yorker* readers; rather, they were characters through which he could present with intimacy the hard truths of the ignored or forgotten men of New York City.

### **Immigrants in New York**

**I**mmigrants feature in prominent profiles in Mitchell’s oeuvre, with one in four of Mitchell’s main characters coming to make a new life for themselves in the United States.<sup>19</sup> And the recurring theme of these characters is the struggle to negotiate their masculine identities on the streets of a rapidly changing urban metropolis. Irish men are featured most prominently and profoundly in Mitchell’s profiles. Rogers argues that the Irish “give voice to

the author's own concerns and preoccupations."<sup>20</sup> He identifies various traits and beliefs in these Irish men that Mitchell himself supported, namely "a refusal to participate in commercial society, a heroic attempt to stay behind the times, [and] a fear that the world passed on to future generations will no longer be, in one of his favorite words, 'genuine'."<sup>21</sup> By extending the appreciation of the key role of the Irish in Mitchell's writing to read their appearances through a gendered lens, we can appreciate such profiles as reports of the experience of such men in New York City, no more so than in "The Old House at Home," Mitchell's 1940 *New Yorker* piece.

"The Old House at Home" tells the history of McSorley's, "the oldest saloon in New York City."<sup>22</sup> The "backbone of the clientele" at McSorley's is its collection of regulars, "crusty old men, predominantly Irish, who have been drinking there since they were youths and now have a proprietary feel about the place."<sup>23</sup> The piece opens with a beautifully poetic paragraph that paints a wistful, even mythical, image of a "drowsy place" where "the bartenders never make a needless move" and "the customers nurse their mugs of ale."<sup>24</sup> And yet, such an immediate sentimental tone shouldn't mask the sociological value of the tale. What runs through the story is the fact that these Irish men have failed to live up to the unattainable ideals of the self-made man and breadwinner archetypes. In the face of such perceived failure, homosocial relations between the men is a central theme. From the separation of domestic and public spheres in the nineteenth century, and the gendering of such spheres as feminine and masculine, respectively, the performance of masculinity in social spaces has been driven by the idea that masculinity is something that can only be verified by other men. Demetrakis Z. Demetriou, in his revision of Raewyn Connell's influential concept of hegemonic masculinity,<sup>25</sup> one which maintains that masculinity is shaped in



Exterior and interior of McSorley's, circa 2006.  
Photos by Norman Sims.

a dynamic system of gender relations,<sup>26</sup> argues that the organizing principle of the hierarchal framework of men in society is not solely the patriarchal narrative of the dominance of men over women, but also the power relations that shape hegemonic groups and subordinated groups of men.<sup>27</sup> Michael Kimmel, one of the leading figures in the field of masculinity studies, reaffirms the self-constituting role of such relationships, and the performance of men in such social situations, with his assertion that “masculinity is a *homo-social* enactment.”<sup>28</sup> [italics in original] With their “tiny pensions” that offer them little income or financial stability, each man finds himself “alone in the world,” so much so that they choose to “spend practically all their waking hours in McSorley’s.”<sup>29</sup> Mitchell’s men “prefer McSorley’s to their homes,”<sup>30</sup> a hint, perhaps, of the feelings toward the feminizing effects of domesticity. Some travel long distances to find safety in this place, where they can feel a sense of control over the men they believe they should be.

Mitchell frames the clientele’s masculinity around memories of Old John McSorley, who the men see as a father figure and an archetype of manhood. Described as having “patriarchal sideburns,”<sup>31</sup> he was a dominant figure, someone with social standing who mixed with other “prominent men”<sup>32</sup> in New York. He was also someone who distrusted the developments of capitalism, technology, and the rise of institutions, most notably banks that began to shape society and dictate the agency and freedom of those who moved within it, and as such Old John becomes a symbol of a lost manhood.

In protest, Old John created this sanctuary, believing that men needed to escape to a place away from the pressures of both the changing public and domestic spheres. Women were banned, as “Old John believed it impossible for men to drink with tranquility in the presence of women.”<sup>33</sup> The back room of McSorley’s was the ultimate safe space, with the sign still hanging: “NOTICE. NO BACK ROOM IN HERE FOR LADIES.”<sup>34</sup> It is in this room where Old John displayed his passion for masculinity-affirming memorabilia, having such items cover every inch of the walls. Mitchell lists the portraits of successful men—ex-presidents, actors, singers, sportsmen, and statesman—as well as the array of pictures, steel engravings, and lithographs, items loaded with coded messages of masculine performance and achievement.<sup>35</sup> Tamar Katz shrewdly reads the setting of McSorley’s as “a public domestic sphere, a space in which [male] city dwellers can be at home, a space of immigrants marked not as foreign, but as quintessentially of New York City.”<sup>36</sup> There is a clear sense of a democratization of space within the saloon. It is a place where prominent men, including Mr. Cooper, president of the North American Telegraph Company and founder of the Cooper Union, would sit “philosophizing with workingmen”<sup>37</sup> in a space decorated with artifacts of the com-

plicated nature of masculinity and nationhood, including “portraits of . . . statesmen,” “excellent portraits of Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley,” and a “copy of the Emancipation Proclamation.”<sup>38</sup>

Mitchell’s profile of the performativity of masculinity<sup>39</sup> in the saloon extends with the passing of the day-to-day running of the saloon from Old John to his son Bill. While Bill endeavors to continue the bar’s masculinity (re-)affirming traditions, one incident—an act of subversion within the sanctuary—results in the performative nature of such masculinity being confronted and contested:

One night in the winter of 1924 a feminist from Greenwich Village put on trousers, a man’s topcoat, and a cap, stuck a cigar in her mouth, and entered McSorley’s. She bought an ale, drank it, removed her cap, and shook her long hair down on her shoulders. Then she called Bill a male chauvinist, yelled something about the equality of the sexes, and ran out.<sup>40</sup>

Judith Butler would approve. Most famously in *Gender Trouble*, she rejects the idea of an inherent essence in gender; rather, gender should be recognized as performatively constituted as something created through a “set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame.”<sup>41</sup> Put simply, gender, or in this case, masculinity, is “a doing” rather than being.<sup>42</sup>

The inclusion of such an anecdote underlines the complexities in the performativity of masculinity, illustrating how masculinity should not, and cannot, exist at the exclusion of women. As the actions of the female protester illustrate, masculinity is not tied to the male body, but it is an act that can be performed with the right trousers, topcoat, cap, and cigar.<sup>43</sup> Mitchell’s interest and awareness of complicating such gender issues re-emerges at notable points in his flâneurial investigations, with the profile of the bearded lady Jane Barnell in “Lady Olga” (1940),<sup>44</sup> as well as the examination of one New York gypsy community in “King of the Gypsies” (1942), in which it is revealed that the elevated status of men in the community is very much of their own creation, as “the women are the real breadwinners.”<sup>45</sup> In “The Old House at Home,” Bill’s reaction to this performance, one which forces him to face the socially constructed nature of masculinity, is telling: “When Bill realized he had sold a drink to a woman, he let out a cross between a moan and a bellow and began to jump up and down. ‘She was a woman!’ he yelled. ‘She was a goddamn woman!’”<sup>46</sup> This revelation affirms the underlying irony of the attempts at self-preservation of masculinity in McSorley’s. These men who spend their lives congregating together—away from the internalized conflicts that define their masculine identities in the face of a changing national society and a changing New York—are shown to be unable to recognize, literally and figuratively, what authentic masculinity truly looks like.

### Indigenous Subjects

Such internalized conflict is again a major theme of Mitchell's writing on another marginalized group in New York: Indigenous men. In "The Mohawks in High Steel" (1949), Mitchell profiles the Caughnawaga tribe, one of the colonies of "mixed blood Mohawks" in New York.<sup>47</sup> Mitchell's interest in writing a piece on this community is not a chance circumstance. The Mohawks played an underappreciated role in the construction of New York City, with their ability to work at high altitudes helping the metropolis to grow, both figuratively and literally, into the capital of modernity that it was to become at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>48</sup>

Mitchell's reporter-at-large piece first examines the group dynamics of the Indigenous community living on the Caughnawaga reservation (now Kahnawake Mohawk Territory) across from Montreal, as well as its satellite colony in Brooklyn's North Gowanus neighborhood (now Boerum Hill). Then it focuses on one elder, Orvis Diabo, a man who embodies the conflicts affecting the Caughnawaga. The narrative emphasizes how new images of masculinity are complicating and potentially compromising the tribe's traditional ways—their beliefs, ideals, and actions. Mitchell reports on the resistance of the early generations to shift from hunting and gathering into the business of farming, choosing instead to uphold traditional roles. These stalwarts leave the reservation in groups to search for food in forests while their wives and families work the farms.<sup>49</sup>

However, with the growth of industry, technology, and commerce in the early 1800s, Mitchell notes how successive generations of Caughnawagas followed the dominant discourses in North America and found ways to become self-made men by learning new skills in timber-rafting, canoeing, and shoe-making—even farming. Tellingly, the men who were unable to move with the times and create a new identity for themselves under the image of self-made masculinity found themselves left behind, becoming "depressed and shiftless" while they "did odd jobs and drank cheap brandy."<sup>50</sup>

The landmark moment for the local Indigenous men, Mitchell notes, is the building of a cantilever railroad bridge, in 1886, across the Saint Lawrence River, from Lachine (now a borough of Montreal), to a point south of the reservation's village. Mitchell locates in this project the origin of the Caughnawaga's reputation for working at great heights without fear. Again, the homosocial relations between working men emerges as a key narrative theme. Mitchell details the importance of working in a group for the development of their masculine identities, with the processes of socialization in such an environment organically shifting the men into hierarchical systems within which the workers progress through stages from apprentice to leader. Mitch-

ell shows how such opportunities for personal and professional development led the Caughnawagas to become more ambitious, driving them to progress from steel bridges to other construction projects as they crossed the United States border to find even more work, before finally settling in New York City. Mitchell places great emphasis on the desire of the men to roam, no doubt a nod to his own flâneurial impulses. The profile reflects upon time spent away from families, where the men either travel solo or in groups to search for more work. Mitchell cites the opinions of several American foremen who believe that the need of the Caughnawagas to roam is inherent to understanding their identities: “They roam because they can’t help doing so, it is a passion, and that their search for overtime is only an excuse.”<sup>51</sup>

Following an overview of the history of the community—a narrative strategy Mitchell employs in his most sociologically driven profiles—he then turns to a key figure to present the story’s central themes, in this case Diabo, a fifty-five-year-old Caughnawaga man with white blood from his mother’s side. Like many of his characters, Diabo is a composite creation that embodies the ideas that Mitchell wishes to present to the reader.<sup>52</sup> Diabo sits with Mitchell and reflects on the concerns of the Caughnawaga men, their masculine identities split between the tribe’s reservation and the urban metropolis. Diabo, born and raised on a reservation, is now a lover of New York. He is also a reader. It is while reading classics from the “Little Blue Books” series that Diabo takes the time to reflect upon himself as a modern urban male, that is, a man of reason and rationality, a man open to new ideas, and improving himself and the society he lives in. As Mitchell has him quip, somewhat tongue in cheek, “I’ve improved my mind to the extent that I’m far beyond most of the people I associate with. When you come right down to it, I’m an educated man.”<sup>53</sup>

As the profile ends, Diabo appears to be another of Mitchell’s men about town. In the vein of other celebrated flâneurial figures, namely Mr. Flood or Joe Gould, Diabo wanders around the city, hanging around saloons, talking to anyone who will listen. But there is a greater sociological message in such a figure as Diabo. Sitting in a saloon, he reflects upon his struggles with his masculine identity. He reveals that although he must return to the reservation—where his wife awaits, disgusted that he is spending so much time away from her and their family—he doesn’t want to go. The fact is, Diabo considers himself a city man now. This central conflict defines men from this Indigenous community, and more broadly the marginalized men that Mitchell is drawn to.

Mitchell has Diabo lay out the narrative of masculinity that defines Caughnawaga men. While at first the reservation man may get homesick



when he moves to the city to work on the high steel, after a certain amount of time passes “he gets used to the States.” When age catches up with Diabo and he must retire, life back at the reservation is slow. He finds that people don’t want to talk about their time in the city. He laments that such men, five or six years after returning, “turn against their high-steel days,” even going as far as to pretend they no longer understand English.<sup>54</sup> Consequently, these men turn away from modern technological advancements—refusing to name their streets, refusing to accept streetlights, and resisting offers from the local council to allocate house numbers free of charge. They even question the need for a modern waterworks system. Diabo rages at their reason for not wanting to do these things: “It wouldn’t be Indian.”<sup>55</sup>

While on the one hand the worries to which Diabo confesses are worries that all men experience at his age—getting older, retirement, filling his days, and even death—there is a refined sociological and historical message here in such stories that is particular to the Indigenous community. Mitchell subverts the traditional narrative of Indigenous people as the unknowable Other. In its place he offers a study on the complexities that underpin the construction and performance of the masculine identity of this marginalized group. Mitchell creates a figure such as Diabo to give voice to these Indigenous men split between old and new worlds: between their wives and old comrades who are waiting for them on the reservation, and the lives they have created for themselves as urban males forever part of the sights and sounds of city life. As Diabo puts it, in a statement that resonates not only in terms of his experience, but very much reflects the essence of these men: “When they talk about the men that built this country, one of the men they mean is me.”<sup>56</sup>

### African Americans

Mitchell’s interest in the masculinity politics of African Americans has its roots in his initial flâneurial investigations. In his first job in New York, working as a “district man” for the *Herald Tribune*, Mitchell found himself “fascinated by the melodrama of the metropolis at night.”<sup>57</sup> His first arena was Harlem. After going off duty at three o’clock in the morning, Mitchell would wander around the streets observing the wonders of a rapidly changing New York City—“alternately delighted and frightened out of my wits”<sup>58</sup>—but struck by the reality faced by African-American men searching for work in an era when they were, in Mitchell’s words, “last to be hired; first to be fired.”<sup>59</sup> The increasingly more complex socio-economic conditions for African American men in the early to middle decades of the twentieth century, a time of oppression facilitated by a complex network of legal, economic, political and social practices, resulted in an African-American community

struggling for recognition as masculine subjects in a society in which race and ethnicity continued as determining markers of status and difference.<sup>60</sup> And yet Mitchell's treatment of men from African-American communities in his flâneurial profiles is to humanize this "Other." As Michael Kimmel writes, in the complex history of American masculinity, "manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us."<sup>61</sup> The Other, therefore, is seen as the enemy, the threat to what is an unstable sense of self. Mitchell's profiles illustrate that African-American men were experiencing both the issues particular to their communities as well as the larger narratives that shape masculinity more broadly in society.

Mitchell's most widely regarded profile of an African American, indeed one of his most widely regarded profiles of all, is "Mr. Hunter's Grave" (1956), the story of the writer meeting George H. Hunter, an octogenarian from Staten Island. This refined study of Staten Island's black community history, from the time of their arrival as "free-Negros,"<sup>62</sup> to their contributions developing the oyster planting business at Sandy Ground, to Hunter's lament that "Sandy Ground is just a ghost of its former self,"<sup>63</sup> is the story of the mechanics of modernization.<sup>64</sup> And yet it is also the personal story of one man's experience of the changing times on Staten Island's South Shore. The narrative opens with Mitchell wandering through old cemeteries and old roads down by South Shore. Moseying through St. Luke's Cemetery in Rossville, he has a chance encounter with another important man in the piece, the rector Raymond E. Brock. The rector not only points him in the direction of Hunter, one of Rossville's most respected patrons, but also provides Mitchell, and the reader, with essential details about the history of the African-American community in Sandy Ground. Thomas Kunkel, for his 2015 biography on Mitchell, found that the rector is a fabrication. Critics have lamented this revelation, the strongest voice belonging to Charles McGrath in the *New Yorker*. McGrath criticizes the fact that the story "gains immeasurably from being presented as factual, an account of scenes and conversations that really took place. If we read it as fiction, which it is, in part, some of the air goes out."<sup>65</sup> While McGrath's stance is understandable, certainly in terms of the recent orthodoxies of literary journalism, which demand the literary journalist to be a reporter of facts rather than a yearning fiction writer, getting too involved in such binary conflicts takes the attention away from the pure motives of Mitchell's pieces and indeed their lasting impact. Put simply, such a stance fails to see what Mitchell, the flâneur—that is, a watcher, interpreter, and writer—is doing. As Rogers notes, George Core, in a 1989 essay on *New Yorker* journalists, makes the point that Mitchell "called his essays *stories*—not reports or essays or memoirs or something else—*stories*"<sup>66</sup> [italics in the

original]. To take this further and emphasize the sociological value of these pieces: Mitchell profiles are multifaceted. They seamlessly weave together objective observations and subjective interpretations. This is due as much to Mitchell's writing style as to his ability to present investigations of such truths in a way that only he can.

We must go beyond the image of the literary journalist as the factual reporter who presents facts to the reader using literary techniques and devices, to an appreciation of such activities as being examples of a flâneurial enterprise, to make sense of the complexities of the sociological truths that define everyday experience in society. And Mitchell achieves this with the insertion of key characters that, like Mitchell, are master storytellers with incredible memories, which Mitchell uses to provide context for the sociological message of his case-study investigations.

Hunter's masculine identity, like Mitchell's male-protagonist Others, is formed dialectically in the struggle between the pressures associated with his community and his performance of his masculine identity shaped by the dominant ideologies of New York manhood. This idea of "struggle" is key here. As Ronald L. Jackson II writes, black masculine identity theory is founded upon this idea of struggle, both in terms of the model of identity politics itself in that "all identity theories in some way call for a dialectics. In this case, Black masculine identities are enwrapped in an I-Other dialectic involving politics of recognition."<sup>67</sup> Hunter embodies this dialectical struggle. Hunter is eighty-seven years old and "one of those strong, self-contained old men you don't see much any more."<sup>68</sup> Hunter's life is one of struggles to define his identity. His mother is born into slavery. She escapes, but Hunter's father dies when he is a young boy. His mother then marries an abusive alcoholic who works in the oyster business. Hunter might be expected to follow the path of those young men into the Oyster business, and yet Mitchell shows how Hunter is not a stock character, but someone who writes his own story. Majors and Mancini Billson write that the history of African-American masculinity in the United States is shaped by the fact that "black men learned long ago that the classic American virtues of thrift, perseverance, and hard work did not give them the same tangible rewards that accrued to whites. . . . Yet African-American men have defined manhood in terms familiar to white men: breadwinner, provider, procreator, protector."<sup>69</sup> Mitchell's profile follows this thread, detailing how Hunter is clearly driven by the archetypes of the self-made man and breadwinner. Hunter creates his own company that builds and cleans cesspools so he is able to provide for his family. This all-American story comes to a tragic end, however, with the death of both his wife and their only son from cancer.<sup>70</sup>

The Hunter character that Mitchell presents to the reader illustrates the complexities and contradictions that characterize this performance of masculinity. Hunter is a man of tradition, of faith, and of beliefs. His tales of cooking on fishing boats with other men underline his loyalty and compassion for others. Tellingly, what his conversations with Mitchell reveal most is his lament of the changes in U.S. society. The 1950s were a time of great acceleration in the workings of society, workings realized in commercialization and consumerism. Mitchell has Hunter reflect profoundly on this, what it means for the manhood that he feels he embodies, and his criticism of a new masculinity that is emerging in the next generation of men. While Hunter reveals that he built the house that they are sitting in with his own hands—a strongly symbolic detail—Hunter laments that the new generation of African-American boys and men define themselves by what they break and what they buy to replace these objects. As Hunter remarks, “They’ve got more things nowadays—things, things, things . . . but they aren’t built to last, they’re built to wear out. And that’s the way the people want it.”<sup>71</sup> Succeeding in his earlier years in the role as self-made man and breadwinner, Hunter still harks back to these times. Hunter idealizes a long-lost model of masculinity, a time when men felt that the qualities of an authentic manhood defined the nation, a manhood defined by an inner strength and determination to succeed. And this is implied in his critical opinions of the next generation’s superficial concerns with outward appearances over inner qualities, a view illustrated, in Hunter’s view, in the obsession that these men have for such objects: “Most of what you buy nowadays, the outside is everything, the inside doesn’t matter.”<sup>72</sup> Hunter sees this masculine regression manifested in the father-son relationship: “You hardly ever see a son any more as good as his father. Oh, he might be taller and stronger and thicker in the shoulders, playing games at school and all, but he can’t stand as much. If he tried to lift and pull the way the men in my generation used to lift and pull, he’d be ruptured by noon—they’d be making arrangements to operate.”<sup>73</sup>

And yet, Mitchell’s portrait of Hunter is clever in underlining the intricacies and even contradictions in Hunter’s masculine identity. The first detail that Brock reveals about Hunter, apart from his age and current role in the community, is the importance of cooking in Hunter’s life: “He’s got quite a reputation as a cook.”<sup>74</sup> Hunter, in contrast to the traditional, even old-fashioned opinions on the essential traits of manhood that he proclaims to Mitchell, performs (and quite clearly enjoys) a domesticated masculinity. This element of his masculine identity is reinforced when Mitchell goes to Hunter’s house to conduct the interview. The first image we have of Hunter is that of the man in the kitchen. As Mitchell tells us, “I knocked on the frame of the

screen door, and a bespectacled, elderly Negro man appeared in the hall. He had on a chef's apron, and his sleeves were rolled up."<sup>75</sup> Entering the house, Mitchell comments on how they go past the parlor, past the dining room, and straight into the kitchen, where their conversation takes place. Their first discussion even regards the semantics of whether Hunter is "icing" or "frosting" a cake.<sup>76</sup> Hunter goes on to reveal the role of his mother in his formative years, teaching him everything she knew about cooking and therefore leading him to discover that he was naturally good with food, which led to Hunter's first job cooking on a fishing boat.<sup>77</sup>

The role of cooking in Hunter's life is explicated further during their discussion of Hunter's role as a provider for people of the church. Not only does Hunter cook every Sunday for the pastor of the church, and will be cooking dinner for a group of ten that very evening, but he also cooks Thanksgiving Dinner for the people of his church.<sup>78</sup> This detail mustn't be overlooked—Hunter embodies an alternative role for the African-American male, that of bread maker rather than breadwinner. And this alternative role appears in other Mitchell stories about marginalized men. In "Houdini's Picnic" (1939), Wilmoth Houdini, the self-styled "Calypso King of New York," also provides for his community. As Houdini calls to Mitchell upon leaving their conversation to help with dishing the paylou and the patties at the event they are attending, "Everybody depend on me. . . . After a picnic I go to bed for a week."<sup>79</sup> There is a thread, therefore, in Mitchell's profiles of such male figures subverting the expected role of men focused sternly on self-making by adopting what might be considered a more traditional feminine role of providing for their communities through their work with food.

### Conclusion

Reading Mitchell through a gendered lens underscores masculinity as a key theme in his work. Revering Mitchell as a flâneurial figure, one who saw it as his duty to be a reader, writer, and interpreter of everyday city experiences, affirms the sociological value of Mitchell's investigations. The analyses of Mitchell's profiles on immigrants, Indigenous people, and African Americans are built upon the philosophies of the flâneur advocated by Jenks and Neves, namely the desire to know the underdog in society, a pursuit powered by a simple moral imperative to find the truth in the everyday experience of such men. Moreover, such flâneurial profiles reveal the existence of alternative discourses in society, particularly in terms of the possibility of counter-hegemonic models of masculinity. Ultimately, Mitchell's stories illustrate that these flâneurial activities of observation and interpretation inspire the sense of continuous reflexivity of the flâneur proposed by Jenks and Neves, leading

to rich narratives characterized by perception and knowledge, experience and memory, and sight and citation.<sup>80</sup>

The flâneurial sketches examined above affirm the vital insights offered by Mitchell into the everyday experiences of men on the margins who wrestle with the expected performances of their masculinity in their communities. Mitchell's profiles also illustrate how these forgotten men were shaped by grander narratives of men endeavoring to adhere to the dominant ideologies of authentic American manhood. Such an approach to reading Mitchell's work—one informed by the key theories of the dynamic fields of gender studies and masculinity studies—will address the lack of attention towards the issues of gender and masculinity in Mitchell's profiles and, indeed, works of literary journalism more broadly. Such gender-focused interdisciplinary studies on the wider impact of literary journalism can only benefit our understanding of the gendered nature of the discourses that shape and define social, cultural, and (gender) political realities in the United States and beyond.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The most widely known and discussed flâneur is that of Charles Baudelaire in "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), 1–40. The role of Baudelaire's flâneur is to define "that quality which you must allow me to call 'modernity' . . . by 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable," 12–13. The flâneur was brought into the academy by Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, his study of nineteenth century Paris and the impact of the urban metropolis on the human psyche. Benjamin, "The Flâneur," 416–55.

<sup>2</sup> See Tester, *The Flâneur*; Jenks, "Watching Your Step"; Jenks and Neves, "A Walk on the Wild Side"; Soukup, "The Postmodern Ethnographic Flaneur"; Ferry, *Masculinity in Contemporary New York Fiction*.

<sup>3</sup> Jenks and Neves, "A Walk on the Wild Side," 4.

<sup>4</sup> Norman Sims offers an extremely useful introduction to the richness of the genre of literary journalism in "A True Story," Chap. 1 in Sims, *True Stories*, 1–24. See also Sims, "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," 7–17.

<sup>5</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 10; see also 14, 53.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 146–48.

<sup>8</sup> Jenks, "Watching Your Step," 148.

<sup>9</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 14. See also Ferry, *Masculinity in Contemporary New York Fiction*, 18–25, for a discussion of E. B. White as a New York flâneur whose writing underscores the discourses of masculinity in the metropolis.

<sup>10</sup> Kunkel, *Genius in Disguise*, 242. Also quoted in Yagoda, *About Town*, 142–43.

<sup>11</sup> Fiennes, introduction to *Up in the Old Hotel*, xii.

<sup>12</sup> Rogers, "Defusing the Joe Mitchell Bombshell," 172–75.

<sup>13</sup> Jonaitis, preface to *A Wealth of Thought*, xi.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers, "Defusing the Joe Mitchell Bombshell," 173.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Kimmel writes on the implications of the "separation of the spheres" for the American family in *The Gendered Society*, 113–21.

<sup>16</sup> Kimmel, in *Manhood in America*, 11–29, 15, dates the arrival of the masculine figure of the breadwinner between 1810 and 1820. See also Kimmel, *The Gendered Society*, 119–26.

<sup>17</sup> Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety," 5–9. See also Armengol, "Gendering the Great Depression," 59–68; Schlesinger, "The Crisis of American Masculinity," 292–303; Stieglitz, "Great Depression," 195–97; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 20; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 140–45.

<sup>18</sup> Sims, "Joseph Mitchell and the *New Yorker* Nonfiction Writers," 92.

<sup>19</sup> This statistic is based on a survey of Joseph Mitchell's profiles from the collection, *Up in the Old Hotel*.

<sup>20</sup> Rogers, "Joseph Mitchell's Irish Imagination," 53.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity," 337–61; see also Connell, *Masculinities*, 67–86.

<sup>26</sup> As Connell explains: "Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." *Masculinities*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> Demetriou, "Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity," 337–61.

<sup>28</sup> Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia," 33.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Katz, "Anecdotal History," 466.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> "Performativity" is a key concept in the study of gender and masculinity in terms of its suggestion that gender, in being performative, is not something that is simply performed, but it is a performance that also produces a series of effects. See Butler, *Excitable Speech*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

<sup>42</sup> As Butler expands, "gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting

the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed." *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>43</sup> See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1–45.

<sup>44</sup> Mitchell, "Lady Olga," 88–104.

<sup>45</sup> Mitchell, "King of the Gypsies," 149.

<sup>46</sup> Mitchell, "The Old House at Home," 11.

<sup>47</sup> Mitchell, "The Mohawks in High Steel," 266. The history of the Caughnawaga tribe in New York has also been profiled in Don Owen's 1965 documentary, "High Steel." More recently, the tribe was the focus of Reagan Tarbell's 2008 documentary, "Little Caughnawaga: To Brooklyn and Back." *Time* magazine made these men of high steel the focus of an online photo essay, Vaughn Wallace's "The Mohawk Ironworkers: Rebuilding the Iconic Skyline of New York."

<sup>48</sup> Wright-Tekastiaks, "Mohawk Nation," 995.

<sup>49</sup> Mitchell, "The Mohawks in High Steel," 272.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>52</sup> Kunkel confirms this when he comments, "A review of both the reservation record and Mitchell's research for 'Mohawks' (it is one of a handful of stories where some of his original reporting notes survive) strongly suggests that Diabo was either a third composite figure or quite possibly a pseudonym for a veteran construction-gang leader of that period, a man named Paul Horn." Kunkel, *Man in Profile*, 174.

<sup>53</sup> Mitchell, "The Mohawks in High Steel," 284.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, *My Ears Are Bent*, 6.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Kunkel, *Man in Profile*, 5–6.

<sup>60</sup> See Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents*, 1–15.

<sup>61</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 4

<sup>62</sup> Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," 529.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

<sup>64</sup> As Hunter divulges, until 1800 there were tremendous, big beds of natural growth oysters all around Staten Island. But between 1800 and 1820 the oysters began to peter out. The islanders reacted by bringing in immature oysters from other places, at first from other localities such as New Jersey or Long Island, before expanding further to Maryland or Virginia. Because of the growth of the oyster business, many African-American families relocated to Sandy Ground and the community continued to grow with the young men and women intermarrying with other families from surrounding areas. Some did so well that they didn't need to work on the land anymore, instead buying oyster sloops and "didn't take orders from anybody." But in 1910 "the water went bad" and "in 1916 the Department of Health stepped in and condemned the beds," until Sandy Ground became "a ghost of its former self," People then had to travel to work, the men working in construc-

tion or factories, the women in hospitals. *Ibid.*, 515, 519.

<sup>65</sup> McGrath, "The People You Meet," 78.

<sup>66</sup> Core, "Stretching the Limits of the Essay," 208; Rogers, "Defusing the Joe Mitchell Bombshell," 172.

<sup>67</sup> Jackson, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, 135.

<sup>68</sup> Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," 505.

<sup>69</sup> Majors and Mancini Billson, *Cool Pose: The Dilemma of Black Manhood in America*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," 521–24.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 505. Brock continues, "His church used to put on clambakes to raise money, and they were such good clambakes they attracted people from all over this part of Staten Island, and he always had charge of them," *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 511.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 509.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 508.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>80</sup> Jenks and Neves, "A Walk on the Wild Side," 4.

## Multimedia Literary Journalism Spectrum

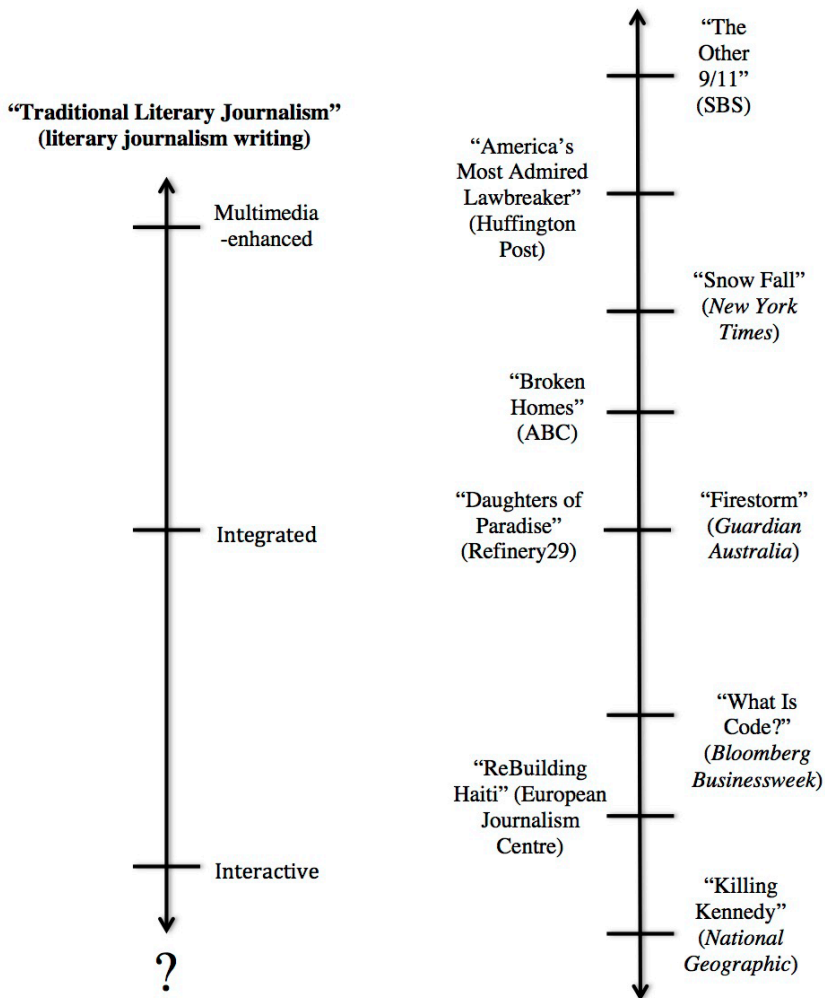


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## *Digital LJ . . .*

# Multimedia Features as “Narra-descriptive” Texts: Exploring the Relationship between Literary Journalism and Multimedia

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**Abstract:** Digital platforms that enable the interweaving of videos, photographs, and audio, together with a layering or central stream of written narrative, provide many opportunities to enhance readers’ experience. This essay explores the implications of this technological shift for literary journalism. We examine the relationship of this form to definitions of literary journalism and consider where this new media belongs in the changing journalism landscape. As a preliminary study, we propose three categories: multimedia-enhanced literary journalism, the integrated multimedia feature, and the interactive multimedia feature. We conclude that integrated multimedia features best leverage the digital medium to convey the narrative, while the multimedia-enhanced and interactive features hold audio, video, and interactivity in a tangential relationship to the written narrative. This is not to propose that there is a single gold standard for narrative long-form journalism. Instead, we adopt John Hartsock’s ideal of the “narra-descriptive” text that “empowers the reader imaginatively” and explore the extent to which this may occur within different multimedia configurations.

**Keywords:** literary journalism – interactive journalism – multimedia long-form narrative – narra-descriptive journalism



Literary journalism is increasingly read onscreen and continues to circulate in print, while digital technology enables enhancements that are not possible offline.<sup>1</sup> Since 1997, when Mark Bowden's serial "Blackhawk Down" appeared as twenty-nine installments in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, long-form narrative has incorporated audio-visuals and scope for interactivity.<sup>2</sup> Bowden's prototype now looks primitive, but offers a point of origin for digital long-form journalism, with multimedia increasingly integrating layers of meaning through a variety of formats.<sup>3</sup>

This study explores three approaches to combining multimedia with narrative writing, proposing the categories of *multimedia enhanced*, *multimedia integrated*, and *multimedia interactive* literary journalism. The framework is based on a range of multimedia features conforming to the definition of literary journalism. While acknowledging many different approaches to narrative writing,<sup>4</sup> this study focuses on different relationships between multimedia and written narrative to derive these categories.

The examples are situated along a spectrum between traditional written narrative and interactive multimedia features, allowing for hybridity.<sup>5</sup> We conclude that enhanced multimedia narrative resembles traditional literary journalism most closely, its multimedia complementing the story as do print-based illustrations. At the other end of the spectrum sit interactive multimedia features, which direct readers into different cognitive spaces that may detract from affective engagement. In the middle sit integrated multimedia features, preserving the literary journalism value of immersion while making extensive use of multimedia techniques. The different relationships reflected in these groupings—between writing, images, sound, and interaction—provide a basis for identifying where literary journalism might have morphed into something else, providing a different reading experience.

Visuals have accompanied writing since antiquity, and images have traditionally accompanied print news. Daily journalism often relies on "picture opportunities" to achieve publication.<sup>6</sup> Other examples of mixed media in narrative storytelling relate specifically to literary journalism. As Hartsock notes of James Agee's collaboration with photographer Walker Evans in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, "While the printed text can be read independently of the accompanying photographs, it can still be viewed as an early attempt at 'converging' media . . . [because] the printed text complements the photographs in a mutual interpretive synergy."<sup>7</sup> Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* is enhanced by Ralph Steadman's wild illustrations.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, millennial magazines such as *Wired* and *Raygun* deconstructed typography, images, and writing, bringing the aesthetics of the screen to the page.<sup>9</sup>

### Defining Literary Journalism

Literary journalism is traditionally defined through a process of exclusion, understood as neither fiction nor news journalism, but drawing on narrative techniques while remaining factual. Hartsock coined the term “narra-descriptive journalism”<sup>10</sup> for text that “empowers the reader imaginatively.”<sup>11</sup>

. . . a journalism that emphasizes narrative and descriptive modalities. . . . I have come increasingly to characterize the genre as a narra-descriptive journalism . . . that works on a spectrum or continuum that, if taken to extremes, results in either an increasingly alienated objectified world on the one hand, or on the other, a solipsistic subjectivity in the most personal of memoirs.<sup>12</sup>

Here literary journalism is no longer defined in terms of its deficits—as neither fiction nor daily journalism—but distinctive in its own right as factual storytelling. Additionally, it can range along a spectrum from impersonal third-person studies to unverifiable stories of the self.<sup>13</sup>

Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche narrowed their definition to four core elements.<sup>14</sup> Not unlike Wolfe’s four elements of scene-by-scene construction, dialogue, third-person point-of-view, and status life,<sup>15</sup> they define the criteria as scene, dialogue, characterization, and dramatic tension.<sup>16</sup> Hartsock builds on Wolfe’s scene-by-scene construction, among other aesthetic elements, such as subjective engagement with “shared common senses.”<sup>17</sup> Hartsock’s focus on a structure upending the inverted pyramid is useful for distinguishing the news reports from narrative journalism, as news reporting “denies the often challenging journey in which a reader can imaginatively participate in the performance by ‘realizing’ what is happening” as the story unfolds.<sup>18</sup>

These definitions emphasize literary journalism’s ability to relay factual information in a way that is creative and engaging, giving readers enough detail to create a picture, but also room, via the written word, for their imaginative processes.

### Defining Multimedia Features

Multimedia features include photographs, video, audio, hypertext, slide-shows, animations, data graphics, and other features.<sup>19</sup> To qualify for inclusion in their analysis, Jacobson and her colleagues note that multimedia features must have consisted of “at least 2000 words on a specific topic.”<sup>20</sup>

Deuze proposes two kinds of multimedia features: a “package on a website using two or more media formats”; or “the integrated . . . presentation of a news story package through different media.”<sup>21</sup> The first is a media collation and the second an interweaving of media with story. Echoing Deuze’s second

definition, the Jacobson research team defines a multimedia feature as one that “seamlessly [integrates] multimedia into the narrative.”<sup>22</sup> McAdams adds that multimedia features are narratives wherein the “components of the story are crafted to complement one another.”<sup>23</sup>

All these definitions regard as key the integration of media into a whole, although the extent to which the written text could be understood without the additional media is not established. Using Hartsock’s term, an “interpretive synergy” is implied through the concepts of McAdams’s complementarity<sup>24</sup> and integration<sup>25</sup>; Deuze and the Jacobson team require a minimum of 2,000 words. But little attention is paid to how the different elements work together, and the extent to which they might fragment, detract from, or interrupt the narrative.

Another element of multimedia features is interactivity.<sup>26</sup> This requires more than hitting play, pause, stop, or scroll on a piece of content, inviting readers to make choices.<sup>27</sup> As Opgenhaffen and d’Haenens argue, using interactive features can transform the reader’s experience from passive to active, while maintaining intimacy.<sup>28</sup> McAdams stresses that wherever interactive features are included, their role should be to enhance the feature, not crowd it or confuse the reader.<sup>29</sup>

The following analyses examine the extent to which multimedia components (and their relation to the written narrative) contribute to a feature’s position along a traditional literary journalism spectrum. We have ranged the approaches along an axis, with examples illustrating where each might sit, and where digital storytelling might become qualitatively different. (Please see chart, p. 74.)

### **Multimedia Enhanced Literary Journalism: “The Other 9/11,” “America’s Most Admired Lawbreaker,” and “Snow Fall”**

Thirty years before the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., Chile was torn apart when President Salvador Allende was overthrown in a military coup. Augusto Pinochet’s ensuing dictatorship resulted in the kidnap, torture, and murder of thousands, many of whom “were ‘disappeared.’”<sup>30</sup> “The Other 9/11” details these events, including the role other countries played in Chile’s destabilization.

Of the examples analyzed, “The Other 9/11” is the closest to traditional literary journalism. Predominantly text-based, it uses scene-by-scene construction,<sup>31</sup> detailing the Chilean coup and the events that followed. Despite being text-heavy, the feature employs video, slideshows, and audio to enhance the narrative. While other pieces of literary journalism may not be structured into specific chapters, many are split into sections that signal to the reader when a



Introduction

The Coup

Australia's Spies in Chile

The Sanctuary

Home Truths

Credits

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [YouTube](#)


Gough Whitlam, Prime Minister of Australia (1972-73).

Listen to SBS Radio's Special Feature on English or Spanish.

*"Espionage is illegal and the clandestine service's job is to break those laws without being caught. Espionage is deceptive, covert, underhand. It is probably the second oldest profession in the world."*



Redacted extracts from the Hope Report (Royal Commission on Intelligence and Security).

The full implications of ASIS's role in Chile was never examined by the Royal Commission, and the Hope Report certainly did not condemn it:

*"At no time was ASIS approached by the CIA, or made aware of any plans that may have been prepared, to affect the internal political situation in Chile. The ASIS station in Santiago was concerned only with intelligence gathering via the agents handed over to it."*

But not everyone was convinced that the Australians could have been so perfectly insulated from the CIA's efforts – at the behest of none other than President Nixon – to unsettle Allende.

"The Other 9/11," SBS, September 1, 2017, uses multimedia to complement the written word, but does not leverage it to make it part of the narrative.

change of theme, topic, or angle is occurring. The presence of chapters in "The Other 9/11" relates factual information in the creative style of a novel.

The chapters also mark chronological points in the narrative. While this might have impeded the flow of the story, the online medium prevails with easy scrolling between chapters. Dialogue, provided through transcripts of historical documents from the coup to current interviews, is crucial to constructing scene, characterization, and dramatic tension.<sup>32</sup> These first-hand accounts drive the story. The profiles at the end, of two women from Chile who settled in Australia, bring the narrative to a contemporary resolution. Because Australia's involvement in the coup was covered up, what little evidence is available to journalists comes mainly from first-hand individual accounts (including Australian government officials), plus dialogue from academics. This highlights the country's post-coup anguish, humanizing those persecuted by the military.<sup>33</sup>

When added to the structural characteristics "The Other 9/11" shares with literary journalism, multimedia are not leveraged to an increased narrative effect. The non-written media are not part of the story, but situated alongside. As a montage of material supplementing the narrative, this dimension of the storytelling could arguably belong to the category, "aesthetic journalism."<sup>34</sup> Given the lack of interactivity between readers and the feature's multimedia elements—as nothing more than a click is needed to begin a slideshow or video—the reading experience is primarily literary. Additionally,



“Snow Fall,” *New York Times*, September 1, 2017, uses the autoplay function on graphics like this to integrate visualizations of what is being described in the text.

the first video in Chapter 1,<sup>35</sup> with Allende’s final speech and footage from the coup, includes advertising that intrudes automatically before the video begins. Not only are the multimedia secondary to the story, they are thereby commercialized. Similar to the interactive function in “ReBuilding Haiti” (discussed below), the advertising precludes intimacy between the reader and the feature, and may result in readers skipping a component entirely. The lack of interactivity and integration of non-text media in “The Other 9/11,” in combination with the format of the diverse media in the work, establishes this piece as a form of multimedia enhanced literary journalism.

The features “America’s Most Admired Lawbreaker”<sup>36</sup> and “Snow Fall”<sup>37</sup> also use supplementary media to enhance the written narrative. “America’s Most Admired Lawbreaker” exposes the negligence and wrongdoing of pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson. The feature, created by Huffington Post USA, is similar to a book, containing fifteen chapters that are predominantly text-based. However, the digital format enhances the long-form narrative by providing a synopsis of the previous chapter in a “catch-up” paragraph at the beginning of the next chapter. It also breaks up the written word with charts, hyperlinks to PDFs, timelines, mini-explanations of key characters, and video snippets of case studies. Despite its wealth of multimedia, these merely supplement the writing and, if removed, would leave the narrative intact.

The *New York Times*’s “Snow Fall,” the story of a deadly avalanche in Washington State’s Cascade Mountains, uses multimedia in a similar way. Acclaimed for its visualizations and animated graphics as well as introducing

parallax scrolling that layers image over text, the technology primarily supplements the writing. Like “The Other 9/11” and “America’s Most Admired Lawbreaker,” the article includes links to more information about characters and topics.<sup>38</sup> Arguably, the multimedia do not add information to the written narrative. However, the use of multimedia to explain the avalanche’s formation in “Snow Fall” (in Part Two: “To the Peak”) also lend to the integrated multimedia sub-genre. Animated graphics assist the reader by illustrating concepts difficult to explain in writing. Hence “Snow Fall” can be situated on the spectrum between the multimedia enhanced literary journalism and the integrated multimedia feature.

### Integrated Multimedia Literary Journalism: “Firestorm” and “Daughters of Paradise”

In January 2013, a bushfire raged through the Tasmanian town of Dunalley, Australia. Tim and Tammy Holmes were minding their grandchildren when the fire raced towards their property. Tammy led the children into a nearby lake beside a jetty. Tim joined them later, photographing Tammy with the children in the water, the sky alight in the background, and surrounded by thick smoke (Chapter 1). The picture spread quickly around the world. Five months later the photo became the cover image to “Firestorm,”<sup>39</sup> a multimedia feature created by the *Guardian Australia*.

Combining writing, photographs, audio, and video, “Firestorm” employs techniques common to literary journalism. Like “The Other 9/11,” “Firestorm” uses separate chapters while maintaining a sense of cohesion. The nar-



Screenshot of “Firestorm,” *Guardian Australia*, September 1, 2017, the story of a family from Tasmania who flee from an oncoming bushfire, seeking safety in the water. Courtesy *Guardian Australia*.



native is two-fold, telling the family's story and the history of bushfires in Australia. Using the Holmes family as the anchor, "Firestorm" humanizes the disaster. This personal quality is reinforced through videos and photographs. The Holmes's video interviews and voiceovers provide dialogue and characterization more effectively than transcriptions. Readers see the family members' faces and body language and hear the emotion in their speech. Using multimedia to create dramatic tension<sup>40</sup> allows the piece to work like literary journalism. Readers learn as the characters and narrator reveal each successive element of the drama.<sup>41</sup> Additional footage of the surroundings sets the scene of desolation left by the fires.

While multimedia are present throughout, they do not intrude on the reader's imaginative autonomy. As Hartsock argues, the ability to imagine how the events took place, and what they mean to those who experienced them, keeps the reader "cognitively in imaginative participation with phenomena . . . as evidence outside the covers of books located at the intersection of a distinctive time and place."<sup>42</sup> "Firestorm" lets the reader create a mental picture of the events by supplying aural and written material as well as imagery of the blaze.

Using additional media dimensions, "Firestorm" successfully leverages the digital platform to provide a different reading experience from that of a purely written account. Yet because "Firestorm" isn't interactive, in the sense of readers being required to respond to non-written elements to progress the narrative, it preserves the autonomy of the reader found in print-based literary journalism. The video and audio media within "Firestorm" require no third-party interaction as they auto-play when the reader scrolls through the



Videos in "Daughters of Paradise," *Refinery29*, September 1, 2017, are used not only to further the narrative of the individual women, but aesthetically to bring the women to life. They begin in black and white and progress to full color.



feature. The multimedia are interwoven seamlessly, yet readers can choose which elements to read and in what order.

While a lack of interactivity qualifies “Firestorm” as literary journalism, the interwoven nature of its multimedia positions it further along the spectrum than “The Other 9/11.” The multimedia in “Firestorm” have been integrated so that if you were to remove the videos and photographs, the Holmes’s narrative would no longer make sense. It would also remove any context from the broader narrative and strip it of its humanizing elements. In the chapter entitled “The Jetty,” for instance, the side panel allows the reader to navigate to each medium—video, photographs, or written text. If a reader were to read only the writing within chapters, there would be a large gap in the narrative explaining how Tim reconnected with Tammy and their grandchildren, and how the famous photograph was taken. This gap, and the subsequent desirability of reading all dimensions of the feature for the narrative to be cohesive, means “Firestorm” belongs to the integrated multimedia feature genres.

“Daughters of Paradise” also integrates multimedia to leverage the narrative.<sup>43</sup> Produced by Refinery29, it explores the Syrian refugee crisis through three women’s stories about escaping from Syria to Turkey. Like “Firestorm,” the multimedia are interwoven with the story, engaging readers in the context. The eye-catching presentation of the definition of the term “refugee” and the zooming-in map of the world provide a dynamic beginning. Like the introduction, each of the three chapters begins with scene-setting videos and quotes. At points throughout each chapter the written element is replaced with either short auto-play videos of the women or a longer, introductory video. The auto-play videos begin in black and white and expand to color, coming to life as the subjects do. Most importantly, the construction, techniques, and multimedia do not interrupt the narrative.

### **Interactive Multimedia Literary Journalism: “ReBuilding Haiti,” “What Is Code?” and “Killing Kennedy”**

When a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, it decimated local infrastructure, killed over 220,000 people, and left 1.5 million homeless.<sup>44</sup> Four years later, a project funded by the European Journalism Centre and the Innovation in Development Reporting Grant Programme documented the country’s recovery. “ReBuilding Haiti” details the Haitian government’s failure and incorporates video footage, photography, animation, and interactive quizzes into the narrative.

“ReBuilding Haiti” exemplifies “slow journalism.”<sup>45</sup> The feature describes itself as a “multimedia interactive story,” revisiting an event that was broadcast by mass media around the world and resulted in billions of dollars of



“Killing Kennedy,” *National Geographic*, September 1, 2017. There are a number of sections in the piece where the control of what part of the narrative is read next is handed back to the reader. Here, the reader can scroll widely and choose from a range of media on each of the characters.

international aid to the country. Until this feature, little media attention was paid to how Haiti coped and whether the money helped.

Each chapter explores a different issue, following no particular order, providing a package of information about Haiti’s reconstruction. This means “ReBuilding Haiti” does not align with Hartsock’s requirement that literary journalism should work towards an end,<sup>46</sup> partly because the story of Haiti’s reconstruction is an ongoing one. The incoherent structure also dilutes the “core elements” of literary journalism as defined by Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche—scene, dialogue, characterization, and dramatic tension.<sup>47</sup>

Because the feature does not follow any individual or part of Haiti, the dialogue comes from a variety of unrelated individuals and resembles quotes for a news report rather than dialogue, preventing the development of characters. Chapter 5 includes short profiles on four Haitian men and women. However, the impact is minimalized because they can only be viewed in the specified order and appear toward the end of the feature.

The title screen of “ReBuilding Haiti” includes a photograph of a street corner blended with bright animation, illustrating a vibrant scene. The writing outlines Haiti’s systemic financial and infrastructure woes, and the visual representation steadily changes to reflect the worsening conditions. However, without a narrative leading to a conclusion, “ReBuilding Haiti” lacks dramatic tension, a lack that is increased by the insertion of an interactive

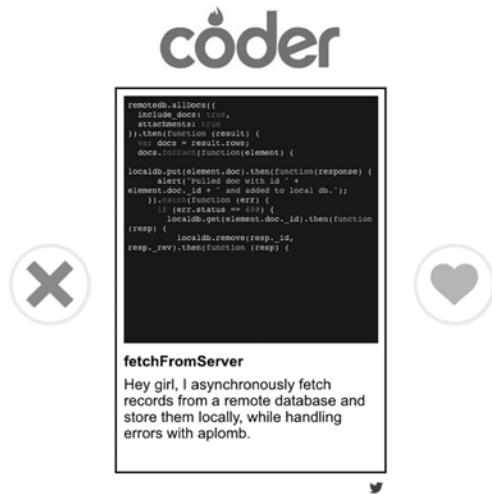
questionnaire after each chapter. Unlike “The Other 9/11,” the reader cannot skip forward. Instead of marking different points in the narrative, the chapter endings stop readers to test their comprehension of the text thus far.

Because of this interactive function, “ReBuilding Haiti” belongs to the interactive multimedia sub-genre, rather than being a multimedia enhanced work of literary journalism.<sup>48</sup> At the end of each chapter the reader must choose what happens next in the reconstruction of the country. The feature then reveals the impact of the reader’s choice and how it would affect re-development. This interactivity ensures readers stay engaged, while forcing them to think critically about the country’s dilemmas. Because readers cannot progress through the feature until they have answered the interactive questions, the creators dictate how, and in what order, the feature can be read. This detracts from affective engagement and impedes intimacy between the reader and the subject.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, the multimedia are integrated with the story. Photos, videos, and interactive elements must be scrolled through and experienced to get to the next section of written text. In some cases small parts of the text have been superimposed on top of the photos. The result is that if any of these media were removed, key parts of the story would be removed. While interactive components in “Rebuilding Haiti” make it interesting, the multimedia do not enhance the narrative; instead, they test the reader and interrupt the flow of the story.

The didacticism of “Rebuilding Haiti” can also be found in the long-form piece, “What Is Code?”<sup>50</sup> Predominantly a written text, it uses interactivity so readers can determine what they learned from each chapter.

The feature provides an exhaustive explanation of computer coding and why it is important to understand, and is peppered with multimedia. These include information boxes over terms that require background knowledge, images, GIFs, and an animated blue character who pops up to



Screenshot of “What is Code?,” *Bloomberg Businessweek*, September 1, 2017. This didactic feature tests what has been learned by the reader using a function that mimics the popular dating application Tinder.

explain concepts. Interactivity is strewn through each chapter, teaching the reader visually what is explained in the text. However, if readers engage in the mini-tutorials, they are diverted from the narrative flow.<sup>51</sup> In Chapter 3.1 the interactivity goes beyond disrupting the story, with an invitation to try the “Wreck It All” function. This destroys the piece entirely, forcing a return to the beginning.

Another written narrative leveraging interactivity is *National Geographic America’s* “Killing Kennedy,”<sup>52</sup> the stories of President John F. Kennedy and his assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. Unlike “What Is Code?” and “ReBuilding Haiti,” “Killing Kennedy” foregrounds visual elements of the story. Images provide backdrops to writing, but every time the reader scrolls, the feature changes. It might be a different color background, a split-screen transition to something entirely different, or icons for exploring different narrative culs-de-sac. Pictures and information boxes appear as chapters proceed, but readers retain autonomy regarding order. Icons for videos, quotes, photos, or added information appear on particular pages, each relevant to the narrative of Kennedy or Oswald. In Chapter 3 the icons are scattered so the reader must scroll widely to reveal them.

“Killing Kennedy” leverages multimedia to great advantage—except where its narrative is concerned. By allowing readers complete control over what they read, listen to, or watch, “Killing Kennedy” risks its audience missing entire sections of the story. Should someone scroll through a chapter and not click on each separate icon, the information that follows appears out of context.

### Conclusion

These examples are distinctive in the ways they incorporate multimedia to fulfil different narrative goals. In “The Other 9/11,” multimedia complement a story told self-sufficiently through writing, closely resembling traditional literary journalism. Alternately, “ReBuilding Haiti” and “Firestorm” use photographs, voice-over, and videos to assist in telling the story; if they were removed, the narrative would no longer be coherent. The interwoven multimedia of “Firestorm” communicate key elements of the narrative, providing an example of multimedia used to great narrative effect. As an integrated multimedia feature, “Firestorm’s” narra-descriptive function enables a *mutual interpretative synergy*. Conversely, the interactive quizzes in “ReBuilding Haiti” fragment the narrative, reduce affective engagement and constrain readers’ autonomy. “Rebuilding Haiti” is educational rather than emotionally engaging and sits further along the spectrum, nearer “Killing Kennedy,” from traditional literary journalism.

Multimedia features bear a close relationship to traditional literary jour-

nalism, if the multimedia unobtrusively complement the writing. If the narrative is disrupted by the removal of additional media, then the text departs from traditional literary journalism but may still enable readers to participate “imaginatively in the journey or process of the story.”<sup>53</sup> In both cases, continuity and reader engagement are maintained. In some instances, however, opportunities for interactivity may also be present where interactivity disrupts the central narrative in order to engage readers in other tasks. This is a departure from literary journalism, particularly if these activities are a barrier to progressing through the narrative.

Given the continuing changes in technology, multimedia literary journalism will further evolve. Hybridity might itself become a characteristic of multimedia literary journalism, and where there is a critical current of written narrative, finer distinctions between sub-genres of multimedia literary journalism could be identified. Where a narrative attends to the techniques of affective writing, fosters readers’ engagement, maintains continuity to preserve this connection, and respects readers’ autonomy in navigating the story, its qualification as literary journalism remains uncompromised.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Berning, "Narrative Journalism in the Age of the Internet," 1–15.

<sup>2</sup> Bowden, "Blackhawk Down."

<sup>3</sup> Royal and Tankard, "Literary Journalism Techniques," 82–88. When the site was published in 1997, it received up to 42,000 hits a day. In 2004 the story was still receiving 32,000 hits a month.

<sup>4</sup> For example: linear vs. non-linear, divergent points of view, relationship between authorial, narrating, protagonist's subjectivity, and other stylistic particulars.

<sup>5</sup> In this context *hybridity* means combining, overlapping or intersecting genres. See for example, Flis, *Factual Fictions*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Harcup and O'Neill, "What Is News?" 274.

<sup>7</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 153. See Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

<sup>8</sup> Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*.



<sup>9</sup> *Raygun: Design Is History*. [www.designishistory.com/1980/ray-gun/](http://www.designishistory.com/1980/ray-gun/). The website provides a discussion of the interaction of text and image in print media. We see these couplings as mixed media rather than multimedia given the digital connotations and interactivity of the latter.

<sup>10</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 3 and following.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. See also, Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 247.

<sup>13</sup> Another use of a spectrum to define literary journalism is in Roberts and Giles, "Mapping Nonfiction Narrative," 101–17.

<sup>14</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "Digital Animation," 6.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 46–50.

<sup>16</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "Digital Animation," 6.

<sup>17</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "Digital Animation," 7; Deuze, "What Is Multimedia Journalism?" 140.

<sup>20</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "Digital Animation," 5.

<sup>21</sup> Deuze, "What Is Multimedia Journalism?" 140.

<sup>22</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "Digital Animation," 2.

<sup>23</sup> McAdams, "Multimedia Journalism," 188.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Deuze, "What Is Multimedia Journalism?" 140.

<sup>26</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "Digital Animation," 7; McAdams, "Multimedia Journalism," 188; Opgenhaffen and d'Haenens, "Heterogeneity within Homogeneity," 303.

<sup>27</sup> McAdams, "Multimedia Journalism," 189.

<sup>28</sup> Opgenhaffen and d'Haenens, "Heterogeneity within Homogeneity," 303.

<sup>29</sup> McAdams, "Multimedia Journalism," 191.

<sup>30</sup> Melgar et. al., "The Other 9/11," Chap. 3. The use of "were disappeared" was common following the coup and other military practices in South America where citizens were taken and their bodies never discovered nor accounted for. See United States Institute of Peace. Report of the Chilean National Commission; Melgar et al., "Mariana Minguez," Chap. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "Digital Animation," 6.

<sup>34</sup> Giles, 12.

<sup>35</sup> References in the text to chapters are from the website presentations, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>36</sup> Brill, "America's Most Admired Lawbreaker."

<sup>37</sup> Branch, "Snow Fall."

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, Hyperlinks to photo galleries or video snippets provide context (for example, "Tunnel Creek," "Saugstad," "Descent Begins").

<sup>39</sup> Henley et al., "Firestorm."

- <sup>40</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, “Digital Animation,” 6.
- <sup>41</sup> Hartsock, 21.
- <sup>42</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 57.
- <sup>43</sup> Forde et al., “Daughters of Paradise.”
- <sup>44</sup> Abbiateci et al., “ReBuilding Haiti.”
- <sup>45</sup> Le Masurier, “What Is Slow Journalism?” 141–42.
- <sup>46</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 21.
- <sup>47</sup> Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, “Digital Animation,” 6.
- <sup>48</sup> McAdams, “Multimedia Journalism,” 189.
- <sup>49</sup> Opgenhaffen and d’Haenens, “Heterogeneity within Homogeneity,” 303.
- <sup>50</sup> Ford, “What Is Code.”
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, see Chapters 2.1; 2.3; 2.4; 4.2; 5.3; 5.7; 6.2; 7.5.
- <sup>52</sup> “Killing Kennedy.”
- <sup>53</sup> Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 21.



The Atlantic Ocean at Terceira Island, Archipelago of the Azores, Portugal (Alice Trindade)

## *Keynote Address . . .*

### Literary Journalism: Many Voices, Multiple Languages

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**Introduction:** Alice Donat Trindade is associate professor in the Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas (ISCSP) at the Universidade de Lisboa (ULisboa), where she has held the position of vice-dean since 2012 and is a member of one of its research centers, the Centre for Public Policy and Administration (CAPP). She has published in the areas of American studies, literary journalism, and on the teaching of languages for specific purposes. She is a founding member of the IALJS and was the association's president from 2010–2012. Her current research interests and publication areas focus on the study of the development of the Portuguese-speaking community of literary journalists throughout the world, as well as the intercultural role of the Portuguese language in the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP) and as an international language. Recently she has been paying special attention to literary journalism texts about Angola in two time periods: the beginning of the colonial war in the 1960s, as it was reported in Portuguese newspapers; and present-day Angolan journalists who write chronicles about citizens whose everyday lives are mostly ignored by both the local and international press. In this research stream her most recent publication is “Angola, Territory and Identity: The Chronicles of Luís Fernando,” published in a special issue of the journal *famecos* dedicated to papers presented at the Eleventh International Conference for Literary Journalism Studies, Porto Alegre, Brazil, in May 2016.

Let me introduce the topic of this address by referring to the words of Vergílio Ferreira, a Portuguese writer—words he used in a speech delivered on the occasion of his receiving the 1991 Europalia Prize in Brussels<sup>1</sup>: “A language is the vantage point from which you view the world and where the limits of our thoughts and feelings are drawn. I see the ocean from my language. In my language we hear its sound, as in others the sound of the forest or of the desert may be heard. That is why the sound of the sea was the sound of our unrest.”<sup>2</sup> Ferreira’s words help me introduce the approach I will use to talk to you about literary journalism: its multiple voices and languages. At this particular moment, let me refer to one of the six analytical implements David Abrahamson selected in his “toolbox of categorizations” used to write, read and teach literary journalism,<sup>3</sup> namely, voice. Abrahamson refers to two aspects of this implement: “One is the style in which the piece is written—‘the sand and lime of language,’ in the wonderful words of Louis Chevalier, with which the prose is constructed. The second aspect relates to the author’s choice of narrator.”<sup>4</sup> With Ferreira’s help, I would add to voice the language itself, which is used as a meaning-making process, a “[coconstruction] . . . form of social action,”<sup>5</sup> in the words of anthropologist Laura M. Ahearn.

The study of these linguistic varieties is a huge task being carried out by scholars from all parts of the world. We will try to focus on the production of a group of countries located on the three continents that “see” the Atlantic Ocean from their language: Portuguese. Their close neighbors, countries that speak Spanish and English, and respective content and formal influences, will also be taken into account.

This multiplicity has been, from the early moments of the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS), one of its prized assets—the international and cultural diversity of a genre that two centuries ago was visible, in Matthew Arnold’s words, in a “feather-brained” New Journalism, or fifty years ago, according to Tom Wolfe, in the New Journalism that was supposed to replace the traditional literary genre of the novel.<sup>6</sup>

Diversity also leads to the topic for the twelfth IALJS conference, “Literary Journalism: From the Center, From the Margins,” a title that brings out the ever-present struggle between any sort of canon and its challengers. Journalism, in general, has had a remarkable interaction with society, at least over the last two centuries. Its various genres have developed and had a considerable importance for the development of the continuous communication process that is actually a relevant tool of the method humanity has followed to lay the ground for its evolution. Center and margin configure a model of existence for diverse human activities and existences.

John Pilger accurately named the human elements of that margin in the

media world as “media unpeople,”<sup>7</sup> an expression the journalist used to designate, part and parcel of what we may call today the Dark Side of the Journalistic Moon, a territory where little or no light is shed by the focus of attention of world media. But in this respect literary journalism may well be considered a vehicle “to boldly go where no man has gone before,” to put it in *Star Trek*, pop-culture terms.

Literary journalism has a common genetic pool with journalism. This fact justifies a brief historical incursion. The designation “fourth estate” was used by, among others, George T. Rider in 1882. The author submitted in his article, “The Pretensions of Journalism,” that aside from “the Family, the Church, and the State” journalism had been acquiring a role of its own, as one of “the dominant forces of our Civilization.”<sup>8</sup> Rider called it a “parvenu,”<sup>9</sup> which found no need to correctly establish its right to existence and importance. U.S. newspapers of the day were severely criticized as sell-outs to politics, business, or other interests, being left with none of the original value Rider spotted in newspapers of the past.

Journalism had acquired, throughout the nineteenth century, new means and publishing processes that had transformed it into a true industry. Mechanization, allowing the decrease of production costs, resulted in enlarged readership, in turn enabled by cheaper newspapers sold on city streets. However, according to Rider, quantity did not entail the quality of observation so relevant to the action of a true fourth estate, which Edmund Burke had proposed as an ideal for the activity in eighteenth-century England, working as a check and balance against his other three estates—clergymen, aristocracy, and commoners.<sup>10</sup>

Yet journalism in various forms endured and prospered for many years to come, against Rider’s tainted recovery of the designation, fourth estate. Matthew Arnold was contemporarily writing in Britain about the same dichotomy for journalism: either a medium for the elevation of society or for its demeaning, as his previously mentioned reference to New Journalism as feather brained attests, which, according to him, might prevent readers from getting facts, as “new” journalists would rather write about impressions.<sup>11</sup> Twenty years before, in December 1864, the Portuguese daily *Diário de Notícias* (Daily News) was founded in Lisbon, promising to publish news that might be of interest to readers.<sup>12</sup> In its editorial statement the newspaper vowed to leave politics and interpretation aside, allowing readers to interpret news as they wished. Its mission would be to convey national and international news of relevance to Portuguese citizens, so that they would be in touch with the world around them in a timely manner.

In an article about nineteenth-century Spanish journalism, Almudena

Mejias Alonso and Alicia Arias Coello wrote that the press of this period felt acutely aware of its educational role, and that a lot of its contents were directed toward forming public opinion, with considerations towards various publics. That occurred even if, due to the low levels of literacy, their influence was limited to a small yet influential reading public: Literacy in Spain rose from just under 6 percent in the early years of the century to 33 percent by 1900. They wrote, “The press of the nineteenth century was aware, at all moments, of its power in matters concerning the dissemination of political, cultural, religious or any other kind of ideas. It felt it was an ‘educator’ and it would consciously play that role.”<sup>13</sup>

Similar to Spanish figures, the first reliable figures for literacy in Portugal were collected by the second mainland population census (*II Recenseamento Geral da População*, January 1, 1878), revealing an illiteracy rate of 79.4 percent.<sup>14</sup> Alongside the educational role felt acutely towards a population that, in its majority, did not have the basic tool to acquire the education contemporary media were adamant to provide, other questions concerned journalism professionals. International examples show overlapping concerns for the ethical issues that accompany education. The latter have been raised throughout time by an activity that is simultaneously individual and of the masses; an art and craft, and an industry; an act of creation and a business activity. We may say that it shares this condition with many other human activities—fine arts, literature, architecture—yet it is the one activity whose outputs on a daily basis openly prod society into contemplating itself in myriad manifestations of local, national, and international matters.

So, Rider’s *parvenu*, his new kid in town, has grown and multiplied itself, and the genre discussed in Halifax, and that we are, in a way, celebrating, has achieved an existence of its own, as well as its own designation: literary journalism. After the Third IALJS International Conference, in 2008, hosted by the Institute of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Lisbon, Norman Sims was interviewed by Alexandra Lucas Coelho, a journalist with Portuguese daily newspaper *Público*. Sims said, “There is a definition that goes: You give the reader the quality of a certain time and space. I like that definition. Literary journalism links a sentiment to an event.”<sup>15</sup> Seminal writings on this field have been published or edited by many members of this association and other scholars and, despite the ordinary agreement to disagree in academic issues, the designation has been gathering support.

And gathering support is the expression used, because this is not a well-established designation, nor one that is semantically clear. Misunderstandings in this field have even led to the submission, in the early days of association conferences, of papers versing subjects such as literary critique, often mistak-



en for literary journalism. Literary journalism may also be called, in similar variants existing in other national journalism traditions, as narrative journalism, narrative nonfiction, reportage, *cronica*, etc.; some of them basically international siblings. As a product of human intellect—reporting human, social activity—literary journalism is culturally relevant. However, from the early days of the existence of the mass circulation newspaper, the material artifact that carries those articles has been given less importance, except, eventually in some cases, for its totemic value, as Wolfe puts it.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, the newspaper has been disrespectfully used, in several countries, to wrap snacks and street food. The Spaniards say that yesterday's newspaper's only role is to wrap fish. The Portuguese roasted chestnut vendors use it to sell their autumn treats. And years ago it typically wrapped British fish and chips. Further signs of transience of this output are now manifested in the replacement of printed paper by electronic screens that display hypertexts. However, not all is lost: The immaterial value attached to journalism has not been altogether overlooked, be it in the totemic or the actual value some publications still possess. On the other hand, the study of digital texts has been undertaken by academics such as Jacqueline Marino, who recently reported in her article on eye tracking<sup>17</sup> the results of experiments on the actual eye movements that accompany reading on screens that interestingly showed that people do read whole texts that are digitally published.

In 2008 in Lisbon, as in 2017 in Halifax, the study of literary journalism was enriched with a worldwide sample, bearing a wealth of similarities and disparities. Indeed, if a journalist wants to provide the reader with the quality of a certain time and space, the text must be written in a culturally adjusted form and using the suitable kind of feeling. Simultaneously, the texts convey that quality in a format that is already the result of an understanding among all actors involved: journalist, recipient, their cultural ecosystem, and their own variety of the genre. This understanding, sometimes, crisscrosses time and space, often borne by a relevant common vehicle, language.

### I. Language and Literary Journalism

That is the case with the set of three linguistic communities I will briefly discuss before focusing on the Portuguese language case. The English, Portuguese, and Spanish languages formed a transatlantic triangle that began its existence six centuries ago with repercussions and influences in countries on both sides of the “pond.” It does not take long to find traits in authors' and academics' work of reciprocally manifested influences, but also of features that set them apart. Transatlantic dialogues in literary journalism, written in three languages, lead to the recognition of these three major spaces of this

genre in the world and their similar, yet different existences. It also confirms the recognition of local and international interest of their respective and comparative studies.

In his book, *Periodismo narrativo*, Roberto Herrscher writes that the work he admires most, in terms of telling the stories of the Other, is John Hersey's *Hiroshima*.<sup>18</sup> Hersey's ability to embody an alternate point of view in his writing is a quality Herrscher encounters in literary journalism. As an author himself, he explains that he understood this phenomenon, when he, an Argentinian, realized that Chilean and Argentinian people are both "*transandinos*" to their respective neighbor, a situation that does not vary according to the side of the border on which were born. In fact, whichever side of the Andes Mountain Range you inhabit, all people who live on the other side have this relative position to you—they are on "the other side."

This is a marvelous epistemological concept: for me, Chileans are *transandinos*, and I am the *transandino* for them. Just think if the Israelis and Palestinians, Irish Catholics and Protestants, South African white and black people, and Iraqi Shiite and Sunni had the same word to refer each other.

I am the Other, for the Other.<sup>19</sup>

This admittance of Otherness as a relative concept, one that should not freeze any human being in its own position, is a common denominator in literary journalism. Whereas Herrscher made it clear in our century that there is relativity in notions of Otherness, nineteenth-century Brazilian author Machado de Assis wrote in 1859<sup>20</sup> that newspapers reflect not only the idea of one man, but popular idea as a whole. Assis was a journalist and author of fiction, one of the most relevant figures in Brazilian literature. In his article, "O jornal e o livro" (The Newspaper and the Book), published by the newspaper *Correio Mercantil* in 1859, he wrote, "The newspaper is the true form of the republic of thought. It is the intellectual locomotive, travelling to distant worlds; it is the common, universal, highly democratic literature, reproduced every day, carrying in it the freshness of ideas and the fire of beliefs."<sup>21</sup>

Assis admitted the existence of common beliefs being reported by newspapers, embodying an "intellectual locomotive" that stimulated the intellect of those members of the reading public that books themselves might not reach. With "republic of thought" he also meant the possibility all elements of society had, through journalism, to get their voices heard, counteracting the notions of high, that is, refined, culture. Attention to this popular voice, relevance being given to the ordinary citizen, may well be another point in common in a lot of the work produced by our literary journalists. The Brazil-

ian author was making another point: He was consolidating a notion of “Us,” encompassing all who lived in the Republic of Brazil, excluding no one.

Popular voice was also being contemporarily heard in North America. In our transatlantic triangle, let me now refer to an immigrant American author, Abraham Cahan, of East European origin. A few decades later than Assis, towards the fin-de-siècle, he was writing about Jewish immigrants in New York,<sup>22</sup> revealing to the city audiences how greenhorns, or recent immigrants, conducted their daily lives, including how they worshipped God on the new continent and how their public acts of worship did not entail any hostile action, as had the ones that had made them flee Europe and that would again afflict the same group years later on the Old Continent. So our journalists wrote and write about a variety of topics, focusing their lens on people or events that occur on either of the Atlantic shores, often influencing each other, but always allowing Voice to be conceded to larger groups within each Society.

Still, in those days, the need to cater to the needs of a society that was facing its own human variety was much more acute in North, Central, or South America than in Portugal or Spain. Whereas the two latter, as well as Great Britain, were still imperial countries, the U.S. and Latin American countries had already entered the first postcolonial moment, after having acquired independence from these European countries in the 1800s to 1900s. After the United States gained independence from Great Britain in 1776, similar movements were witnessed by Spain and Portugal, with nineteenth-century independentist claims from many Latin American territories and countries—Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia—culminating in independence no later than the third decade of the 1800s.

Since the early days of maritime voyages in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the European imperial powers were used to meeting and handling peoples they regarded as different, eventually exotic, but elsewhere in the world, not in their own territories. The situation became slightly different in nineteenth-century Great Britain, with authors writing, for instance, for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, about encounters with territories and peoples of estrangement in places like London, a home territory where different groups of destitute people were identified, studied, and used as material for newspaper articles. Authors such as W. T. Stead<sup>23</sup> immersed in fieldwork, digging for the topics of a “new” journalism, pinpointing and writing about sectors of the population that had, so far, attained no public recognition. As Isabel Soares has written,<sup>24</sup> Stead and other British authors, in turn, influenced Portuguese authors who lived and worked in England, establishing a transatlantic connection that linked different journalism practices, their respective countries

and languages, involving journalistic print cultures in an intellectual movement that promoted formal and genre innovations in the different countries.

So, some of our more reflexive, more literary journalists of mid- to late nineteenth century, writing in countries where varieties of literary journalism were emerging, chose as topics the events and challenges that needed adequate genres to be transmitted to the public, a public that was confronted with a new economic reality—a capitalist, industrial society. This society produced, as one of its outputs, affordable newspapers, sold on every street corner to be read by more and more people who relished popular journalism, developed by journalists who sought new audiences and would care for topics that had not been on the media agenda before.

And here lies one of the main characteristics of this kind of journalism: it broadens the media agenda. It does so from unexpected points of view, using a voice that works with language in a distinct way, giving voice to unusual narrators and doing that in different styles. It appeared at a time of economic and social change, when both social structure and thought were changing: social structure, because of emerging phenomena due to rapid industrialization and its consequences, and social thought, because social sciences were blossoming, undergoing a process of methodological and epistemological development.

## II. Now, in Portuguese

In the twenty-first century, the transatlantic scene is witnessing a re-centering of its core, moving south towards the formerly less relevant area. As Herrscher's *transandinos*, strangers who share more common traits than they know, transatlantic journalists still seek inspiration in each other: Spaniards, Latin Americans, Brazilians, Africans, and Portuguese reproduce models they have found elsewhere and cross-fertilize their writing. Let me just introduce a couple of examples.

The Angolan Luís Fernando acknowledges the tremendous influence Gabriel Garcia Marquez exerted over his writings, via his Cuban academic period. As a college student of journalism, Fernando lived six years on this Caribbean Island: He revered the joy of life depicted in the Sunday writings of journalists published by the newspaper *Juventud Rebelde* in the 1980s and 1990s. The Cuban Enrique Nuñez and the Colombian Gabriel Garcia Marquez made his Sundays, and reading their chronicles has admittedly influenced his style of writing.<sup>25</sup> Nuñez once said in an interview, “Now that you ask me, I believe the goals of my chronicles are: to picture the person as he/she is, present him/her as life’s protagonist and, in that respect, there is no possible limit.”<sup>26</sup> That is exactly what Fernando does—when he picks any An-

golan person or situation and writes a text, he brings that person or situation alive to audiences that, even though they're sharing the same space, would not be aware of their existence.

Fernando, in an interview with Venceslau Mateus in 2015, said, "I drink from the world around me. I am a restless mind and everything that stirs up sameness brings my senses alive. The weekly chronicles I have written for the last seven years bear witness to that."<sup>27</sup> The Angolan journalist prefers to think of the continuum of his writing, and the relevance given to the course of events, rather than the immediacy of occasions.

Two more examples of this extensive but detailed approach are the works of Brazilian author Eliane Brum and Portuguese author Susana Moreira Marques. In the two texts selected to exemplify their approach, the authors chose as a topic people who were aware of the fact that they were inexorably heading towards death. In 2008, Brum wrote "A enfermaria entre a vida e a morte" (The Infirmary between Life and Death), a piece of long-form literary journalism that depicted the lives of patients in a palliative care unit. In 2012, Moreira Marques wrote *Agora e na Hora da Nossa Morte* (Now and at the Hour of Our Death), a book that resulted from her in-depth research of a group of oncologic patients living in a mountainous area in northwest Portugal.

Both spent months collecting data: one visiting the infirmary of a São Paulo Hospital, the other accompanying a team of health professionals that deliver palliative care to patients who are at home in an under-populated area of Portugal. In-patients and out-patients, in a huge city, São Paulo, or in a remote, mountainous area of Portugal, these people, their lives and their loved ones' lives are treated with care and closeness, showing that life is there up to the last moment, and that it is not a defeat but a part of our existence. Brum sums up the self-perception of one of the patients, as disclosed in these words: " 'I am ill, but I am not my illness.' . . . and she asks: 'Do you think I can have a glass of beer?' "<sup>28</sup> This self-awareness translates into a situation where the patient still feels empowered to make her own decisions, largely as the result of the messages and attitudes of the health professionals who accompany these patients.

One of our evergreen taboos—death—is confronted, viewed, and treated as a feasible topic by literary journalists. Both female authors, Brum and Marques express the view that death had been taken hostage by twentieth-century developments in the medical world and turned into an area of human existence where lay people, including patients, had no space. Palliative care is slowly transforming that technologically induced cultural shift.

Two countries that share the same language and quite a few common

traits, namely a shared predominantly Christian population, experience new ways of facing not only death but also human suffering and how to treat it as human again, and not just medically controlled. Again, the two Portuguese-speaking authors chose to write about a process, not an event.

So, what do Fernando, Brum, and Marques—as well as many other Portuguese-language literary journalists—share? A Portuguese vista, a common denominator, a language that displays in chronicles (Latin American influence); long-form journalism (U.S. American tradition); and book-form literary journalism (international trend). These are excellent examples of shared and divided experiences, and turning transatlantic Portuguese-speaking journalistic works into a different *transandino* experiences, as per Herrscher's concept. These stories, written in Portuguese, use the same language but apply it to different issues. They share a common but often antagonistic history across an ocean, one that divides but may also unite.

A language, in this case Portuguese, added to voice, as described by Abrahamson, is the common denominator, the linguistic platform used. It is written with local inflexions, depicting different realities. The genre is literary journalism, as practiced in different parts of the world, especially in the ones that are nearer, English-speaking and Spanish-speaking Atlantic neighbors, on both sides of the ocean.

Form and content share characteristics and display diverse features, but voice has the distinct trait Ferreira identified: the unrest triggered by the ocean and the unknown in Portuguese-speaking peoples.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> António Cardoso e Cunha, speaking for the Commission of the European Communities, said of presenting Vergílio Ferreira with the prize: “The jury’s intention in awarding the Europalia 1991 Prize for Literature to Mr. Vergílio Ferreira was to pay tribute to a writer whose subject is man’s inner life, a writer attentive to man’s destiny and his existential poverty who, through his great mastery of language, has found a way of expressing a secret component of the Portuguese soul,” European Commission, accessed May 16, 2017, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-91-902\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-91-902_en.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Ferreira, “A voz do mar,” 83.

<sup>3</sup> Abrahamson, “A Narrative of Collegial Discovery,” 88–89.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. The other five implements are character, setting, plot, theme, and structure.

<sup>5</sup> Ahearn, “Language and Agency,” 111.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold, “Up to Easter,” 638; Wolfe, “The New Journalism,” 9. Wolfe later wrote, “It is not merely that reporting is useful in gathering the *petits faits vrais* that create verisimilitude and make a novel gripping or absorbing, although that side of the enterprise is worth paying attention to.” Wolfe, “Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast,” 165.

<sup>7</sup> “It was a place of media unpeople and of heroes,” Pilger, *Heroes*, xiv.

<sup>8</sup> Rider, “The Pretensions of Journalism,” 471.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.; Mark Hampton has elsewhere written, “According to Thomas Carlyle (1840), Edmund Burke first applied the term “Fourth Estate” to the press gallery in the late eighteenth century, contrasting it with the three Estates of the Realm in France (Clergy, Aristocracy, and Commoners).” Hampton, “The Fourth Estate Ideal in Journalism History,” 3.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold wrote, “It throws out assertions at a venture because it wishes them true; does not correct either them or itself, if they are false; and to get at the state of things as they truly are seems to feel no concern whatever.” Arnold, “Up to Easter,” para. 21.

<sup>12</sup> *Diário de Notícias* (Daily News), December 29, 1864. Actually, in the first, December 29, 1864, issue of the newspaper, apart from the editorial statement, the first page displays in prominent position (top left corner) a notice asking readers to supply any information on the most varied topics that might help the newspaper enlighten their readers on the truth of facts. Original Portuguese text: “. . . tudo, emfim, que possa interessar ao publico em geral, ou às classes em particular uma vez que as pessoas que com ellas obzequiarem a empresa lhe assegurem a verdade d’essas informações” (translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>13</sup> Mejías Alonso and Arias Coello, “La Prensa del Siglo XIX,” 241. Original Portuguese text: “La prensa del XIX fue consciente, en todo momento, de su poder en lo que se refería a la difusión de ideas políticas, culturales, religiosas o de cualquier otro tipo. Se sentía ‘educadora’ y cumplió, conscientemente, este papel” (translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>14</sup> Estatística de Portugal, *II Recenseamento Geral da População*, January 1, 1878.

<sup>15</sup> Interview of Norman Sims can be found at Coelho, “Jornalismo literário.” Original Portuguese text: “Há uma definição que é: ‘Dar ao leitor a qualidade de um determinado tempo e espaço.’ Gosto dessa definição. O jornalismo literário liga um sentimento a um acontecimento,” para. 27 (translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>16</sup> “A totem newspaper is the kind people don’t really buy to read but just to *have*, physically, because they know it supports their own outlook on life,” Wolfe, *Kandy-Kolored Tangerine*, xi. (italics in the original).

<sup>17</sup> Marino, “Reading Screens,” 139–49. Marino delivered an early version of this paper at the Eleventh International Conference for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS-11), Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil, May 19, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Herrscher, *Periodismo narrativo*, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 35. (italics in the original). Original text: “Es un maravilloso concepto epistemológico: para mí los chilenos son transandinos, y para ellos lo transandino soy yo. Figúrense se los israelíes y los palestinos, los católicos y protestantes de Irlanda, los blancos y negros de Sudáfrica o los chiés y suníes de Iraq tuvieran la misma palabra para referirse al otro. . . .Yo soy el otro para el otro” (translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>20</sup> Machado de Assis's complete works are available online: "O jornal e o livro," at: <http://machado.mec.gov.br/images/stories/pdf/cronica/macr13.pdf>. "The newspaper, *quotidian literature*, as described by a contemporary publicist, is the daily reproduction of the spirit of the people, the common mirror for all facts and talents, where not only the idea of one person is depicted, but the popular idea, this fraction of human mind." Original excerpt in Portuguese: "O jornal, *literatura quotidiana*, no dito de um publicista contemporâneo, é reprodução diária do espírito do povo, o espelho comum de todos os fatos e de todos os talentos, onde se reflete, não a idéia de, um homem, mas a idéia popular, esta fração da idéia humana." para. 29 (italics in the original; translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Original Portuguese text: "O jornal é a verdadeira forma da república do pensamento. É a locomotiva intelectual em viagem para mundos desconhecidos, é a literatura comum, universal, altamente democrática, reproduzida todos os dias, levando em si a frescura das idéias e o fogo das convicções," para 22, accessed February 1, 2017 (translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>22</sup> Rischin, *Grandma Never Lived in America*. Abraham Cahan wrote extensively in Yiddish, and directed the *Jewish Daily Forward*, a newspaper that is still published and with an online version. Moses Rischin collected many of Cahan's articles, written in English and published by the *Commercial Advertiser*, in this 1985 volume.

<sup>23</sup> W. T. Stead's "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" was an exposé of child prostitution that shocked British society when published in 1885. The whole text is available online at Owen Mulpetre's WTSRS W. T. Stead Resource Site, <http://www.attackingthedevil.co.uk/pmg/tribute/>.

<sup>24</sup> Soares, "Literary Journalism's Magnetic Pull," 118–33. Soares further noted, "... a new generation of journalists—sharing the same disillusionment with conventional factual journalism as their counterparts writing in English on both sides of the Atlantic—started to experiment with and adopt a whole 'new' way of writing journalism," 122.

<sup>25</sup> Luís Fernando refers to this in detail in the collection of chronicles first published by newspaper *O País*, *Um Ano de Vida*, under the title, "Como se perde um amigo." Original Portuguese text: "Escrevia ele [Enrique Nuñez] com o humor crioulo que nasce com todo o cubano de gema mas escrevia também, em dupla imbatível no mesmo lugar, o grande Gabriel García Marquez." "He wrote using the creole humor all Cubans worth their salt are born with, but he also wrote, as an unbeatable team for the same medium, with Gabriel Garcia Marquez" (Translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>26</sup> Ross, "Enrique." Original Spanish text: "Ahora que me lo preguntas, creo que el objetivo de mis crónicas es ese: dar al hombre como tal, presentarlo como protagonista de la vida y, en ese sentido, no hay límite posible" (Translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>27</sup> Interview available at: Mateus, Luís Fernando a favor." Original Portuguese text: "Angop – Quais são suas principais fontes de inspiração?"

"LF: Gosto muito do passado, daquilo que vivenciei, das histórias que ouvi

ao longo da vida ou do que me contam no presente. Tenho alma de contador de estórias e sinto-me dotado de uma sensibilidade aguda para escutar e captar experiências que depois recrio, amplo, ficciono. Bebo muito do mundo que palpita ao meu redor. Sou uma mente inquieta e tudo o que sacode a modorra, a mesmice, entusiasma-me. As crônicas semanais que escrevo há sete anos são uma demonstração disso.” para. 17 (Translated to English by A. Trindade).

<sup>28</sup> Brum, “A enfermaria entre a vida e a morte,” para 24, “‘Eu me transformei aqui na Enfermaria’, disse. Original text in Portuguese: ‘Estou doente, mas não sou a doença. Estou viva. Quero viver enquanto estiver viva. Essa é a minha cura. Me libertei.’” Tira os óculos, enxuga as lágrimas, abre um sorriso lindo. E arrisca: ‘Você acha que eu posso tomar uma cervejinha?’” (translated to English by A. Trindade); Marques, *Agora e na Hora da Nossa Morte*, [Now and at the Hour of Our Death], trans., Sanches.

~~Looking for the Best Title~~

~~The Best Title~~

~~The Flawless Title~~

~~The Killer Title~~

~~The Perfect Title~~

~~LOOKING FOR THE PERFECT TITLE~~

A good title is a work of genius. I have no hesitancy in saying that, for it is genius whether it is the inspiration of a lucky moment or the painful elaboration of a faint idea through an hour of deep thought.

— Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, Jewish-American socialist writer, atheist thinker, social reformer, publisher (1889–1951)

I actually really suck at naming books, so lots of years ago, readers were sending in their ideas for titles, and what we realized is that they were smarter than us. So we thought, Hey, go for it. So now we have a contest every year.

— Janet Evanovich, American writer (1943–)

I have on my bookshelf a series of books with opposite titles: *The Alpha Strategy* and *The Omega Strategy*; *Asia Rising* and *Asia Falling*; *Free to Choose* and *Free to Lose*; *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*. Visitors love the collection.

— Mark Skousen, American economist, investment analyst, newsletter editor, college professor, author (1947–)

# *Scholar Practitioner Q+A . . .*

## Searching for the Perfect Title

David Abrahamson  
Northwestern University, United States

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Northwestern University, United States

Titles are no doubt a great source of stress for writers—a quick Google search will turn up pages and pages of articles offering advice on the subject. Much of the advice is conflicting, and the only general consensus seems to be how important a good title is. Titles have to sell the book by sounding good while also giving the reader an idea of what’s to come; they have to be catchy, short, and informative, all at the same time.

To make matters more complicated, it’s not always possible to know before publication how well a title will work. We can laugh now at the fact that *The Great Gatsby* was originally titled *Trimalchio in West Egg* or that *Of Mice and Men* was originally titled *Something That Happened*,<sup>1</sup> but we can’t know how Fitzgerald or Steinbeck felt about those working titles.

Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, a publisher whose Little Blue Books pamphlet series sold hundreds of millions of copies, knew well the power of a good title. He would pull books from his list when their sales weren’t meeting his expectations. Then they’d go to “The Hospital” to be rejuvenated with new titles before rerelease. A few editorial assistants would brainstorm a potential list, and one of those would be tried.<sup>2</sup>

The process could work quite well: *Fleece of Gold* sold 6,000 copies in 1925 but the following year, rereleased under the title *The Quest for a Blonde Mistress*, it sold 50,000 copies. Sometimes, even Haldeman-Julius’s young daughter would help; after reading the book *Privateersmen*, she summarized that it was about seamen and battles, so it was retitled *The Battles of a Seaman*.<sup>3</sup>

How enticing those titles seem point to something else that can't be predicted: how well a title will age. Eighteenth-century novel titles were short summaries in themselves, such as the full title of Daniel Defoe's story of Robinson Crusoe, *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates* (1719).<sup>4</sup> The greater detail was necessary at a time when novels were still entering the cultural mainstream, and it would take more than a word or two to pique a reader's curiosity.

More recent classical works often have titles derived from other works. Popular sources include Shakespeare (*Brave New World*; *Pale Fire*), the Bible (*The Sun Also Rises*; *Absalom, Absalom!*), and the works of major poets (*Of Mice and Men*; *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*). Now, it's common for works to have single-word titles—but the pressure to summarize, or least capture the essence of, the work within nevertheless remains.

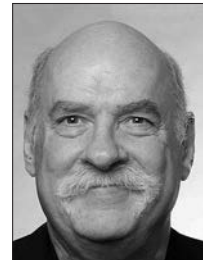
Those articles online do offer a few modern suggestions to creating titles, but take any or all of the advice at your own risk. Methods range from A/B testing<sup>5</sup> to random title generators (which can generate titles as inane as *The Missing Twins* to as nonsensical as *The Teacher in the Alien*).

Common title structures make something like a random title generator possible; the titles can sound real, albeit not always. And because there are no copyrights on titles, some small subgenres of fiction do see titles recycled every few years. But picking a title that truly fits takes a bit more work.

Six award-winning authors, also university faculty teachers of writing literary journalism, were asked to share what they have learned from their experiences in titling their books.

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## The Inspiration Season

Amy Wilentz

University of California at Irvine, United States

It's worth thinking about other writers' really good titles when you start brooding about naming your own book. Why do they work?

Here's a title for all time: *The Way We Live Now*. A novel by Anthony Trollope, true. But it can be repurposed for narrative nonfiction, anthropology, political science . . . and it has been. It's endlessly useful, because it's empty, yet urgent (that *Now*), and we all want to have our lives explained to us.

Here's another: *War and Peace*. Again empty and waiting to be filled with the meaning of the book, yet gigantic and important. We care right away. Some writers, feeling self-important and at the top of their game, choose titles with just one abstract word, as in Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*. And at the end of the book one is left wondering why, other than the drumbeat repetition of the word within the text.

But other times, a one-word title happens to be just right, such as William Shawcross's brilliant *Sideshow*, about the desolation and killings associated with the war in Vietnam that did not take place in Vietnam. To be fair, *Sideshow* has an explanatory subtitle—*Kissinger, Nixon, and the Destruction of Cambodia*—but nonfiction often does.

My favorite title for a novel (other than the idiosyncratic and inimitable *Moby-Dick*—which has a much ignored explanatory subtitle, *or, the Whale*) is *Bleak House*, by Dickens. In *Bleak House*, you barely notice Bleak House itself, and when you do see what Bleak House is, you realize the house isn't bleak at all, it is bright and beautiful and reflects the lovely soul of its proprietor. It is the site of happiness, and a reconstituted family, and an unbreakable

but profoundly assaulted love. Bleak House is where the main protagonists of the book gather and we see them there in their best light. Dickens could have called the house and the book *Sunnyvale*, but *Sunnyvale* wouldn't have interested us, and more important would not have conveyed the darkness and power of the novel. It wouldn't have made you feel, on putting the book down, finally, that all England, and especially London, is in the grips of an oppressive system that grinds humanity down. *Bleak House* does that.

And plus: the title sounds good. Real estate almost always provides good title. Chatwin's *In Patagonia* comes to mind, or Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*.

Depends on the place, though. Mississippi is evocative, Patagonia is mystical. But not all places work. Try *In Rhode Island*. No. *Life in Staten Island*. I don't think so. D. J. Waldie, who wrote a great book about suburban anomie, had the sense not to call it *In Lakewood*, but rather *Holy Land*. With the explanatory and seemingly contradictory subtitle, *A Suburban Memoir*.

When I am writing a book, I'm always trying on titles as if they were eveningwear for my workmanlike piece of writing. One is too elegant, another too transparent, another too old-fashioned, another, somehow, boxy or too contemporary.

When I was writing my first book, I was living in Haiti and reporting on Haiti and writing about Haiti. I had this little apartment in a small complex for foreigners that was expanding daily. I was alone when I wasn't out reporting, and I had a Hermes Rocket typewriter, white plastic, very small, that clacked and binged a lot. I'd put it on the "dining room" table, facing a big window that opened on the canyon at the bottom of which I lived, amid garbage and birds and rats. I was working my way through reporting and note taking. Every day then in Haiti (and every day now) was filled with event. I was pushed and pulled from one thing to another, always exhausted, always underfed. For years, I couldn't figure out how to feed myself in Haiti.

And all the time, like a little gnawing anxiety, I was wondering what I should call this thing that, as I grew thinner and thinner, was growing fatter and fatter, into a sizable pile at the side of my Rocket. Whenever I looked up from my work, I could see the house gecko eating trails of ants. He wasn't hungry. The "kitchen" was behind me, old coffee sitting on the "counter" in a silver Italian espresso maker. There was nothing in the "fridge," a machine that must have dated from the 1960s and suffered frequent lapses for lack of electricity.

On Friday afternoons, drums outside my window announced dances or get-togethers or religious services. I'd be writing up my notes from the day, and the drums would get going, evening settling in, the smell of cooking charcoal burning, and then a rainstorm would come pounding down on us,

whipping the palms and the banana trees. I loved that moment because I was inside. The ceiling was tin and thunderous. I'd get up from my chair of labor and go stand at the window, watching the rain and wind make everything dance, including the garbage, as the waters turned the dribble of the canyon into a broad river carrying mango leaf and banana refuse and plastic and glass and bones.

One evening, standing there, watching another flood go by, I said to myself, ah: the rainy season. And then I said to myself, ah: *The Rainy Season*. And the title was born, and thus the feeling of the entire book.

Of course, the book wasn't about the rainy season or any particular rainy season. Its subtitle was *Haiti since Duvalier*, and it was about a time of doubt and struggle in the country, during which it rained in a way that was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It rained dramatically, unabashedly, violently, brilliantly, passionately. And the title seemed to express something I'd felt about Haiti: how the rains disoriented me the way the place did; because they and it were foreign to me, and not yet arranged in my mind to be known and navigable.

It always takes me time to come to a title. *Martyrs' Crossing* is my novel about an emergency faced by a Palestinian toddler and his mother at a checkpoint between Jerusalem and the occupied territories. I finished it before I had a title.

The working title (there's always a working title, or three . . .) was *Checkpoint*, but I felt that that made it sound like a thriller by Michael Crichton. Although it did have elements of a thriller, that title was too limiting and—worst sin of all for a title—promised something other than what the book delivered.

I offered my editor many possible titles for this book, titles I culled from the Old Testament (hey, I figured, it's a book about the actual holy land). But my editor was having none of it. I said to her, "Hemingway did it." She replied, in her tart way: "Are you Hemingway?"

I wasn't.

Then one night my husband, who had been a reporter in the Middle East while I was writing the book, said, "How about *Martyrs' Crossing*?" And I had that moment one can have, with a good title, where everything seemed to come to a stop, and it was clear that this was the title the book had been waiting for.

I tried to ignore the fact that it sounded, to my American ear, just a bit like a highway warning sign. Also: martyr is hard to spell. Also, I hate having any punctuation in my titles. But it seemed to me to sum up the problems raised and the story told in the book.

This was in the spring of 2001. It was in the early days of Amazon ratings for books, and I used to go on to Amazon to see what the book's number was and what people were saying about it. Then I thought, "Let's see if it appears anywhere else on the Internet," and I Googled the title. (Maybe I Internet Explored it . . . it was early days.)

After a few references to the book, another listing appeared. I clicked on that: It was a story about the infamous Israeli Army shooting, captured by French television, of twelve-year-old Mohammed al-Dura while in his father's arms at a checkpoint in Gaza the Israelis called Netzarim junction—and the Palestinians called Martyrs' Crossing. I remembered being so sad about this kid when he was killed, and feeling his connection to the boy in my novel; but I had no idea that he'd died at a crossing point that shared its name with my book. History made the title deeper, more political, and just plain better. Not that anyone knew the connection but me. Still, I knew it.

I can't give pointers for titles of books. It doesn't really work that way; it's all about inspiration and a feeling for the totality and broad meaning of the book. My most recent title, *Farewell, Fred Voodoo: A Letter from Haiti*, came to me as an inspiration. At the Monnin art gallery in Pétiön-Ville, just outside Port-au-Prince, I had seen a very moving and beautiful flag of the kind used in Vodou ceremonies, a huge green sequined thing with a forest god depicted on it, waving. As I stood before this sweet, friendly little god of Vodou, I was still in the middle of reporting my book, and writing it (I tend to do both simultaneously) and standing there in front of the flag, I thought of the early reference in my book to "Fred Voodoo," which was what British journalists used to call the Haitian man in the street, affectionately, but disparagingly, too. Outsiders should stop seeing Haitians as Fred Voodoos, was one of the points in the book. The book also, I'd started to notice, had begun to take on a kind of valedictory flavor, as I wandered the rubble-strewn streets of a city I had once known so well, notebook in hand, and contemplated what my life would be, would have been, could ever be, without Haiti.

Hello, the little Haitian god seemed to be saying with his wave. And bye-bye. Farewell, Fred Voodoo. So there was the title, in a flash. He welcomed me in and pushed me away; that was Haiti for me. If you ever see the book you'll notice that that little god is on the cover, waving to you, too.

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## Mom, My Editor, and Rolling Somewhere

Ted Conover  
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The search for a perfect title is, of course, collaborative. It's you and your editor, but it's also your best friends and the publisher's sales team. The search for the title of my first book, about riding freight trains with hoboes, lasted for months—for the entire time I wrote it. And the night I mailed it in—the typewritten manuscript, pre-computer—my mother had me to dinner in Denver. The good news: I was finished! The bad: except for the title.

Over dessert we brainstormed. I knew my ideas weren't working and soon she could see that I didn't like hers, either. "So tell me some titles of actual books that you *do* like," she said. (Dialogue here is reconstituted to the best of my ability.) I told her I liked the title of Jack London's story collection about hoboes, *The Road*. I liked *Hard Travelin'*, a biography of Woody Guthrie, and I liked a book of photos and interviews called *Riding the Rails*. Of all the books about hoboes I'd read, I said, getting distracted, the best was a collection of semi-autobiographical stories from the Great Depression by a man who had been homeless named Tom Kromer. I told Mom how the book was dedicated "to Jolene, who turned off the gas."

"What was the book called?" she asked.

"*Waiting for Nothing*," I answered. "Doesn't that say it all?"

The wheels were turning in Mom's head. "How about *Rolling Nowhere*?"

she suggested. It struck me as perfect—the railroad-specific version of *Waiting for Nothing*. I added the subtitle, *Riding the Rails with America's Hoboes*. Coffee was poured; such was my relief that it might have been champagne.

By the time the book came out, I was in graduate school in England. The Viking Press airmailed me two early copies. Holding that first book of mine in my hands was one of the highlights of my life, except . . . for the subtitle. The publisher had changed it from “Riding the Rails with America’s Hoboes” to “A Young Man’s Adventures Riding the Rails with America’s Hoboes.” I got on the phone to New York. “What’s with ‘A Young Man’s Adventures’?” I demanded. “That’s not what we agreed on.”

My editor, who otherwise had done a great job, sounded defensive. “We just thought that described it better,” she said. “You *were* young then.”

The book came out a year later as a Penguin Travel Library paperback. A few years after that it went out of print. But with the success of *Newjack*, Vintage Books, my new publisher, agreed to bring *Rolling Nowhere* back. That’s when I learned that you can sometimes change a subtitle. So for many years, the complete title has been what it was meant to be all along: *Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails with America’s Hoboes*.

*Coyotes* wasn’t my first choice for my second book, which recounts a year of travels with Mexican migrants; my first choice was *Mojado*, which means “wet” in Spanish. It was slang used jokingly by Mexicans themselves, which is why I liked it. But my editor put the kibosh on that. “How do you pronounce it? Mo-JAY-do?”

“Mo-HA-do,” I corrected him.

“Well, forget it. Books with foreign titles don’t sell.”

I don’t remember how we came up with *Coyote*, except that it had the benefit of being a word in English as well as Spanish. That it didn’t refer to the migrants but instead to the smugglers didn’t bother my editor, who thought it conveyed an atmosphere—and finally I agreed.

A few months before publication, he sent me the Vintage Books catalogue. There was my book, with an evocative photograph by Sebastião Salgado on the cover, and the word *coyotes*, plural, emblazoned across the top. Again I called New York. “What’s with *Coyotes*, plural?” I asked.

“Oh,” said my new editor. “It turns out that a novel is coming out at the same time from another house called *Coyote*. We added the ‘s’ so there wouldn’t be confusion.”

“Why didn’t *they* add an ‘s,’?” I demanded.

“Don’t worry, Ted—it’s basically the same,” he assured me.

My next book, about Aspen, was with the same editor. We agreed on that title, *Whiteout*, with its connotations of loss of perspective, of wintertime, and of cocaine. There were no surprises except for the first cover art he showed

me: a photo of two women in bikinis and fur coats standing near the Little Nell gondola. After my flat rejection, he sent another one, of a photo of a snow globe they had commissioned just for the occasion. Inside the globe was the title of my book, chiseled out of a snowy mountain. I was very happy.

*Newjack*, about my ten months as a New York State corrections officer, got its title from inmate slang for a rookie officer. That's an idea I like: a title derived from the argot of a subculture. My new editor and I agreed upon it immediately. The only problem it has ever caused: Occasionally a reader confuses it with the movie *Newjack City*.

I had a new editor again for my next book, about roads. We struggled and struggled until one day I blurted out the idea I'd been husbanding for a while but was afraid to say out loud. "How about *The Routes of Man*?" I said.

There was silence. "Did you just pull that out of your hat?" he asked.

No, I said—I'd had the idea for a while. But I was afraid it might sound sexist. He didn't think it did. And like me, he appreciated the echo of the classic photo book by Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man*, and the double-entendre with "roots of man." The only hitch with it has been that some people pronounce routes as "routs," and miss the double meaning. Ah well.

For my most recent book, which is about how to research and write the immersive nonfiction that I'm best known for, we considered the titles *In Deep*, *Inside*, *The Art of Immersion Writing*, and *The Deep End*. But after a long discussion over the phone, my editor and I agreed on *Going Deep*. As I hung up, I thought it might be a good idea to check online for books with that title. Already there was a memoir about football called *Going Deep*, as well as romance novels, gay and straight. So we moved the phrase to the subtitle, settling on a simple label for the title: *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep*.

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*Ted Conover is an author who combines anthropological and journalistic methods to research social groups. His research has led him to experiences such as riding freight railroads across the western United States and working as a corrections officer. Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing (2000), based on his time as a corrections officer, won the National Book Critics Circle Award in general nonfiction and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. He is the author of five other books and is a professor at New York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute.*





## Out in the World, Titles Find Me

Deborah Campbell  
University of British Columbia, Canada

One thing the experience of writing each of my books has in common is this: I remember exactly where I was when I found their titles.

In the first case, I was in the Middle East, conducting fieldwork, and writing at the same time. That day I was at a friend's apartment, working on the fourth or fifth chapter of a book that very nearly wrote itself. It took me three months to write, a rare state of grace I have never since recaptured. It was early evening, mid-autumn. The sun had set and I was working by lamplight. I had gone to look for a pair of scissors, for what purpose I have no recollection. I had just picked them up and turned back towards whatever task I had in mind when the title appeared, seeming to me to be as much a physical object as the scissors. *This Heated Place*. That was what I was writing about: the Israel-Palestine conflict, the view from the ground for those who lived it. I had just written a line that included that phrase: "Conflict is the leitmotif of this heated place." As a title it seemed both literary and quiet, like the book itself. It stuck, as did most of what I wrote in that first draft. The book was published, with that title, one year later, though at the time I had no inkling of its ever finding a publisher.

Second books are said to be the hardest to write. The next one took five years, not including a year and a half of fieldwork. The book is about the arrest of my fixer in Syria while I was with her, and my search for her. The numerous drafts stacked on the floor of my office attest to the effort it took for this book to coalesce: They reach well above my knees.

For the first several years the book had a title I loved. But as the book evolved, I found that the title required increasingly long explanations, since it no longer made sense to anyone but me. The book had outgrown that working title—but still, I wasn't prepared to abandon it. It had been with me each day of the journey, like the old grey sweater I wore in for years despite the elbows wearing through and the sleeves coming unraveled. That I don't wish to divulge it, despite queries from this journal's editors, illustrates how attached I remain—part of me maintains that I will use it for another work.

I remember the day the new title came. I was walking home from the university where I teach. It was mid-afternoon, and I was watching the trees signal the change of seasons. I wasn't thinking about writing, I was simply absorbed by the world around me, which is often when ideas come. As I was about to turn a

street corner, four words appeared: *A Disappearance in Damascus*.

A disappearance is an event that is at once action and mystery. It bespeaks narrative momentum, and a certain edge-of-your-seat suspense. There was a sense of drama to the title that reminded me of Gabriel García Márquez's nonfiction book, *News of a Kidnapping*, which a friend had given me when I confessed I was having trouble with my own book. The new title had what the original title lacked, or might have had before the book was written: a quality of inevitability.

Scarcely a single line in the book itself came with such ease. Writing, my second book taught me, is mainly work. But as you do the work, there are sometimes moments of serendipity, moments of grace.

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*Deborah Campbell is a writer who has published in eleven countries and six languages. Her literary journalism incorporates extensive fieldwork in places such as the Middle East, Russia, Cuba, and Mexico, and, she has won three National Magazine Awards. Her 2016 book, A Disappearance in Damascus: A Story of Friendship and Survival in the Shadow of War, won the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize, the largest literary award for nonfiction in Canada, and was selected as a New York Times Editors' Choice. She is a lecturer at the University of British Columbia, where she teaches creative nonfiction.*




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## This Menagerie of Titles

Pamela Newkirk  
New York University, United States

The title for my 2015 book, *Spectacle*, came to mind early in the process of researching the story of a young African who in 1906 was exhibited

in the Bronx Zoo monkey house. The title, I believed, not only captured the shocking exhibition in a world-class zoo of Ota Benga, the caged African boy, but also the ravenous public response. During the month of September 1906 nearly a quarter-million people flocked to the zoo to see Ota Benga, who was taunted and at times attacked by raucous crowds. The exhibition provoked sensationalized headlines across the country, including at the *New York Times*, where editors defended zoo officials against the handful of outraged critics. The spectacle set in stark relief the prevailing bigotry of the era and of the city's leading men of science and public affairs.

However, as we neared publication my editor was unhappy with the title. She argued that it was too vague and instead proposed one that indicated that the book was about a man who was exhibited in the zoo. Among the suggestions were: *Man in the Monkey House*, *Scandal in the Monkey House*, *An Unnatural Event in the Monkey House*, and *A Man amongst Monkeys*.

I countered that the book was not merely about the weeks Ota Benga spent at the zoo. The book explores his life and the racial attitudes embedded in science, history, and popular culture that culminated in his exploitation. I believed that the shameful episode was merely a microcosm of race during the era. For weeks we tossed around other titles and subtitles but none, to my mind, were as fitting as *Spectacle*. She finally relented and we agreed that a subtitle was needed to give readers a better sense of the contents. After weeks of brainstorming we agreed on "The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga," which evoked the stranger-than-fiction story of Ota Benga's remarkable life that went beyond his captivity at the zoo.

The working title for my first book was *The Color of News*, which examined how race overtly and covertly influences news coverage. The book more specifically explored the uphill battle of black journalists to integrate mainstream newsrooms and present more balanced portraits of black people. The book, based both on archival documents and interviews with more than one hundred journalists, took readers behind the scenes to uncover some of the contentious newsroom debates around race and news coverage.

I opened the first chapter with a quote by W. E. B. Du Bois that read: "Leaving, then, the world of the white man, I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls."<sup>6</sup> I thought the quote conveyed my aim to lift the veil on newsroom operations to tell the untold story of the battles waged by black journalists to more fairly depict black life.

My agent at the time honed in on the words "within the Veil" which she said could signal that the book was a behind-the-scenes look at race in the newsroom. The full title became *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*.

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*Pamela Newkirk is a professor of journalism and director of undergraduate studies at New York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute. *Spectacle: The Astonishing Life of Ota Benga* (2015), her latest book, won the NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, Nonfiction and the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Foundation Legacy Award. Her 2000 book, *Within the Veil: Black Journalists, White Media*, won the National Press Club's Arthur Rouse Award for Media Criticism. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from New York University and graduate degrees from Columbia University.*




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## The Title Keeps Him on Track

Michael Norman  
New York University, United States

Working a manuscript, I try to keep an eye out for a good working title, a word or phrase I can hang on the wall of my mind, reminding me that my job is to capture the essence and nature of the topic or the collection of characters I'm writing about.

You don't find such a title; it finds you. As I'm writing or sifting notes or reading for background, I'm subliminally asking myself, "What is this book about?" Then, when I have hundreds of answers to that question, most of them unsatisfactory, I narrow the question and ask: "What is this book *really* about?" And the answer to that should be the working title. Simple, right?

Of course not. A title should also be much more than a description of the book's contents or a statement of its theme. It should be a suggestion, a powerful prompt to readers that the well-crafted work of narrative nonfiction they have in front of them is also about the universe just beyond the book. It urges readers to look for more and think about more than what's in the pages.

All of this takes place in that private space where writers struggle through

the process of creating a book. It's a wonderful place, that space. Quiet, insulated against the rest of the world. Plenty of room for grand ideas, room to let the narrative mind wander until it happens upon the perfect title.

Then you finish the final polish and hand the manuscript to the publisher, and the wonderful place where you created the book is gone. The "book" becomes a "product." From the writing room to the factory floor. For me, the title has always represented a kind of tipping point between those two states of mind, or to put it in more scholarly terms, the two phenomena.

Every professional writer wants sales. Writers know that to help achieve those sales, their books should carry an intriguing, powerful, elliptical, punchy, shocking, salacious, clever, or otherwise engaging title. Sometimes that title is the working title, or a refinement thereof, and sometimes it's an editorial directive. Often it's a conflation of both.

Here are two examples of the effort to find a perfect title.

**M**y first book was a memoir, a look at my time serving as a young man in a Marine Corps combat unit in Vietnam. The title: *These Good Men*. I was wary of the title at first because, at the time, the Corps was using the advertising slogan, "We're looking for a few good men." But the phrase "good men" interested me. What did it mean? "Good," how? At killing people? There was no goodness on the battlefield. I was thinking of "good" in other, more philosophical terms. So I started reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>7</sup> Lo and behold, there was my "good": The feeling of comradeship that is as powerful as love. That's what the book was about. I simply added a demonstrative plural pronoun—short for "these particular men"—and *These Good Men: Friendships Forged from War* became the title. The subtitle, as I recall, was the publisher's. And I wasn't thrilled with it.

My aim is to avoid clichés and threadbare idiomatic expressions, easy titles I call them, and the subtitle *Friendships Forged from War* struck me as clichéd, wrong-headed, and melodramatic. Friendship does not, in any sense, arise from a blast furnace. And war is not a caldron. It's a funeral pyre. A broken metaphor all around. The only thing the subtitle had going for it was the alliteration. When all else fails, call for the cavalry of assonance and consonance.

I was an English poetry major in college, so I also thought about the poetics of the three words—the phonemes, the meter, the images. To me the substrata of music produced by the words in a title (or in any phrase or sentence, for that matter) can be as important as the meaning. The title is the reader's first encounter with the book, and it should have the power of a siren song, one that suggests the essence of the book and acts as a powerful invitation to engage it—which is to say, buy it.

A title can be a summary or coda or an elegant suggestion of what is to come. For me it was also a way to introduce the idea of many characters as well as a characterization of them as a group. I think a writer has to consider the conflation of purposes a title represents and explore the implications of the title for each of those purposes. Again, my first consideration was literary.

I came to my title early, which is to say as I was about to sit down and begin the manuscript. If the title reflects all or most of the themes in the book (conflation without confusion), it helps to keep me on track. It's like standing on a precipice for a moment, surveying the full landscape of the book just before you sit down to write.

I work hard to come up with a title early, rather than let the publisher begin the process of the title search. On my second book, a co-writer and I spent months wrangling with our editor, going through hundreds of titles; yes, hundreds. And here's the kicker: The title we ended up with (*Tears in the Darkness*) was the very first title we had proposed.

**T**he book is a cross-cultural look at America's first land battle in World War II, a battle that turned out to be the largest defeat in American military history. The book took on the myths of war and tried to unmask them. (*Tears in the Darkness*, by the way, came from one of the hundreds of interviews we did for the book, a war book with a shifting point of view.) One Japanese character, describing his commander's reaction to mass casualties, used the word *anrui*. Japanese expressions often have literal and figurative meanings that serve as complements. In this case, the idiom of *anrui* was "a broken heart," but the literal translation was hidden or unseen tears, hence *Tears in the Darkness*.

Not perfect, but it works.

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## No More Body Parts

Madeleine Blais

University of Massachusetts Amherst, United States

In writing, everything counts, and even something as inherently short and seemingly inconsequential as a title requires heavy lifting. It is often the final order of business, finding a title that works, ideally on more than one level, functioning as a metaphor and a mini poem. Titles are the first selling tool for a book and, as such, the publisher retains veto power, often just as well because authors are sometimes too close to the material to pick a snappy title on their own. The original title for Anita Shreve's novel *The Weight of Water* was the less lilted *Silence at Smuttynose*.<sup>8</sup>

Examples of titles that work, from fiction and memoir, include *A Girl's Guide to Hunting and Fishing* and *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, thanks to their sass and their originality. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* shakes up the gene pool of our expectations. Variations have followed, such as *Lipstick Jihad* and *The Kabul Beauty School*. *Running with Scissors* has brilliant generic quality; it applies to any childhood narrative filled with risk and danger. Mary Karr's memoir, *Lit*, works on three levels, describing the author when she was drunk, describing her as she sought spiritual insight, and as shorthand for the business at hand: literature.

Often, one well-chosen word can do the trick. *Atonement*. *Waiting*. *Prep*. *Monkeys*. *Lucky*. *Saturday*.

How about *Jaws*? Peter Benchley had been mulling the idea of a shark terrorizing a resort community for years, carrying in his wallet a newspaper clipping about a 4,500-pound shark that had been captured off the coast of Long Island in 1964 to prove to any potential publishers that the story was not so preposterous: It had an antecedent in the world of fact. He kept a running list of possible titles, each more clunky than the next, including *The Edge of Gloom*, *Leviathan Rising*, and *Tiburón*. He also envisioned *Jaws of . . . Despair*, *Anguish*, *Terror* (take your pick), shortening it at the last minute to the one-word wonder by which the book (and the movie) became world famous.<sup>9</sup>

Among my favorite student-generated titles is that of a memoir written by a young man about the struggle to acknowledge his sexual orientation. For years he struggled to articulate out loud the simple sentence, "Mom, I am gay," feeling that until he did he could not move forward in his life. His title: *Four Words*. Another title, about a father who was always on his way out the door: *Going, Going, Gone*. An older returning student wrote about how as a child in the sixties in an African-American community in Boston, hers



was the only family to go on camping trips. Everyone else she knew traveled by train or by car to see relations in the South or in Chicago or Harlem, but her father loved his pop-up camper and all the equipment it entailed and for weeks before they left each summer, he fussed over his lanterns and his mess kits and his two-burner grill stove, much to the amusement of neighbors who took borrowed pleasure in the tableau and saw his enthusiasm as an annual marker in their lives as well as his. Every year when the family set forth, with fewer and fewer black people in sight until finally there were none, the student remembered being befuddled by the road signs as she traveled north to New Hampshire, especially one sign in particular.

Why did her father keep speeding by it? Why didn't he get in trouble?  
The title of her memoir: *No Passing*.

As for my books, the title of my collection of journalism, *The Heart Is an Instrument*, came from one of my subjects, Tennessee Williams, who said to me during a series of interviews over three days in Key West in February of 1979:

I used to be kind, gentle. Now I hear terrible things, and I don't care. Oh, objectively, I care, but I can't feel anything. Here's a story. I was in California recently and a friend of mine had a stroke. He is paralyzed on the right side and on the left side and he has brain cancer. Someone asked me how he was doing and I explained all this and the person said, "But otherwise is he all right?" I said, "What do you want? A coroner's report?" I never used to react harshly, but I feel continually assaulted by tragedy. I can't go past the fact of the tragedy; I cannot comprehend these things emotionally. I cannot understand my friend who is sick in California and who loved life so much he is willing to live it on any terms.

Sometimes I dream about getting away from things, recovering myself from the continual shocks. People are dying all around you and I feel almost anesthetized, feel like a zombie. I fear an induration, and the heart is, after all, part of your instrument as a writer. If your heart fails you, you begin to write cynically, harshly. I would like to get away to some quiet place with some nice person and recover my goodness.<sup>10</sup>

The title *In These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle* was also inspired by a writer, Emily Dickinson, the poet who lived in Amherst, Massachusetts, the setting of the high school basketball team whose championship season I covered. Her famous poem claims "hope is the thing with feathers,"<sup>11</sup> though Woody Allen has a joke about that thing with feathers is his nephew in Zurich who thinks he is a bird.<sup>12</sup> I, obviously, had my own definition.

For *Uphill Walkers*, a family memoir, I had two goals—to avoid body parts ("heart," "muscle") and to be less verbose. As children, we walked to school (not very far, definitely wearing shoes). We were designated, on the way home,

as part of the uphill patrol. Given my family's slow trudge upward after receiving a devastating blow (my father died suddenly leaving my mother with five children, eight and under and one on the way), the trajectory seemed to mirror our fate. In our hometown we were the mysterious Other—the frequent target of whispered conjecture, “How do they manage, after all?”

**M**y most recent memoir is about the loss of a beloved summerhouse on Martha's Vineyard, hardly the stuff of tragedy. And yet when it came time to part with this ramshackle dwelling surrounded by water (“blue gold” in realtor's parlance) I was filled with that deluge of mixed emotions that signals something worth writing about. The book, published on July 4, 2017, contains the following passage:

The new owners could of course imagine their own future happiness, but they could not see, and therefore could not appreciate, the human history preceding the purchase, all the lives that grazed ours and the ones that truly intersected, the noisy arrivals and departures, the arguments and the recipes, the ghosts and the guests, crabs caught and birthdays celebrated, clams shucked, towels shaken, lures assembled, bonfires lit, the dogs we indulged, the ticks we cursed, the pies we consumed, and, through it all, both close by and in the distance, the moving waters (as a poet put it) at their priest-like task. They could not see the depth of the life lived here during the summer for all those years.<sup>13</sup>

The title, *To the New Owners*, comes from that excerpt. I must confess, to my amazement: Everyone connected to publishing who hears the title claims to love it. Why? I don't know. I do know that my son said if he had written the book it would have been called *Not for Sale* and the entire text would have consisted of two words, “The End.”

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*Madeleine Blais is a professor of journalism at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she teaches memoir, journalism literature, and nonfiction writing. Her 1995 book, In These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle, was a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist in nonfiction. She is also the author of The Heart Is an Instrument: Portraits in Journalism (1992), and Uphill Walkers: Memoir of a Family (2001). She holds a bachelor's degree from the College of New Rochelle (1969) and a Master's from the School of Journalism at Columbia University (1970).*



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “24 Classic Books’ Original Titles.”

<sup>2</sup> Haldeman-Julius, “The Hospital,” 139.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 140–41.

<sup>4</sup> Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, title page, reproduced in Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Keymer and Kelly, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ferriss, *The 4-Hour Work Week*.

<sup>6</sup> Du Bois, “The Forethought,” v.

<sup>7</sup> Thomson, trans. *Ethics of Aristotle*.

<sup>8</sup> Shreve, "The Weight of Water."

<sup>9</sup> Gilliam, "Peter Benchley: The Father of *Jaws* and Other Tales of the Deep."

<sup>10</sup> Tennessee Williams, as quoted by Blais, "Tennessee Williams in Key West," para. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Dickinson, "'Hope' is the Thing with Feathers," 116.

<sup>12</sup> Allen, *Without Feathers*.

<sup>13</sup> Blais, *To the New Owners*, 18.

# Book Reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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Journalist-academic Roberto Herrscher. Photo by Miguel Fernández.

## A Global Context for the Weapons of Storytelling

*Periodismo narrativo: cómo contar la realidad con las armas de la literatura*

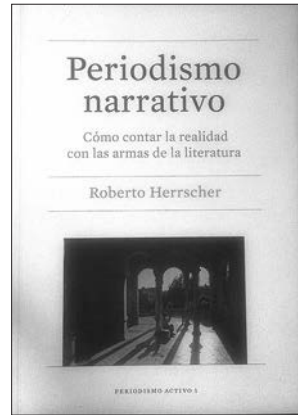
by Roberto Herrscher. Providencia, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Finis Terrae, 2016. Paperback, 636 pp., \$27.99.

Reviewed by Isabel Soares, CAPP, ISCSP, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Telling real stories. This is how Roberto Herrscher summarizes literary journalism in his book *Periodismo narrativo: cómo contar la realidad con las armas de la literatura* (2016), literally meaning Narrative Journalism: How to Tell the Truth with the Weapons of Literature, a Chilean edition of a book he first published with the University of Barcelona in 2009.

It is also through storytelling, his own personal life stories, that Herrscher, both a journalist and a journalism educator, starts positing a theory of literary journalism. His life stories, whether as a soldier during the Falklands War in 1982 or as a traveller crossing the border from his native Argentina to Chile with his fiancée, are examples of an “I” that writes about personal experience as a way towards both self-discovery and the discovery of the “Other” with whom the “I” engages. Such is also, according to Herrscher, the purpose of literary journalism, here called “narrative journalism,” the favored expression in the Spanish-speaking world. To Herrscher, literary journalism is the “theatre of reality” (48). It is the crossing of a threshold separating a source-only based journalism from a journalism of scenes and characters. As he writes: “To go from the sources to the characters and from the statements to the almost theatrical scenes where people tell things is to step into the world of literary journalism” (49). (My translation. Original: “Pasar de las fuentes a los personajes y de las declaraciones a las escenas casi teatrales donde la gente se cuenta cosas es entrar en el mundo del periodismo narrativo.”) It is not, of course, going from fact to fiction because literary journalism is nothing but reality.

Being a book about the guiding principles of literary journalism, Herrscher’s *Periodismo Narrativo* was written as a sort of manual for his students. There are many manuals regarding literary journalism but Herrscher’s is not the usual kind, where one can find easy recipes and unchallenged theories. The book is divided into two main sections: one provides definitions and a body of theory on the genre, and the other illustrates literary journalism at work. In this latter section, Herrscher provides a happy blend of English-speaking literary journalists with Spanish-speaking ones. Regarding English speakers he spotlights work by practitioners such as the inescapa-





ble Gay Talese, Joseph Mitchell, George Orwell, Truman Capote, and John Hersey. From the Spanish-language world, he focuses on Josep Pla, Alma Guillermoprieto, Gabriel García Márquez (another inescapable), and Javier Cercas. Outside those linguistic borders, Herrscher includes Günter Wallraff and Ryszard Kapuściński, the inescapables of, respectively, German and Polish.

Two features, however, are worthy of mention for giving *Periodismo Narrativo* its standout characteristics. Because literary journalism is journalism, Herrscher deconstructs the (in)famous 5W1H and meticulously explains what each one brings to the genre and why each one is so different in literary journalism as opposed to conventional, faster journalism. We can focus on the “where” just for the indulgence of example. “Where” is probably one of the least rated Ws of journalism. News happens in a certain place and that is basically it. Not quite so for literary journalism. As Herrscher argues when contrasting conventional versus literary journalisms:

Once we get to be sure of where things happen, in the most cases we have a succession of words that do not mean much to the reader. A geographic place, a city, a street. . . . What does that mean? Then is when the weapons of fiction intervene in literary journalism. . . . Description, dialogue, the narration of events that locate not just the geographic place but also the cultural, the economic, the historical, the psychological place in which the action takes place make the reader have the feeling of “I was there.” (76) (My translation.)

Original:

Una vez que llegamos a contestar con certeza dónde suceden las cosas, en la mayoría de los casos tenemos una sucesión de palabras que no significan mucho para el lector. Un sitio, una calle . . . ¿Qué significa eso? Ahí intervienen en periodismo narrativo las armas que nos proporciona la ficción. . . . La descripción, el diálogo, la narración de eventos que nos ubican en el sitio geográfico pero también económico, histórico, mental en que sucede la acción, hacen que el lector sienta ‘estuvo ahí.’”

Different people apprehend geography in different ways; it is always more than mere topography or physical space. Literary journalism apprehends geography from multiple perspectives so as to better convey the meaning of the true “place” to the reader.

The other instance in which Herrscher is innovative in presenting an outline of literary journalism is by alluding to the gospels. It seems a little bewildering at first but Herrscher makes a case that the history of Jesus has been told by four different voices and it is this multiplicity that allows for a more detailed picture of the life of the Son of Man. Literary journalism is just another voice looking at reality and contributing to broadening our understanding of reality. For Herrscher, Matthew’s gospel is written as though the evangelist were the advocate of Jesus. He presents facts, figures, names, and lists. He is descriptive, not narrative. Literary journalism should present facts but avoid excess description so as to not bore the reader. Luke is like a historian. He is writing for an audience that already knows the topic but he is presenting a newer, presumably better, version of events. He writes almost academically, carries out a lot of research, and even enunciates the purpose of his narrative:

to add more validity and certainty to the facts. Literary journalism should be wary of such immaculate certainty. John is a poet who directly from the heart writes of his love and admiration for his subject. Lyricism, however, is not the best path for literary journalism to follow. Albeit resorting to literary devices, literary journalism tells us what the journalist sees, not what his heart felt. Finally, there's Mark. And Mark is the reporter. He does not start at the beginning of the narrative. He begins his gospel on the banks of the river Jordan, where John the Baptist is preparing for the Messiah. He creates a scene that he knows will have impact, taking us to the pivotal moment when Jesus entered history to change the world. After this opening he rewinds the narrative back to Jesus' birth, and Mark then continuously arouses the reader's interest as he recounts the various events that happened along the way. To Herrscher, this is the quality of literary journalism: to instill in the reader the desire to know more. Mark depicted a real man and told a real story, which is a trademark of literary journalism. By focusing on the lives of real people literary journalists create empathy with an audience composed of real people.

Herrscher's *Periodismo Narrativo* reads like an unusual manual of literary journalism that constantly piques our curiosity about the genre and takes us deep into the soul of literary journalism where the truth refuses to wear the corset of the Truth. That Spanish-speaking literary journalism is presented alongside international literary journalism is also a cause to praise Herrscher's book in giving readers a broader, borderless image of this genre.

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## Digital Narrative Takes Atavistic Turn

*Love and Ruin: Tales of Obsession, Danger, and Heartbreak from the Atavist Magazine.* Edited by Evan Ratliff. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016. Paperback, 352 pp., \$16.95.

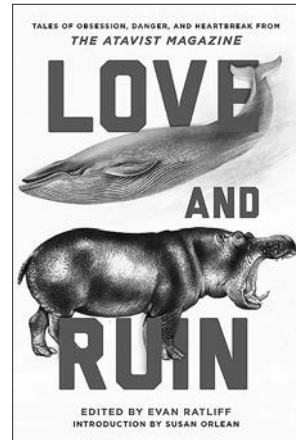
Reviewed by Kate McQueen, Independent Scholar, Los Gatos, United States

It was 2009, and from barstools all along Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue, writer Evan Ratliff, editor Nicholas Thompson, and programmer Jefferson Rabb pondered the future of traditional narrative journalism. Digital publications and online consumption leaned increasingly in favor of the short and the simplified. "At the time," Ratliff writes in the foreword to *Love and Ruin*, "telling serious stories digitally was considered quixotic at best and utterly futile at worst" (ix). The three agreed that the internet's infinite space must have room for the deeper dive as long as such stories were "compelling enough to capture readers in the digital age" (ix). If only someone would design a software platform that made the online telling, and reading, of "long form" enjoyable.

Two years later Ratliff, Thompson, and Rabb turned that *Schnappsideoe* into Atavist, a successful hybrid venture that offers to subscribers a digital publishing platform and a digital magazine of the same name. Don't let that name fool you. Though the *Atavist* magazine originally saw its mission as a kind of reversion, it in fact deserves credit as a trailblazer of multimedia literary journalism. Over the last five years, it has been nominated for nine National Magazine Awards (winning one in 2015) and two Emmys, and attracts a steady stream of story submissions from literary journalism's rising stars. And now, more than fifty issues in, the magazine has undertaken another atavistic turn: a print anthology.

*Love and Ruin* offers only a small showcase of the content available on the Atavist website—ten lengthy, rich, and engaging pieces of narrative nonfiction by writers who may be familiar to regular readers of the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine* and *National Geographic*. The collection's range stretches beyond standard journalistic boundaries, from true crime and historical narratives to what we might call reported personal essays. Its style and content are eclectic, a product of what Susan Orlean in her introduction to the book characterizes as "magpie journalism," stories "glimpsed and then grabbed and shaken until they unfurled, stories that many other writers might not have noticed at all" (xiv–xv).

One great example is "American Hippopotamus," a preposterous tale of two enemy spies who briefly join forces in an effort to promote hippopotamuses as an alternate food



source in early twentieth-century America. The process of extracting this well-hidden story from archives scattered about the United States was undoubtedly arduous but author Jon Mooallem's light and lively narration gives none of that away. It is a pure joy to read.

In addition, there are long cons and lonely hearts, an attempted casino heist, a shipwreck, and a modern-day leper colony in Hawaii, parents behaving badly, lovers torn apart by war. If anything unifies this jumbled assortment, it is an emphasis on narrative. These are largely plot-driven tales, with plenty of swashbuckle, intrigue, and heartache. No profiles, no think pieces. It will come as no surprise that a few have already been optioned for television and film projects.

Collections of journalism play an essential role in sustaining knowledge of this essentially ephemeral form. Teachers, scholars, and general enthusiasts of journalism, we all lean heavily on such books, and *Love and Ruin* certainly deserves a place on the shelves alongside other publication-based collections, like those produced by the *New Yorker* and *Esquire*. Still, it's hard not to notice the irony of producing a print anthology for a digital publication. Ratliff, who edited the collection, admits as much in the book's foreword, though his only explanation is that such stories "are naturally at home in print, the medium that originally inspired us to create them" (xi).

It's true that some pieces don't suffer much in their adaptation to the printed page. David Dobb's account of the hunt for his deceased mother's long-lost love, aptly titled "My Mother's Lover," for instance, is so evocatively written that a reader hardly needs the accompanying photographs and letters. But Leslie Jameson's piece is at somewhat of a loss without its audio component. "Fifty-two Blue" tells the story of a mysterious blue whale, whose high-pitched call, measured at an unprecedented fifty-two hertz, moved a cult-like following to identify with what they dubbed "the loneliest whale in the world." Jameson's story is inherently aural. Her enormous talent can't capture in words the haunting quality of that whale song. The quoted fans of Fifty-two Blue don't fare any better; the tremor of emotion in enthusiast Leonora's voice conveys more about the meaning she finds in the whale's call than her actual words ever could. The thrill of reading a story like this in a multimedia context is gaining access to such voice recordings. They amplify the whole point of the piece, the deep desire humans have to find meaning in and connect with the world around them.

As a book of text exclusively, *Love and Ruin* does little justice to the dynamism of the magazine's multimedia work. In comparing the book's content to the original online issues, I did wonder who this volume is for. It's hard to imagine a current audience that does not have access to the internet, and through it the ability to enjoy these pieces in their fullest state. The strongest candidates are libraries and their future users. Digital-to-print adaptations are arguably an exercise in legacy building. Until we have a better way to preserve content if a digital magazine were to cease, print remains the best holding device, even if that means letting go of developing multimedia storytelling aesthetics. University libraries should by all means buy a copy of this book. All others—teachers, students, scholars, and pleasure readers of literary journalism—would be better served by subscribing to the magazine, which provides one original story per month in its intended multimedia form, access to the full *Atavist* archive, and the pleasure of providing continuing support to an innovative publication.

## Hunter, Up Close and Personal

*Stories I Tell Myself: Growing Up with Hunter S. Thompson*

by Juan F. Thompson. New York: Knopf, 2016. Hardcover, 288 pp., \$26.95.

Reviewed by Ashlee Nelson, Victoria University, New Zealand

If you've read Hunter S. Thompson—any Hunter S. Thompson, really—then to some extent you know him. That is, you've gotten to know a carefully crafted, occasionally semi-fictionalized, exaggerated version of him. That is, as (auto)biography seen through the lens of a journalist who was a masterful storyteller and an author who was also his own character.

In Juan F. Thompson's memoir, *Stories I Tell Myself: Growing Up with Hunter S. Thompson*, we get a view of Thompson unlike any seen before. Juan is, of course, Hunter's son. (To avoid confusion, I refer to author Juan F. Thompson as "Juan" and subject Hunter S. Thompson as "Hunter," or occasionally "Hunter Thompson.") Juan states clearly at the beginning that this "is a memoir, not a biography," and "a highly subjective and unreliable memoir" at that (xi). Yet, in addition to being a well-written, thoughtful, and gripping memoir, it is the exclusivity of Juan's perspective, being Hunter's only child, that makes this book invaluable for Hunter Thompson scholars. This achievement is secondary to Juan's goal; his primary objective is to portray as honestly as possible his relationship with his father (xii). I'll admit to a slight twinge of apprehension reading the references in Juan's introduction to the volatility of that relationship. As a Hunter Thompson scholar, I knew he had had a chaotic and fractured relationship with his son. But it is one thing to know that as an abstract fact, or a detail gleaned from his writing, and another to be confronted with the lived-in emotional fallout.

Perhaps what saves Juan's tale from being an entirely dark narrative is the redemption that we sense is to come. He does not wait until the end to tell us how important his reconciliation with his father was to him. Instead, he foreshadows it throughout the text, and his love for his father is manifest. Despite Hunter's mayhem, Juan views his Woody Creek, Colorado home as "a place of comfort to return to, in spite of everything that happened inside that house, even long after I moved out, even now" (39).

Which isn't to say this book is not occasionally an uncomfortable read. In particular, Juan's analysis of Hunter's anger gives a disturbing twist to our understanding of Hunter Thompson as master of words:

Fully appreciating the power of the right word, he never called it a spanking or even a whipping. He always called it a Beating, with its implication of severe pain. A



Beating implies the overwhelming physical dominance of one person over another, with no mercy and no restraint, in which the victim is bloody, broken, utterly vanquished, and pathetic. (47)

That Juan assures us that his father never actually beat him (48) is small comfort compared to the implicit cruelty lying behind the selection of just the right word to instil optimum fear. Insults like “You stupid waterhead bastard!” (46) may be amusing in Hunter’s Gonzo writing, but not when lobbed at his own son. There is a line early on that summarizes the dichotomy between the cruel beast of the young boy’s memories, and the loved father recalled by the grown man, post-reconciliation:

I don’t know what he wanted. And yet, it’s so terribly important to me to believe that I didn’t let him down. He’s dead, I’m in middle age, and it’s still very important. Will there be a time when I can say it doesn’t matter what my father thought of me? I don’t think so, not today. (80–81)

Though Juan does not hold back on the nightmarish quality of some encounters, he does not demonize or vilify his father. There are plenty of softer moments, particularly in Hunter’s awkward attempts to demonstrate his love for his son, and in his doting love for his grandson. These vignettes humanize Hunter in a quiet way that offers a significant modification to his larger-than-life nature that has colored perceptions of much of his writing.

If this were a work of fiction, the downside to *Stories I Tell Myself* would lie in the disjointed characterization of Hunter. On the one side, he is the lauded and brilliant writer, a keen observer of humanity and the world, obviously deeply proud of his son if awkward in showing it. On the other, he is the brute, the villain, and the drunk (and a mean one), who picks fights and is cruel and spiteful. This duality in Hunter’s nature is not always clearly drawn, so an observation of one side of Hunter often contradicts the other. But this is not a work of fiction, and the disjointed characterization is due not to a lack of skill on Juan’s part, but to the imperfect nature of memory, the complicated feelings of a son towards a father he struggled to understand, and the complex nature of Hunter himself. And if, further along, this back and forth creates a tension that grates, Juan has succeeded in capturing the experience of living with his father’s unpredictable nature.

The book’s latter section, after the reconciliation of father and son begins in earnest, brings a different kind of discomfort. It is not long after Juan’s public forgiveness of Hunter—at the 1996 Hunter S. Thompson celebration in Louisville, Kentucky—that the book shifts to Hunter’s prolonged physical decline. His hip replacement surgery, his back surgery, the long-term effects of a lifetime of constant smoking, drinking, and drug-taking all eventually lead, inevitably, to Hunter’s suicide and funeral. These facts are well known, but are painfully rendered through the eyes of the son who had only recently had his father returned to him. There is a difference between knowing that Hunter’s failing health contributed to his decision to end his life and reading an intimate portrayal of what that failing health meant in day-to-day reality. The night before Hunter’s suicide, there is a moment when his grandson, Will, asks if Hunter knows the difference between suicide and murder: “Hunter said, ‘What?’ Will said,

‘Suicide is self-kill.’ Hunter said, ‘That is exactly right.’ Will went on to explain how a forensic investigator could tell if a death was a murder or a suicide based on the trajectory of the bullet” (242). It was at this point that I had to put down the book for a bit.

References to Hunter’s work abound. There is Juan’s lovely touch of littering his chapters with a slew of subtitles, the way that Hunter did in many of his books and articles. Likewise, the stylized form of the acknowledgments, done, as Hunter did, as an “Honor Roll,” Juan dedicates to an intention to “continue that tradition” (273). After the first, each chapter begins with a “HST TIMELINE,” giving the corresponding professional movements and publications of Hunter Thompson, a nice detail for scholars and fans, as well as a technique that mirrors the key moments of the dichotomous roles of Hunter Thompson Professional Journalist and Hunter Thompson Volatile Father of Juan.

In additional, the book provides an excellent selection of photographs, from personal family shots—one, involving Ralph Steadman and Juan, is captioned “Uncle Ralph (Steadman) preparing to crush my skull with a rock . . .” (35)—to candid images of Hunter with some of his Honor Roll, luminaries such as Oscar Zeta Acosta and George McGovern (25, 31). There are also a few letters pulled from the Hunter Thompson archives that have not been published in previous collections. One of the longest and most personally revealing is from Hunter to Juan upon Juan’s leaving Woody Creek to go to university in Boston (110–112). Here, Hunter is openly sentimental: “I’m glad you came home for a while, + I wish it could have been longer. I had a good time—and as always, was proud of you” (111), and, “You’re a good person, and I love you for that as much as because you’re my son” (112). Of the letter’s importance, Juan astutely observes: “Sometimes apparently ordinary events or objects encapsulate vast realities” (112). The letter’s inclusion should tantalize scholars, as it adds another piece to Hunter Thompson’s already multifaceted character. It shows how acutely aware he was of the performative aspects of his Gonzo persona: of his next work project, he writes, “It will live or die on the dialogue—+ for that I will have to get re-acquainted with my own sense of humor” (111–12).

Regarding style, Juan is not the writer his father was. In his working life he is an IT professional, not a literary journalist. Nonetheless, he does a commendable job of capturing the times and places of life with his father. It is not literary journalism, but it is literary: “With the lights off in the pool room, at three a.m., at the top of a valley in Woody Creek, far from any city, the Milky Way stood out clearly and immediately. There were so many stars that it was difficult to pick out the familiar constellations among the myriad dots of light” (203).

*In Stories I Tell Myself*, non-Hunter Thompson scholars may find plenty of mid-twentieth century cultural perspectives to think about, as well as insights into the nuances of complicated relations between sons and fathers. However, Hunter Thompson scholars do need to read this book. It is not as if there are revolutionary new truths about Hunter Thompson contained in it, and readers should not take Juan’s version of his father as definitive. But for a man whose identity was built out of the pages of his own works, Juan’s memoir offers a new Hunter Thompson persona to consider: The Kemps (Paul and Welburn) of his fiction, the Hunter S. Thompson of his reportage, the Raoul Duke of his Gonzo writing, and now Hunter the prodigal father.



## The Limits of Memory, the Vicissitudes of Truth

*Kept Secret: The Half-Truth in Nonfiction*

edited by Jen Hirt and Tina Mitchell. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017. Paperback, 193 pp., \$29.95.

Reviewed by Susan E. Swanberg, University of Arizona, United States

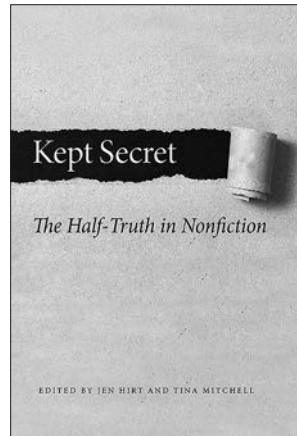
The essays compiled in *Kept Secret: The Half-Truth in Nonfiction*, edited by Penn State Harrisburg assistant professor Jen Hirt and University of Louisiana adjunct instructor Tina Mitchell, inhabit a land bounded on one side by the limits of recall and on the other by the confines of truth. At the heart of each essay resides a secret—concealed or revealed, hoarded or shared. The author interviews, incorporated within the anthology, frequently unmask the writers' hidden impulses. The result is a compendium you'll want to visit and revisit, reading first to uncover the mysteries at the surface and then to discern the enigmas below.

The anthology opens with "Maybe It Happened," Jo Ann Beard's account of an indolent summer afternoon. A young girl (likely the author) and her older, more worldly cousins play outside while the children's mothers share a cigarette and (perhaps) a bottle of liquor in the kitchen. A phone call interrupts the day. But then again, maybe it didn't, taunts the writer.

The narrative's fine, journalistic detail—the "pop-bead wardrobe," the "vat of hair dye," and the "pink Melmac cups that would outlast all the people in this story, and all the people reading this story"—suggest that the events really occurred. To paraphrase essayist Sarah Gorham, the greater the detail a story includes, the less likely that story is to crumble. Punctuated with conditional language (words like "perhaps," "likely" and "possible") the essay leaves the reader suitably puzzled and asking, "What just happened?"

In her interview, Beard reveals that James Frey, his fabricated memoir, and his shaming were much on her mind when she wrote the essay. Beard's interview does not bare all the piece's secrets, but does expose Beard's inner disquiet regarding the ethical boundaries of nonfiction writing, one of the overarching themes of the anthology.

"Tolstoy pointed out that immediately after a battle there are as many remembered versions of it as there have been participants," wrote John Hersey in his 1980 *Yale Review* article, "The Legend on the License." The essays in *Kept Secret* acknowledge the vagaries of reality and the sometimes precarious relationship between truth and memoir.





Neuroscience tells us that memory is not a blank slate on which one's personal history is indelibly recorded, to be called forth in precise detail at a later date. To the contrary, memories are encoded and consolidated fitfully—with biological taglines, footnotes and asterisks added to each incident, affair, or episode—particularly when the event arouses strong emotion.

Recall rebuilds a memory, but that memory does not necessarily match the raw input. No matter how faithfully a writer desires to honor the truth, personal memories can hijack realities past, emphasizing some facts and minimizing others. We are more likely to remember the gun in our face than the color of the assailant's eyes, but did eye color really matter? It depends . . .

In "My Father's Secrets," Ron Tanner probes the life of his deceased father—a man who lived and worked for a time at the top-secret military installation on the isolated island of Kwajalein. Amazed by his father's stoic attitude and puzzled by his father's many "impenetrable" secrets, Tanner explains that his essay was an attempt "to put some order to this jumble of fragments," including the jumble of emotions that he felt or couldn't feel about his father's death. Struggling to reassemble an image of his father from scant memories, Tanner shares in his interview that "[w]e hold secrets at our peril."

Samuel Autman's explosively personal essay, "Invisible Nails," is a wrenching account of the author's battle to discover his authentic self. No longer trapped within the box of shame imposed by a faith that sanctioned a particularly virulent form of conversion therapy, Autman shares his past agonies in excruciating detail, revealing how he removed each painful "nail"—false friendship, self denunciation, broken trust.

"Leaving Duck Creek," written by Mary Clearman Blew, describes a world that exists only in memory, except for the remnants of an old country school. Like recollection—stable in some places, weak in others—by the time Blew revisited the defunct Duck Creek School many years later it had "tilted off its foundation with its desks still bolted to its hardwood floor and a clutter of forgotten primers and workbooks discarded in the chaff." In the essay, Blew recounts her experiences as a precocious child attending an old-fashioned rural school along with her sister and an eccentric array of schoolmates taught by an unstable teacher.

Noted in Blew's essay and in her interview is the fact that she wrote and published a fictionalized version of "Duck Creek." In "Forby and the Mayan Maidens," published in the *Georgia Review*, Blew substituted a male protagonist (also permanently scarred by a peculiar and stultifying rural education) for herself. Blew's two renditions of Duck Creek School share locale, characters, and even dialog, yet the fictionalized version steepens the angles of guilt, remorse, and denial flowing from the deeds to which Blew alluded in "Leaving Duck Creek." Read together, the essay and the fictionalized account reveal trade secrets of an author who successfully navigates nonfiction and fiction, truth and half-truth.

Many *Kept Secret* authors pepper their narratives with tangible landmarks—clues like breadcrumbs that a curious reader will be tempted to follow, hoping to authenticate and grasp each writer's personal truth. Follow the breadcrumbs and you will find online images of Tara Parson's 9/11 airplane monotypes, the history of Kwajalein or

a photo that purports to show “the old Duck Creek School.”

Sarah Gorham’s “On Lying” is a fitting bookend for the collection. “I confess,” Gorham announces at the onset, introducing an elaborate lie concerning the death of her putative great-uncle Max, a lie Gorham (possibly) used to excuse her daughter from a day of school. The essay presents a series of scenarios—all illustrating the nature and significance of lying, whether it is to protect the self from punishment or from the truth about the self’s reality.

What the writer is doing when shaping a story’s truth, advises Gorham, “. . . is no different from memory itself, which edits out most of life. . . . Don’t feel like you must honor the facts unless you plan to turn the essay into a textbook for ultrasound technicians.”

Whether it’s the videotaped assault of a beloved-yet-imperfect brother, the destructive undertow of conversion therapy, or Amy E. Robillard’s discovery that she and her elderly mother shared (without sharing) the grief and loss occasioned by their separate secrets, these essays dwell on the fear and apprehension inevitably aroused whether the truth is concealed or revealed.

The interviewers’ well-posed questions reveal how each author negotiated nonfiction’s ethical tightrope in a creative and authentic manner to produce an essay that is both compelling and illuminating. There might not be a role for half-truth in conventional journalism or some other forms of nonfiction, but there certainly is a place for inspired renditions of the truth (as opposed to mere fabrication) in creative nonfiction. *Kept Secret: The Half-Truth in Nonfiction* celebrates the veracity of this assertion.

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## A Long Journey from Darkness to Light

*The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland*

by Dan Barry. New York: HarperCollins, 2016. Paperback, 340 pp., \$15.99.

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

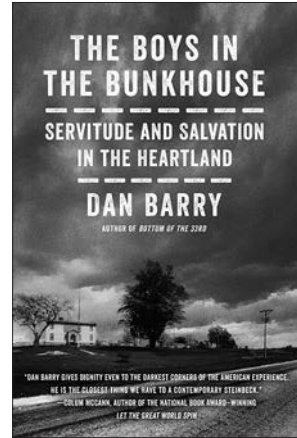
*New York Times* writer Dan Barry's first telling of the story of the Bunkhouse Boys—not "boys" at all but grown men of various ages with mental disabilities—was an excellent investigation into the plight, exploitation, and degradation of these Texas men doing forced labor in Atalissa, a rural community in Iowa.

The March 2014 article begins with a man waiting for and then getting on a bus, and it ends with the man getting off the bus and going to his job. In between, readers learn of the decades-long abuse that the man on the bus and others like him suffered. After several sentences and a few short paragraphs, Barry gives the obligatory detail, the facts of just what his investigation has discovered:

This Dickensian story—told here through court records, internal documents, and extensive first-time interviews with several of the men—is little known beyond Iowa. But five years after their rescue, it continues to resound in halls of power. Last year the case led to the largest jury verdict in the history of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: \$240 million in damages—an award later drastically reduced, yet still regarded as a watershed moment for disability rights in the workplace. In both direct and subtle ways, it has also influenced government initiatives, advocates say, including President Obama's executive order to increase the minimum wage for certain workers (*New York Times*, March 9, 2014).

The *Times* piece successfully documented the plight of the men but it is a "telling" with a touch of showing, loaded with quotes from the proper authorities, people who were overseers of the men, residents of Atalissa, and the men who for decades had essentially been held prisoner in an old school house that had been converted into a bunkhouse. It's good reporting and fine writing, with a bit of a literary touch, but the reporting shines far more than its storytelling. (Barry's *Times* account is available online as an interactive site complete with many photos and several videos.)

Barry's book-length version, however, is a tale well told, one in which the reader gets to know the men in the bunkhouse personally and some intimately as they become fully developed characters. He provides the feel of the facts with such skill that we are taken on an emotional ride that shifts from page to page, churning up waves of anger, occasional relief and jubilation, and almost constant, immense sadness. Large-



ly that's due to Barry's wise decision to focus on the "boys," men with mental disabilities who were pulled out of a Texas institution and put to work ripping the guts out of turkeys—eviscerating the birds for a meat-processing plant—all day, over and over, their hands becoming arthritic and misshapen and painful from hour after hour of unnatural rapid repetition. These men were paid a pittance and were kept from their families; they were denied medical care so that when they were rescued many had untreated ailments and injuries. But the businessmen and turkey owners from Texas who came up with the scheme of using these men for a nasty job became rich.

The book opens with a preface in which we're introduced to Willie Levi, who in eviscerating turkeys turned "the shit-flutter task into an artistic performance of movement and sound, like some Astaire of slaughter. He was a turkey whisperer. He talked to the birds, and they talked back, as if sharing an interspecies understanding about the fetters of fate" (3). Despite Levi's skill in handling turkeys, the work takes its toll, as it did with the other "boys," who were never given proper medical care for aches, pains, bruises, and breaks. Later in the book, for instance, we learn that when Levi was rescued in 2009, he had a broken kneecap that required immediate surgery, his teeth were decayed or gone, he needed hearing aids, his feet were infected with fungus, and he had nightmares. Most of these men suffered in similar ways. Some walked haltingly in pain because no one had ever cut their toenails.

But it's the emotional pain that is the most striking and captured so well by Barry, pain caused by being cut off from family, longing for family that could no longer take care of them or had abandoned them. A few of the men would use a bunkhouse phone to occasionally call a family member, "but the rest of the men had no one to call—or, at least, no one to answer," writes Barry. "Telephone numbers scribbled on paper and stored in wallets were generally no longer in service, but some of the men kept dialing the same numbers over and over and over throughout the years, unable or unwilling to accept the disconnection" (175).

Barry's story is marked by extensive use of compound modifiers and alliteration, which give his tale a distinct literary sensibility and which this reviewer found mostly effective though some may find occasionally forced. In addition to "shit-flutter task" mentioned above, other examples include "feather-flecked flock," "fun-less funhouse," "shit-and-feather-filled work," "breeze-fluttered tremble," "snow-globe divide," "mobile home-style bunkhouse," "straight-line precision," "God-kissed soil," and the clear and true "modern-day slavery."

What more strongly makes the book a work of literary journalism, however, are the book's fully developed characters and specifically Barry's skill in capturing their humanity and dignity, both of which had been denied through most of their adult lives. In this way, Barry bears witness, essentially calling the men's humanity and dignity into existence, thereby giving meaning to their lives. He does this through rich, thick description, ample use of dialogue, scene-setting, and evocative and revealing irony and paradox. For instance, the opening of Chapter 9, with some of the former workers now old men going through a packet of photos from "their bunkhouse past" nicely demonstrates Barry's skill:

The opening of the crinkled manila envelope releases the musk of cloistered mysteries. Hundreds of photographs skitter across the varnished dark wood, the past spilling from the envelope's mouth. The four men around the dining room table hesitate. But soon they are sorting through the square and rectangular images like partners working on a familiar jigsaw puzzle they're not sure they want to reassemble.

Combined, they gave nearly 150 years to Henry's Turkey Service, and here now are stray snatched moments from their time as Henry's boys, twirling like playing cards before them. Scratch-covered photographs, taken with types of cameras no longer even manufactured, their spectral negatives tucked into small Kodak envelopes labeled "Magic Moments."

"He used to be in the bunkhouse with us," Henry Wilkins says, his finger resting on a frozen face. At seventy years of age, Wilkins remains boyishly lanky, but he has emphysema and works hard to mask the trouble he has with his balance. "I know him but I can't think of his name. What was his name, Johnny?"

John Orange, fifty-four, the only black man at the table, so disconnected from his roots that no one is sure whether his true surname is Orange or Owens, takes a look. "John . . . Novack," he says.

"John Novack," Wilkins says in confirmation. "He had his fingers. . ."

"Sewed together," Billy Penner says, because these men often finish one another's sentences. "Just like this." (111)

Overall, Barry gives us a tale of both heroes and villains, showing us the vile mistreatment of these men, but also those who were kind and tried to rescue the men from their servitude and their awful living conditions. Many of the scenes that Barry has reconstructed superbly place the reader back in time with the men, to when they would sing at the country fair or spontaneously extend Sunday worship at the Lutheran church because, as one of the men put it, "This has been such a good worship! Don't you think we should sing something else?" and then they led the congregation in the singing of "Jesus Loves Me."

The book ends as it began, with Willie Levi. But instead of pulling guts from turkeys, he's on a karaoke stage, his arm around his girlfriend, singing an old Sam Cooke pop song, having travelled from suffering to triumph. At last, in that final scene, concluding a harrowing and painful journey from darkness to light, the significance and full meaning of the book's epigraph, a quote from James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" resonates:

For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness.

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## All Aboard for Fun Time

*The Funniest Pages: International Perspectives on Humor in Journalism*

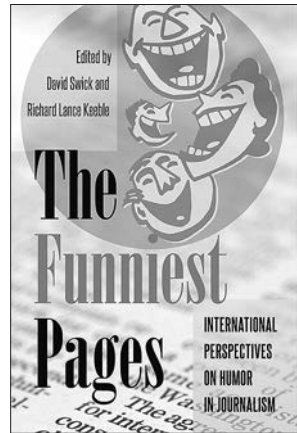
edited by David Swick and Richard Lance Keeble. New York: Peter Lang, 2016. Hardcover, 271 pp., \$89.95.

Reviewed by Ashlee Nelson, Victoria University, New Zealand

Academic texts that are well written enough to be an enjoyable read are valuable, both to those who spend considerable amounts of time with them as researchers, and those who use them in the classroom specifically to engage students in the material. *The Funniest Pages: International Perspectives on Humor in Journalism*, while missing out on a couple of opportunities, manages to be exactly this kind of enlightening and entertaining read as it analyzes various uses of humor in journalism over seventeen chapters.

*The Funniest Pages* is edited by David Swick and Richard Lance Keeble, with contributing chapters from Nicholas Brownlees, Dean Jobb, Ben Stubbs, Mary M. Cronin, Mark J. Noonan, David Swick, Hendrik Michael, Antonio Castillo, Carolyn Rickett, James Waller-Davies, Matthew Ricketson, Rob Steen, Dermot Heaney, Sue Joseph, Asif Hameed, Blake Lambert, and Kevin M. Lerner, and an introduction and afterword by Swick and Keeble. Swick is associate director of journalism at the University of King's College, Canada, and was a practicing journalist for more than twenty years before his academic career. Keeble is professor of journalism at the University of Lincoln, United Kingdom, and visiting professor at Liverpool Hope University. Current chair of the Orwell Society, he has written or edited thirty-six books and is the joint editor of *George Orwell Studies* and *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. Together, Swick and Keeble bring an editorial eye well informed by both the professional and academic sides of journalism studies.

The first of the book's four sections, "Seriously Funny, From Past to Present," focusing on the development of humor in journalism, covers over the course of eight chapters a large span of time beginning with a chapter on the seventeenth century "pamphlet wars" of the English Civil War, and concluding with a (truly fascinating) chapter on the *Clinic*, a Chilean satirical weekly newspaper that launched in 1998. The second section, "Unsolemn Columnists," addresses three humor columnists: John Diamond, Clive James, and John Clarke. The third, "This Sporting Life" offers two chapters on humor in sports writing (obviously). And the fourth and final section, "Have Mouse, Will Laugh," includes four chapters on humor in journalism published online. This may look at first glance like an imbalance in terms of the divi-



sion of chapters per section, but it's actually a wise move for the text, as it frames it as an overview of the development of the use of humor in journalism, and then addresses specific notable sub-genres and forms of humor journalism.

An element of the book that Swick and Keeble highlight as linking all of the texts covered in their collection is good journalism: "One key to success, for the more than thirty journalists considered in these papers, is brilliant writing. Just as a joke, poorly told, falls flat—or worse, comes across as crude or cruel—humor in journalism needs to be crafted with fine skills" (2). This reflects the underlying thread of intelligent academic analysis at play in *The Funniest Pages*, which, though Swick and Keeble emphasize the importance of humor and of taking the time to appreciate and take pleasure in that humor, is key to the book's value as an academic text. It is not just about the jokes; it is about the finely crafted journalism that it takes for a work to have both journalistic value and integrity, and to simultaneously provoke mirth.

One category the book doesn't cover is cartoonists. It would have been nice to have seen some work on the relationship between comics and journalism, particularly given the tradition of satirical political cartoons, the development of modern journalists who practice their craft entirely through the comics medium, or the fact that the book includes a chapter on Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, which is one of the many Thompson works to utilize the illustrations of Ralph Steadman. I can't imagine I'm the only one who expected to get at least some analysis on comics in journalism from the book, given both the title and the aims. Nor are the chapters in the book as strictly devoted to print or online journalism as the introduction suggests. For instance, in "Howling Mad: *Mad* Magazine, Allen Ginsberg, and the Culture Wars of the 1950s," Mark J. Noonan spends considerable time in analysis of Ginsberg and his poem, which, though it offered societal commentary, was not journalism. Though "Howl" is the focal point for Noonan's assessment of *Mad*, this still seems a curious diversion, particularly considering the book's self-established parameters.

That said, I can certainly respect the need to make a decision on how to choose and curate which writers to focus on in the book, and that not everything could be included. The introduction offers the explanation for the lack of analysis of comics journalism that "there is already a substantial literature on cartoons and television's 'comedic, satire journalism'" (8), but I wouldn't agree that we are glutted with texts addressing comics journalism from the kind of perspective offered in *The Funniest Pages*, or that it didn't deserve to be included alongside the other forms covered. Particularly since comics, unlike television, still fall under the criteria of being published in print (or digital, as per section four of the text) journalism. A follow-up volume, perhaps? Though the book is well executed, it is not a comprehensive collection, nor could it be and still remain the reasonably sized text well suited to the classroom that it is. I can think of a number of areas to explore beyond those which the book has dealt with, and Swick and Keeble themselves propose in their afterword that the "four sections of *Funniest Pages* mapped out a few more critical areas that it is hoped literary journalism academics will use as the basis for future research" (268) and offer suggestions for publications and journalists that may invite future research, as well



as the note: “While this text provides an international perspective many parts of the world are, alas, not represented: Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Arab world, to name a few. So the territories still left to explore are vast. . . .” (268). A follow-up volume then—yes, please.

*The Funniest Pages* contains, my one qualm about the lack of analysis of comics notwithstanding, a nicely diverse set of chapters, which even the knowledgeable academic will likely find offers new things to consider—I, for instance, was not previously familiar with any Chilean journalism, and found Antonio Castillo’s chapter “The *Clinic*: Satirizing and Interrogating Power in post-Pinochet Chile” a highly informative and insightful read. The range of chapters likewise means that readers are likely to find something that speaks to their particular research interests—I myself found this kind of appreciation in Hendrik Michael’s “Words! Wisdom! Gibberish!: Verbal Irony in *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail ’72*,” which I wish to praise here for arguing from the position “that Thompson, contrary to his public image, should be primarily understood as a *political* journalist whose peculiar methods of reporting are not just play and pranks but a serious journalistic experiment of writing about politics” (93); emphasis in original. Humorous journalism does not necessarily mean frivolous journalism, a point well argued by Michael and indicative of the stance of the collection as a whole.

For literary journalism scholars, while *The Funniest Pages* is not expressly approaching analysis in any of the chapters from the perspective of literary journalism discourse, there are links to be made in its discussion of literary journalism practitioners. For instance, Ben Stubbs’s chapter on travel writing comments on the links between the fictional work and the journalism of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain.

The editors’ afterword to the book, “Putting Fun into the Curriculum,” addresses a salient point: academic debate over many of the authors and works discussed within the pages of *The Funniest Pages* is common, yet how much of our academic debate pauses to consider and really appreciate the humor of the works themselves? As Swick and Keeble observe, “how often do we respond to wry wit or droll irony with a smile, or to a hilarious joke with laughter? Intriguingly, little academic discussion of print and online media—and, indeed, media in general—has highlighted the *pleasure* of reading or the humor of the text (267)”; emphasis in original. Nor do they lay this solely at the feet of those of us who teach courses about journalism, but also those who teach courses in the practice of journalism: “Humor writing also rarely features in university journalism programmes. It’s difficult to know precisely why. Are journalism academics particularly serious? Hardly. Writing wittily is, certainly, difficult—but that should not be a turn-off for students and their tutors” (267). The afterword’s argument suggests addressing the lack of humor plaguing both halves of the journalism academic community is one of the text’s primary goals: “Our main purpose here has been to do precisely that, to focus on the funniest pages. . . . The rewards for academics and their students in studying—and practicing—humorous journalism are immense. Above all: it’s fun!” (267–68). Swick and Keeble have succeeded in this goal. A highly entertaining and informative course on the role of humor in journalism could be created using this anthology as a textbook touchstone.

If you're going to set a comprehensive academic text for your students to read, it may as well be one that both you and, hopefully, they can take pleasure in reading. (While writing this review, I nearly upset my cup of coffee all over the book when laughing at Dickens's instructions for exiting a London horse-drawn carriage: "We have studied the subject a great deal, and we think the best way is to throw yourself out and trust to chance for the alighting on your feet. If you make the driver alight first, and then throw yourself upon him, you will find that he breaks your fall materially" (41), in Stubbs's chapter "Travel Writing and Humor: From Dickens and Twain to the Present Day." It's a tie between Stubbs's and Matthew Ricketson's chapter, "John Clarke and the Power of Satire in Journalism," for the one that made me laugh the most.

This is not to say that the entire book is humorous—it is, after all, a book about humor rather than a work of humorous journalism itself. The analysis in Dermot Heaney's "Bowling Them Over and Over with Wit: Forms and Functions of Humor in Live Text Cricket Coverage," for example, is particularly dry and lacking in levity. Nor are the chapters of *The Funniest Pages* only valuable when humorous: the aforementioned chapter by Castillo on the *Clinic* is not humorous, but it is compelling. And Asif Hameed's "Speaking Truth to Power in 140 Characters or Less: Political Satire, Civic Engagement and Journalism" likewise contains no laughs but is an insightful and well-written look at the emergence of social media's role in the development of modern online journalism: "The world is changing—and so too are the definitions of journalism. . . . Change is the climate in which we find ourselves. As mobile technology and social media create great change, it is important that our institutions and discourses progress as well" (229–30). Still, on the whole, *The Funniest Pages* is notably more entertaining than the average collection of academic essays, and well worth the read whether you intend to use it for a course or not—even if you don't intend to, you too may find yourself inspired after reading.

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MISSION STATEMENT  
*Literary Journalism Studies*

*Literary Journalism Studies* is an international, interdisciplinary blind-reviewed journal that invites scholarly examinations of literary journalism—a genre also known by different names around the world, such as literary reportage, narrative journalism, the New Journalism, *nuevo periodismo*, reportage literature, literary nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, and creative nonfiction—focusing on cultural revelation. Published in English but directed at an international audience, the journal welcomes contributions from different cultural, disciplinary, and critical perspectives. To help establish comparative studies of the genre, the journal is especially interested in examinations of the works of authors and traditions from different national literatures not generally known outside their countries.

There is no single definition of the genre, but the following descriptions help to establish a meeting ground for its critical study:

- “The art and craft of reportage—journalism marked by vivid description, a novelist’s eye to form, and eyewitness reporting that reveals hidden truths about people and events that have shaped the world we know.” —*Granta*
- “Reportage Literature is an engagement with reality with a novelist’s eye but with a journalist’s discipline.” —Pedro Rosa Mendes, Portugal
- “I think one of the first things for literary reportage should be to go into the field and to try to get the other side of the story. —Anne Nivat, France
- “A good reportage must not necessarily be linked with topical or political events which are taking place around us. I think the miracle of things lies not in showing the extraordinary but in showing ordinary things in which the extraordinary is hidden.” —Nirmal Verma, India
- Literary journalism is a “journalism that would read like a novel . . . or short story.” —Tom Wolfe, United States

Such definitions are not comprehensive and may at times conflict, but they should help to establish an understanding of this fundamentally narrative genre, which is located at the intersection of literature and journalism.

At the critical center of the genre lies cultural revelation in narrative form. Implicit to the enterprise are two precepts: (a) that there is an external reality apart from human consciousness, whatever the inherent problems of language and ideology that may exist in comprehending that reality; and (b) that there are consequences in the phenomenal world, whether triggered by human or natural agency, that result in the need to tell journalistically-based narratives empowered by literary technique and aesthetic sensibility. Ultimately, the emphasis is on the aesthetics of experience.

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
FOR LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies is a multidisciplinary learned society whose essential purpose is the encouragement and improvement of scholarly research and education in literary journalism (or literary reportage). For the purposes of scholarly delineation, our definition of literary journalism is “journalism as literature” rather than “journalism about literature.” Moreover, the association is explicitly inclusive and warmly supportive of a wide variety of approaches to the study and teaching of literary journalism throughout the world. The association’s web address is <http://www.ialjs.org>.

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