

**Workshop Session Organized by the  
International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS)  
to Be Held at the Annual Meeting of the  
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC)  
August 6-9, 2014  
Montreal, Canada**

**Panel Organizer:** Josh Roiland, University of Notre Dame (U.S.A.)

**Title of Panel:** What's Old is New Again: Literary Journalism's Modern Renaissance

**Description of Panel:** In 1973, Tom Wolfe published what would become an iconic introduction and anthology of narrative nonfiction from the 1960s and '70s. He called it *The New Journalism*. In 2005, Robert Boynton published a collection of interviews with writers from Wolfe's time to his. He called it, *The New New Journalism*. As historical markers, these adjectives are inaccurate—there are decades of antecedents to Wolfe, et al.—but as a rhetorical approach, these descriptors are revealing. They indicate a cultural preference for the present, and an amnesia for the past. There is no question that literary journalism is experiencing a contemporary renaissance just as it did forty years earlier. During such periods of resurgence, it is always useful to remember what came before, and such a spirit of reflection and comparison animates this panel. This workshop session looks to make connections between old and new ways practicing, publishing, reading and teaching literary journalism. How do their predecessors influence contemporary literary journalists? How have today's publications and platforms changed the way literary journalism is produced, disseminated, and read? How have journalism educators evolved in their teaching of literary journalistic techniques?

**Panelists**

**Panelist:** Michael Berryhill, Texas Southern University (U.S.A.)

**Paper Title:** "The 'Literary Aspect of Journalism': An Early History"

**Abstract:** In the late '60s I took a graduate course in American Studies at the University of Minnesota called Literary Aspects of Journalism in which I attempted to write literary nonfiction. After many years in newspapers and magazines, I succeeded a bit and now teach a version of that class at Texas Southern University. The phrase "literary aspect of journalism" comes from a 1904 *Atlantic* essay by H.W. Boynton, a prolific reviewer and critic who wrote: "it may happen that a brief sketch of some apparently trivial scene or incident, printed in an obscure journal, actually excels in pure literary quality the more elaborate structures of fiction..." From Boynton I propose to discuss the 1915 anthology of literary journalism, *Stories of Today*, edited by two Columbia University English professors who argued that good journalism was a better model from which to teach composition to college students than the usual literary essays. The "as-told-to" story of the Titanic's wireless operator that ran in *The New York Times in 1912* is well worth teaching to students today. I would mention three Houston newspaper columnists who have practiced literary art in ways that are sufficiently acknowledged. I would briefly account my own practice in the form, including a 7000-word magazine story, "Death of Poet," and how I use it in class. I would also mention the timidity of most creative writing programs in teaching nonfiction that includes the dreaded task of reporting. I think there is a vacuum here that journalism programs could fill.

**Panelist:** Lesley Cowling, University of the Witwatersrand (South Africa)

**Paper Title:** Echoes of an African "Drum": The New Journalism in dialogue with the old South Africa

**Abstract:** In post-apartheid South Africa, the 1950s "Drum" era has been romanticised through posters, photographs, a feature film and even television commercials. Despite this nostalgia for the music, fashion and celebrities of the era, the lively and creative journalism of the magazine's writers is unfamiliar to many young South African journalists. The Drum writers' use of fictional devices and literary strategies anticipates the New Journalism by more than a decade, but has in common with it an emphasis on social context that is implicitly, but powerfully, political. Engaging with the work of both eras in a writing

course for South African journalists illuminates the ways in which certain kinds of literary journalism can become social commentary. This presentation sets out the usefulness of such a “conversation” across decades and continents to the teaching of creative writing for journalists.

**Panelists:** Madeleine Danova & Danail Danov, Sofia University, (Bulgaria)

**Paper Title:** “Literary Journalism and Teaching the Art of Blog Writing in Bulgaria”

**Abstract:** The paper looks at an ongoing project at Sofia University of enhancing the inclusion of critical thinking and media literacy as two of the most important components of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Bulgaria. With the renaissance experienced by literary journalism in the last few decades, the project also seeks to investigate how the skills of creative writing can be used in reporting and critically assessing issues of everyday importance through the art of blog writing. The paper will present the findings of a survey of the discursive competences for the creation of descriptive and argumentative texts by students in English and German and how these competences can be used in the teaching of blog writing to the students at the BA Program in Pedagogy of Mass Media and Communications at Sofia University. A critical assessment will be done of the art of blog-writing in Bulgaria as well as part of introducing new journalism into the Bulgarian ‘mediascape’.

**Panelist:** David Dowling, University of Iowa (U.S.A.)

**Paper Title:** “The Literary Legacies of Digital Longform’s “Supreme Nonfiction””

**Abstract:** The *New York Times* publication of “Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek” on December 21, 2012 signaled a revolution in online journalism, prompting news editors to ask of their best features, “Can We Snowfall This”? The story’s stunning debut seemed to present an achievement without precedent through its reinvented multimedia template for longform journalism, especially in its immersive narrative reading experience ideally suited to the tablet. Prior to “Snow Fall,” however, the Brooklyn, New York startup company, Atavist, had been producing longform journalism with embedded multimedia features designed for mobile electronic devices since 2010. The market for digital longform has since seen the entrance of companies like ESPN’s Grantland.com and *Sports Illustrated* as serious players with their own products inspired by the “Snow Fall” template. Each hybridizes newspaper feature writing with documentary filmmaking into a refashioned product that is more textual documentary than traditional feature news. But the new longform renaissance online has not abandoned tradition entirely in its embrace of multimedia technology. Instead, I argue, these works self-consciously situate themselves in the category of literary journalism through explicit allusions to their narrative nonfiction legacy, ranging from Shackleton and Melville to Bellow and Krakauer, in order to establish their aesthetic as well as technological achievements. In a series of case studies I explore how such works draw on the journalistic styles and subjects of the “New New Journalism” (Boynton, 2012) represented by Sebastian Junger’s *The Perfect Storm*, and John Krakauer’s *Into Thin Air*, the most visual, and thus readily adaptable to the filmic elements of this textual documentary hybrid form. “The Sinking of the Bounty” (Atavist), “Lost Soul” (*Sports Illustrated*) and “Out in the Great Alone” (Grantland.com) reflect how a preponderance of “Snow Fall” inspired digital longform incorporate outdoor sports and adventure themes, situated either on the open ocean or in snowy remote climates.

Brian Phillips’s “Out in the Great Alone” on the Alaskan Iditarod ranges from colloquial blogging to literary allusion. The result is a harnessing of the New New Journalism’s intimacy with loosely structured, wide ranging, impressionistic segments that represent a noticeable contrast to the more traditional approach of Ben McGrath’s *New Yorker* story on the same event. Compared to the emotional impact of witnessing the race from above in a small airplane Phillips renders, McGrath’s journalism offers an earthier detailed account from the ground, using the race itself as a window into the participants’ unique stories and motives. Phillips’s more untethered nonlinear Gonzo approach unleashes his full range of expressive skills, including scene building and dialogue for what Robert Boynton (2012) calls “supreme nonfiction,” digital longform for the tablet that expands the achievements of journalistic experimentation visible in Krakauer and Junger. Phillips does so through the three New New Journalism staples of storytelling drawn from fiction writing: putting the author at the center of the story, channeling

characters' thoughts, and using nonstandard punctuation (Boynton, 2005: xii). Further, Phillips's subject holds constant with the other case studies through his concern for the sociology of the fringe, as Iditarod competitors represent a subculture of outdoor adventurers akin to the backcountry skiers of "Snow Fall," the romantically inclined like Bison Dele of *Sports Illustrated's* "Lost Soul," and the eighteenth-century replica ship sailors of the Atavist's "The Sinking of the *Bounty*."

**Panelist:** Russell Frank, Penn State University (U.S.A.)

**Paper Title:** "Snow Job: Was 'Snow Fall' the Breakthrough Everyone Said It Was?"

**Abstract:** In 2012, *The New York Times* published a long feature about the deaths of three skiers in an avalanche in the state of Washington. The story, titled "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek," appeared in print and on the paper's website – to enormous acclaim. While the reporting and writing of John Branch was highly praised, the multimedia elements of the online version of the story attracted most of the attention. Here, at last, according to many commentators, was the perfect marriage of text, photography, video, audio and animated graphics. So great was the impact of the story that "snowfalling" became a verb at The Times and in other newsrooms meaning "to produce a major work of multimedia journalism." This presentation challenges the hype surrounding "Snow Fall" by looking back at what the *Philadelphia Inquirer* was able to achieve 15 years earlier in its online presentation of Mark Bowden's "Blackhawk Down."

**Panelist:** Fiona Giles, University of Sydney (Australia)

**Paper Title:** "Teaching Features as Narrative Journalism"

**Abstract:** The majority of feature writing text books are either craft-based or anthologies, and sometimes a mixture of both. Very few of these look at the history of features as a family of genres, or critically consider how they are often regarded as secondary to the production of the 'hard' news report. Drawing on Steen Steensen's work on the feature, which suggests the distinction between hard and soft news writing is outdated, this paper proposes a fresh approach to features education by teaching it through the lens of genre and within the framework of scholarship on literary and narrative journalism. The paper will also look at the changes to, and resilience of features as they've moved online, the development of multimedia features, or 'textual documentary' (Thompson 2102) and how understanding news as narrative might help to maintain feature writing's value as a form of news.

**Panelists:** Jacqueline Marino, Kent St. University & Susan Jacobsen, Florida International University (U.S.A.)

**Paper Title:** "History's Hold on an Emerging Genre: The Literary Side of the New Digital Journalism"

**Abstract:** A reader began an online question to John Branch, author of *The New York Times's* "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek," with this note:

*Sobering story, beautifully written. I felt like I was witnessing the birth of a new medium — the writing, the slide shows, the videos — it was very exciting to read.*

"Snow Fall" is a new type of storytelling—or it was when it was published in 2012. Since then, digital news audiences have seen a growing body of similar work characterized by the purposeful integration of multimedia elements, such as video, animation, graphics, data visualization and more, into long-form narrative journalism. Creators include established media organizations and startups. Their work is alternatively celebrated as the future of digital storytelling and lambasted as a distracting mess of multimedia. Just as the journalists of the 1960s attempted to write the nonfiction equivalent of the great American novel, the Web journalists of the 2010s are experimenting with breakthrough multimedia formats to enhance the literary form, adding different methods of storytelling—video, animation, audio, data visualizations and other interactive elements—to stimulating, character-driven narrative. In this presentation, we will highlight examples of strong, multimedia-infused literary journalism, cataloguing its features and offering guidance on how it can be taught.

This work was informed by an analysis of 50 multimedia narratives published between January 2010 (when the iPad debuted) and December 2013.

**Panelist:** Bill Reynolds, Ryerson University (Canada)

**Paper Title:** “Ahead by a Century”

**Abstract:** Upton Sinclair's agitprop novel, *The Jungle* (1906), is based on copious reportage. So is Ted Conover's cover story for Harper's magazine, “The Way of All Flesh” (May 2013). This presentation seeks to compare the two works and in so doing pit pre-literary journalistic writing against the so-called new New Journalism of a century later. (And, incidentally, it seeks to determine whether or not much has changed in the world of slaughtering animals and cruelty to humans, or the other way around.)

**Panelist:** Bret Schulte, University of Arkansas (U.S.A.)

**Paper Title:** “Literary Journalism and the Growth of Newspapers”

**Abstract:** The canon of literary journalism studies is filled with New Journalists—Wolfe, Talese, Breslin—who made their names as newspaper feature writers. However, the role feature writing has historically played in the rise of newspapers has been largely unexamined. My presentation argues that this style of writing (employing literary journalism techniques), and the sections it spawned, boosted the popularity of newspapers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As Nancy Roberts illustrated in her 2011 keynote address, women's sections—and papers—proved the early acceptance and attractiveness of the genre. IN 1969, *The Washington Post* debuted the “Style” section, an innovative showcase for feature writing that editor Ben Bradlee called “a unique collection of ‘new journalists’ who wrote with vitality, imagery and humor.” By the 1980s, debuting feature sections to increase circulation and target new advertisers was routine.

As Michael Schudson has noted, surveys show that readers prefer the narrative-style of feature stories to the inverted pyramid, while the storytelling quality of feature writing help readers retain information and draws them further into articles. The Pulitzer Prize committee legitimized feature writing when, in 1979, it began issuing awards for the genre.

While not all feature writing qualifies as literary journalism, newspapers remain an important home for the genre and its feature-section kin. As newspapers now fight online challengers (in both short-form and long-form journalism, such as Atavist), they are returning to journalism with literary flair. New feature sections are rolling out, and as Michelle Weldon's research shows, many newspapers are dramatically increasing narrative journalism where it counts most: on their front pages.

**Panelist:** Rebecca Taylor, Siena College (U.S.A.)

**Paper Title:** “Cross-training for the Modern Literary Journalist: Creating Content Across Multiple Platforms”

**Abstract:** The purpose of this presentation is to explore strategies to cross-train literary journalists to create content across multiple platforms. The presentation will explore the evolution of digital storytelling and the popularity of multi-media narratives, which demand journalists possess proficiency in both traditional writing skills and visual storytelling techniques.