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# In This Issue



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LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

VOL. 10, NO. 2, FALL 2018

Solveig Brandal on Åsne Seierstad, Matthew Ricketson on the Wolfe Archives

# *Literary Journalism Studies*

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# Literary Journalism Studies



Editorial Offices

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*LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES* invites submissions of original scholarly articles on literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, New Journalism, and the nonfiction novel, as well as literary and narrative nonfiction that emphasizes cultural revelation. The journal has an international focus and seeks submissions on the theory, history, and pedagogy of literary journalism throughout the world. All disciplinary approaches are welcome. Submissions should be informed with an awareness of the existing scholarship and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length, including notes. To encourage international dialogue, the journal is open to publishing on occasion short examples or excerpts of previously published literary journalism accompanied by a scholarly gloss about or an interview with the writer who is not widely known outside his or her country. The example or excerpt must be translated into English. The scholarly gloss or interview should generally be between 1,500 and 2,500 words long and indicate why the example is important in the context of its national culture. Together, both the text and the gloss generally should not exceed 8,000 words in length. The contributor is responsible for obtaining all copyright permissions, including from the publisher, author, and translator as necessary. The journal is also willing to consider publication of exclusive excerpts of narrative literary journalism accepted for publication by major publishers.

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# *Note from the Editor . . .*

## Well, How Did We Get Here?

Already our tenth anniversary is upon us, and what a sleek, limber decade it has been. We've had a most excellent ride, sometimes a little bumpy production-wise, but still rolling, still dreaming. In this special edition you will find origin stories from several writers (more of which below).

But first, please allow me to tell you my own small origin story. In September 2005 I presented a paper at a conference called Mapping the Magazine 2, in Cardiff, Wales on metaphor in literary journalism, using for case studies books by John Vaillant and William Langewiesche. It went fine and I met scholars like David Abrahamson of Northwestern University and Jenny McKay, then of Stirling University in Scotland. Jenny was fun to talk to because the considerations of our field are so different in the U.K., and I was pleased to find out that her husband was Simon Frith, the rock critic who once filed a monthly column for *Creem* magazine, which I had read religiously as a teenager.

The next winter, Jenny emailed about a conference in May. She did not say the organizer was desperate and would take just about anybody; she said it looked like something I might like. I said, sure. Would there be anyone else I knew, she wondered? I remembered chatting with David in Cardiff, so I emailed him. What's your phone number, he emailed back. David's style is to pick up a telephone. Pretty soon we were talking about this May 2006 conference in Nancy, France, and David expressed curiosity. So, between Jenny, David, and myself, the organizer seemed to have three more prospects. I did not realize till later how such few willing souls it took to get the conference off the ground. I also didn't realize how disparate participants' interests could be at a conference dedicated to the centenary of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. My abstract barely qualified for inclusion—differences in methodology and style between Vancouver and Toronto literary journalists—yet it was accepted all the same.

That was one of the happy paradoxes at the first literary journalism conference. It was successful precisely because it was tiny and intimate. Everyone listened to what everyone else had to say and participated in discussions. Another was, everyone's topics varied wildly, which on the surface suggests

disfunction, yet it created multiple avenues for conversation about what this thing we were agreeing to call literary journalism was and could be. We could not know it then, but we were defining, with the help of more experienced scholars, such as David and John Hartsock, what the borders might look like.

Yet another paradox: the organization that now sets it sights on formalizing literary journalism into a discipline began as a celebration of a novel. I'll leave it to our fine contributors to elaborate. Tom Connery recalls what it was like being a literary journalism scholar in the era before there was such a thing. John S. Bak, host of that first conference, divulges the true origin story. David Abrahamson encapsulates the struggle to launch this journal. Xiaohui (Sophie) Wu and Brian Gabrial analyze the first decade of content. Nancy Roberts explores literary journalism scholarship's prospects over the next decade. Beate Josephi, Sue Joseph, and Willa McDonald tell us the view from Australia. Isabel Soares gives us the view from Portugal. Sue Greenberg reports the view from the U.K., as does Richard Lance Keeble, who also recommends in his essay that we blow up literary journalism's boundaries.

I want to thank all for their fine contributions as well as Anthony deRado for his lovely thematic design.

The anniversary content threatened to overwhelm our regular research section, but we managed to squeeze in two papers. Solveig Brandal's work fuses theories about harem literature with a study of *The Bookseller of Kabul* to produce a different take on Åsne Seierstad's literary journalism. Brandal locates Seierstad's work in the tradition we know but also within a strain of travel writing, common especially in the nineteenth century, where Western female travel writers commented on the personal details of women's lives in harems. Brandal's fascinating study also draws upon Said's New Orientalism concept.

Our second essay, by Matthew Ricketson, is based on the author's first dive into the Tom Wolfe papers that were recently archived at the New York Public Library. Ricketson decided to focus on Wolfe's famous, tidy origin story of his style—that he overcame writer's block in 1963 by writing all night as he listened to rock 'n' roll radio—using the archives get beyond it. Ricketson discovered several items including high school compositions, a college sports column, and the controversy surrounding his PhD dissertation, that in effect were early versions of his New Journalism style.

Also in this issue we have Ted Conover's fascinating keynote address to IALJS-13 in Vienna, May 2018, a Digital LJ column in which Christopher P. Wilson discusses his new and important literary journalism website, Kate McQueen's interview with science journalist Ed Jong, and Roberto Herrscher's study of Gabriel Gárcia Márquez's nonfiction books.

**Hemingway, Paris, and a Distressing Email**

This past July my wife and I stayed in Paris for ten days. We were lucky enough to find an apartment in a courtyard off Rue Saint Honoré. Our location was about a ten-minute walk east of the Louvre and slightly north of Place de la Concorde and the Obélisque de Louxor. Fairly central. I have walked by those large, forbidding doors on downtown Paris streets but never been inside one. Once the heavy green door closes, effectively, so does Paris. The courtyard was quiet—not a word one associates with Paris and Rue Saint Honoré's taxis, motorcycles, trucks, cars, and impatient humans. There were dozens of apartments behind the reserved pale concrete façades, Haussmann-style without balconies. The courtyard was spotless. We were given a talking-to about locking bicycles to the wrought-iron railing attached to the steps leading up to our apartment. There was a shed for bikes. This was where the bicycles went. No bicycles in the courtyard proper. Doing so destroyed the clean, austere lines.

We also learned that we were a skip and a hop from Stage 21, the final day of the Tour de France, which was to take place on July 29. We stumbled upon this fact because, the day before, we noticed barricades being erected on Rue de Rivoli while we were walking back to our flat. I felt embarrassed that I did not know this, as I am supposed to be conducting researching for a book about riding a bicycle—not about racing, mind you, but still.

Anyway, it was a happy coincidence and around 6:30 that Sunday evening the leaders of the day's race were being chased by the peloton from the Arch de Triomphe to Rue de Rivoli, around and around, eight times, before arriving at the nearby finish line. Exciting times. The Team Sky bus—Team Sky being Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas's outfit—was parked nearby and we found that, up close, the riders were not at all what we expected—instead of freak-like displays of massive thighs, we observed slighter men of jockey-like proportion.

Our neighborhood also happened to be the fashion district, where an improbable number of impossibly chic, lithe, handsome, beautiful humans demonstrated various sartorial sensibilities, and made stepping through oversized door onto the sidewalk a psychically intimidating, but amusing, adventure.

We were in Paris because I was presenting a paper that attempted to scrutinize Ernest Hemingway's *Toronto Star* newspaper feature journalism, 1920–1924, through the eyes of Tom Wolfe's New Journalism principles, circa 1973. That panel, which focused on Hemingway's nonfiction and featured presentations from William Dow from the American University of Paris and John Bak from Université de Lorraine, Nancy, went well. I'm happy to

report that I did not spend my entire first week in Paris as an agitated worrywart, poring over an incomplete presentation—for the first time in years of presenting all I needed to ask of myself was to read over and revise the presentation every morning for a half hour or so. With that professional obligation not casting a shadow, instead, we were free to rent a couple of bright orange bicycles and tour around. A Copenhagen-based company, Donkey Republic, makes available for rent free-standing city bikes, or should I say heavy, durable, two-wheeled objects, via the company's smart phone app. We used our phone to load the app, locate the nearest pair of Donkeys, unlock the bikes, and off we went. We were free to lock and unlock as we pleased, and scoped parts of Paris we had not bothered with before. For instance, one rather cutting Hemingway column I was citing, "American Bohemians in Paris a Weird Lot" (*Toronto Star Weekly*, March 25, 1922), situates the reader inside a club called Café de la Rotonde. The day before my presentation it occurred to me to Google the place. I mean, is la Rotonde still around? Yes, since 1911. I mapped the route, jumped on my bike, and headed for the intersection of Boulevard de Montparnasse and Boulevard Raspail. I enjoyed the free pistachios and cashews while working my way through a repulsive Parisian whiskey beer. The dark wood paneling, the red cushioned chairs, the formal wait staff in black and white, all suggested that not much had changed in a century.

All of which is to say, generally, other than the challenge of enduring thirty-three- to thirty-seven-degree heat—cold baths, anyone?—we were in downtown Paris, in July, having a ball.

Then I received a distressing email from Norman Sims. We knew that our friend and colleague John J. Pauly, an early scholar of literary journalism, who until recently had been provost of Marquette University, Milwaukee, and who delivered the IALJS-6 keynote address in Brussels, in May 2011, "Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life," had been diagnosed with cancer. I personally knew about this because John had sent me an email to let me know he would not take part in the panel on which we were grouped, "Counterculture and Crisis," in March 2017, for the Joint Journalism and Communication History Conference, an annual one-day feast of ideas held at New York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute. At JJCHC John was set to talk about the New Journalism, as was I. John's approach with "How the New Journalism Got Its Name" was to assess the New Journalism in a new way, that is, in the context of the institutional and marketing forces of the day. For instance, it was no accident that the *New Yorker* and *Esquire* could afford to run pages and pages of one story—there was so much advertising for words to be wrapped around. My idea was less sweeping. "History

in the Present Tense" proposed to examine one major event, the Chicago Democratic Party Convention, August 1968, through the prism of New Journalist reportage in relation to standard news reporting with the goal to demarcate what made this rogue form so special and different.

It was disappointing news to find out that John's doctor had advised him not to fly in March while beginning a new drug regimen. And it was disappointing again, two months later, in May 2017, because John was expected at King's University in Halifax for IALJS-12. There were too many events in his life, between retirement celebrations and continued treatments, and he thought it best not to complicate his schedule. The point is, I did not get the feeling that anything especially untoward was happening in John's world. The world of cancer is different now, and the level of cancer management in our time can be impressive.

Fast forward to July 2018 and Norm's email shattered that illusion. Despite all of the progress, John's doctor had now advised him to stop treatments. They would no longer help. The subsequent unfolding of events was dizzying.

When I arrived in Bayfield, north Milwaukee, on August 7, ostensibly to hang out with John for a couple of hours to talk about his New Journalism research, I was informed that the aperture had shrunk even further. In fact, it was not possible to have a conversation. John died four days later. Those two weeks were difficult to comprehend in real time, and I found myself wondering how this acceleration could be possible.

I have asked John's good friend Thomas B. Connery if he would be kind enough to attempt to capture some of the essence of our colleague by interviewing his friends and associates in the literary journalism community. Tom's remembrance follows this editorial.

*— Bill Reynolds*

Photo of John J. Pauly by Kevin Pauly

# Remembrance: John Pauly

Thomas B. Connery
St. Thomas University, United States

*John James Pauly*, Jr.
Marquette University, United States
Died, August 11, 2018

Oh, John Pauly, you kind, sweet man. I will miss you." That was my first response when I learned of John's death. To call John "sweet" may seem a bit peculiar or quaint. But it so fit John. Just ask David Abrahamson. "Although sweetness is not a quality most memorial texts feature," says David, "John Pauly was one of the sweetest people I have ever been able to claim as a friend and colleague. His encouragement sustained me, and his easy, always kind laughter bespoke a generous and smiling view of life. I shall miss him terribly."

In July, I followed John's emails to several of us that updated the progress of the cancer, slowly taking him away from us. And so I called him one afternoon and we talked and talked. Two and a half hours later we hung up. When I called him again in August, I was only able to leave a message. By then he was mostly sleeping and obviously fading. I had hopes of seeing him one last time, but it didn't happen.

Gathering comments from those who knew John to write this reflection has been a very emotional and occasionally heart-wrenching task. We first met and became friends thirty-five years ago, at the second annual conference of the American Journalism Historians Association.

Although he was two years younger than I, he nevertheless became my intellectual mentor as well as close friend. I had a master's degree in journalism, specializing in public affairs reporting, and had worked at newspapers and the Associated Press. But my PhD was in English. My dissertation made a case for a "literary" type of journalism in the 1890s newspaper. I wasn't at all sure how or what to do with all this, but John provided guidance and encouragement, helping me find direction.

Perhaps one of the best ways to acknowledge John and his influence is to allow several who knew him or worked and studied with him to tell their stories in their own words, beginning with Norman Sims, Linda Steiner, and Dean Krugman, who were in graduate school with John at the University of Illinois, where they studied with James Carey.

**Norman Sims**

Carey advocated something we called the cultural approach to communication research. He did not mean what "cultural studies" means today. Rooted in humanism and intellectual diversity, Carey's approach irritated a great many professors elsewhere who were immersed in behaviorism and formalistic approaches to communications. They tried, unsuccessfully, to keep Carey from becoming president of AEJMC.

One time during our graduate careers, probably in an effort to broaden our perspectives, students from several Midwestern universities were brought together to talk about our research. I remember graduate students from Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan being at the gathering. It was a lot of fun, and astonishing in some ways. One grad student told us, for example, that at his university they read nothing more than ten years old. At Illinois, in contrast, we concentrated on original works by John Dewey, Harold Adams Innis, Richard Hoggart, and Walter Ong, among others. I don't believe we read many books as young as ten years.

At one evening session, one person from each university took the stage and elaborated on the scholarly foundations of their work. John Pauly was our representative. John was nervous as a mouse before going onstage. Describing Dr. Carey's system of thought was a task filled with difficulties, especially in front of an audience who had not done the background reading. Nor did any of us have a strong enough grasp of Carey's thinking to enable explanation. Almost immediately, someone asked John to explain the cultural approach to communications.

I stood on the side in amazement as John responded. Even to this audience, his explanation of the cultural approach seemed coherent, things matched up, and the approach was a reasonable response to a complicated and interconnected modern world. John received applause as he walked off the stage. I was the first to greet him. "John," I said, "that was the best explanation of the cultural approach that I've ever heard." His eyes darted around. He still had that jittery mouse look. He blinked a few times, then said, "What did I say?" He was so nervous that he couldn't remember a word he had said. Neither of us was ever able to reconstruct his answer. But John understood even if he couldn't repeat his explanation.

In the decades that passed since then, I came to believe that John Pauly had come closer to the mark set by Jim Carey than most of our class of grad students. Carey had been a dean; Pauly became a dean and then provost at Marquette University. Neither scholar was a writer of books; both used essays and articles to explore wide-ranging issues. And both became close friends with their students and colleagues. Carey was a Catholic, and Pauly almost always taught

at Catholic universities such as Marquette, St. Louis University, and Fordham. Something in Carey's cultural approach seemed to fit well at those universities.

**Linda Steiner**

John Pauly was a friend from graduate school—but clearly among the intellectual heavyweights in my grad school cohort. From day one, John knew how to talk like a scholar. I did not, so I was quite impressed. Part of his advantage was that he could talk about sports—that is, talk as an intellectual about sports. And it was not only to agree with Jim Carey, our adviser, that baseball was the genuine nineteenth-century sport; after all, lots of people understood baseball in this way. John could also be intellectual about bowling! What a concept! I associated bowling with working class and even rather tough guys with tattoos, who went bowling (at least in Schenectady, New York) mainly for the opportunity to drink Pabst beer. John convinced us all that bowling, at least as "performed" in the LaGrange and other Chicago suburbs, represented a particular form of community bonding, its rituals rich in opportunities for communal life.

John developed a good "bead" on all sorts of academic politics that went wholly over my head. Over the years, in reminiscing about Illinois, it became clear that even at the time John understood who at Illinois were the people generally on good terms with one another and who were the secret (and not-so-secret) backstabbers. "Didn't you notice," John asked me, "how Dr. X and Dr. Y would glare at each other at college events. And don't you remember that it was because of . . . ?" No, I hadn't noticed. I had no idea. Maybe such powers of observation and analysis was key to his wise stewardship both as dean and then/soon thereafter as provost at Marquette. He clearly faced, and faced down, some tricky political problems and thorny ethical dilemmas as provost—one in particular involved some frogs, I think.

**Dean Krugman**

John was a wonderfully supportive friend with an instinct for how people operated. After conceptualizing, collecting, and analyzing data, I wrote the first couple chapters of my dissertation. The result was workmanlike. Good stuff, said my adviser Arnold Barban, but it needs an editing, not a proofreading, an editing. I turned to John and asked for his comments. He unflinchingly said yes, carved up the two chapters and handed them back in quick order. While words and meaning were not changed, John demonstrated a tone and phrasing that not only resonated but completely fit my style. Template set, the rest of the chapters came easy. Simply put, John understood where his pal was coming from and edited and guided accordingly. I have frequently credited John for his writing tutelage.

And now here are comments from a few scholars and teachers who came to know and appreciate John more recently, in the years of his academic career.

**David Abrahamson**

As a scholar, John Pauly was without peer. Yes, he swam against the prevailing tide in the academy by choosing the article/essay as his preferred medium, rather than book-length works. I know this for a fact because I once commissioned John to write a book, and at his death fifteen years later the manuscript had yet to materialize. Nevertheless, I uniformly revered John's articles, essays, and presentations. Without fail they provided his fellow scholars with the most eloquent statements of his extraordinarily insightful ideas. We professors, per force, are required to read a lot of dross; after enduring the pain of such tasks, I inevitably found John's articles to be the perfect antidote. Simply put, they were the paragon of intellectual excellence—and I confess that being able to claim that John was a colleague made me proud to call myself a professor.

**Nancy Roberts**

It's heartbreaking to lose John—such a brilliant, kindhearted, down-to-earth, modest man. I met him sometime in the early 1980s, likely at a conference, and then when I was the book review editor for *American Journalism* (1989–1993), he was the editor-in-chief; and I worked closely with him. He was one of the smartest and most original thinkers I ever knew. And he was a marvelous mentor to so many—his students, other scholars, and the faculty colleagues whose tenure and promotion cases he oversaw in his many years as a highly respected administrator. The last time I saw him was about a year and a half ago, when he came to my university to serve as an external reviewer for our journalism program. Although his health was failing, he was as thoughtful, insightful, and helpful as always, with that telltale spark in his eyes when something tickled him. We had a wide-ranging conversation about his research on the New Journalism and also about his family. (I always admired the loving way he talked about them over the years.) Rest in peace, dear friend.

**Roberta Maguire**

So here's my memory—and it is a recent one. As John was entering his last month of life, he reached out to Bill Dow and me to let us know that one of the two chapters he had agreed to write for our Routledge Companion to American Literary Journalism—on the *New Yorker*—he would not be able to finish. Here the man was, in his last month of life, more concerned for us and our project than for himself. Classic John. But there is more: He sent on

his notes for the unfinished chapter to me and offered to talk with me about his argument, in case we wanted to do something with the quite substantial research and thinking he had done (in fact, Josh Roiland has picked up the project). I read John's notes, which were of course very thorough and interesting, and called him at our appointed time. John was enthusiastic, told me his new ideas since he had sent on his notes, and we engaged in a very high-level conversation for at least half an hour. He never mentioned himself. He stayed interested in and excited about ideas. Josh is picking up the work, and like the true mentor John always was, he left Josh a wonderful roadmap—with signposts, to be sure, but with enough open space for Josh now to put his own mark on the project. Again, classic John. He was a light in this world.

**Miles Maguire**

One of things that I think would have amused, and pleased, John about his memorial service is that three different eulogists—his son, a colleague from Marquette, and one from St. Louis University—all settled on the same phrase to describe him. As each one spoke in turn, they all fell back on the same quote, sometimes attributed to Maya Angelou: "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

There's a good reason why they all ended up in that place—John had a gift for making you feel important, important to him at that moment and important for whatever it was you were saying—whether it was scholarship or chit-chat or anything in between. He made you feel that he was genuinely and deeply interested in whatever your work might be at a given moment but also who you were at that moment, how things were going for you, and how you were doing. That's not something you can fake. He made you feel that he cared, because he did actually care.

**Tom Connery: Final Thoughts**

As Miles pointed out when I was talking with him, John had chosen the Grateful Dead's "Ripple" to be played at his memorial and so it seems only fitting to conclude this remembrance with those words:

> If my words did glow with the gold of sunshine/
> And my tunes were played on the harp unstrung/
> Would you hear my voice come through the music/
> Would you hold it near as it were your own?
>
> It's a hand-me-down, the thoughts are broken/
> Perhaps they're better left unsung/
> I don't know, don't really care/

Let there be songs to fill the air/

Ripple in still water/
When there is no pebble tossed/
Nor wind to blow

Reach out your hand if your cup be empty/
If your cup is full may it be again/
Let it be known there is a fountain/
That was not made by the hands of men

There is a road, no simple highway/
Between the dawn and the dark of night/
And if you go no one may follow/
That path is for your steps alone

Ripple in still water/
When there is no pebble tossed/
Nor wind to blow

You who choose to lead must follow/
But if you fall you fall alone/
If you should stand then who's to guide you?
If I knew the way I would take you home

Rest in peace, my friend—we will miss you.

# Tenth Anniversary Issue
# Looking Back, Looking Forward


All word-cloud images in this section by Anthony DeRado.

# The Early Days of Literary Journalism—A Tale of Sims, Eason, and Connery

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

Nineteen eighty-four. It was a very good year. That's when my doctoral dissertation was officially "posted," although I had finished it in 1982 while on the faculty at the University of Idaho, my first full-time teaching position. It was the year Norman Sims's *The Literary Journalists* was published. And it was the year David Eason's highly influential article, "The New Journalism and the Image-World: Two Modes of Organizing Experience," ran in the first issue of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. (Eason later revised it, with the title "The New Journalism and the Image-World," as a chapter in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*.)[1]

Sims's *The Literary Journalists* was important because it essentially called into existence or at least branded an emerging writing form, and Eason's piece was also critical because it demonstrated the meaning-making nature of literary journalism as well as its limitations. As John Pauly has pointed out, Eason went a step further and used insights from literary criticism and phenomenology to question our confidence in journalists' ability to serve as independent, authoritative reporters of reality, even when using more in-depth methods. Nevertheless, it was becoming clear that what was being called literary journalism could be identified by common characteristics, which Sims noted in his book's introduction, and it was slowly becoming evident as well that literary journalism wasn't simply reporting with pretty writing. Rather, it had substance and style and was therefore worth the read.

The title of my doctoral dissertation was a bit cumbersome, as often is the case with dissertation titles: "Fusing Fictional Technique and Journalistic Fact: Literary Journalism in the 1890s Newspaper."[2] I was essentially making a case that the so-called "New Journalism" of the 1970s was part of a tradition of reporting with a literary purpose, and I was tracing it back to the 1890s. I focused on four writers: Stephen Crane, Richard Harding Davis, Julian Ralph, and Hutchins Hapgood. The dissertation contained no mention of either Sims or Eason. Yet for a while, Sims, Eason, and Connery were the three constants in this emerging field of writing and study.

In those days, research dealing with literary journalism was presented at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC)[3] meetings, specifically at sessions of AEJMC's Qualitative Studies (QS) division; if you crunched numbers, you'd present in the Quantitative Studies division sessions. Quite often, those judging papers had neither an understanding of nor a knowledge of literary journalism. Conference papers in the QS Division could be on just about any topic, including media ethics, for instance, or gender and media. If the research was largely historical, it might even be best suited for the AEJMC's History Division, though once again the paper judges probably would not have a solid grasp of literary journalism, even if the history of the form was the topic. That lack of knowledge and understanding was often quite evident in a judge's comments.

In 1983, the AEJMC held its annual conference at Oregon State University. That's when I first met Norman Sims. He was presenting his take on literary journalism by discussing a few of its contemporary practitioners. Afterward, I introduced myself, and we had a short, pleasant exchange.

In 1988, AEJMC was meeting in Portland, Oregon. My friend John Pauly, who was then on the faculty at the University of Tulsa, before going to Marquette University, told me there was someone I should meet, and he introduced me to Eason, who at that time was on the faculty at the University of Utah. Pauly was right. It was clear to me that Eason and Sims were almost outliers, interested in and advocating for a type of journalism that had a literary purpose but not a huge number of supporters (although Sims's book would become a hot item).

I was presenting parts of my dissertation at the occasional conference, but publishing was a challenge. The part on Hutchins Hapgood was published in the journal *Journalism History*,[4] while a piece on Julian Ralph was published in *American Journalism: A Journal of Media History*.[5]

Eason eventually ended up at Middle Tennessee State University, just south of Nashville, where he oversaw a master's program and codirected an annual conference of journalism scholars and practitioners. Sims and Pauly, who had been in graduate school together at the University of Illinois and had a long-standing friendship, were regulars, and I was invited as well. The conferences were always stimulating, but just as rich were the conversations outside of sessions among a handful of literary journalism's fellow travelers. After the conference had ended on Saturday morning, we'd hang out in Nashville, and the conversation continued.

The participants in that conversation would come and go, often being those who might dabble a bit and go on to another scholarly interest. But in those early days, Sims, Eason, and I, with the occasional broader view coming

from Pauly, continued to try to explain literary journalism to "outsiders" who were eternally puzzled and might ask, "Isn't that just magazine writing?" Or, "Didn't Tom Wolfe invent that?"

So, a central question arose: Where was literary journalism's home, the place where it belonged, where it could continue to grow and develop?

Most importantly, who might publish the research, and where else might it be presented? Those history journals certainly weren't interested in current literary journalism. Sims's work was appearing in books, and he and I found a relatively receptive audience one year at the annual meeting of the American Journalism Historians Association. But, again, it was "history."

Another year, Sims, Pauly, and I were presenting on literary journalism at the annual meeting of the American Studies Association in New York City. We sat in on a few sessions and were pleased to hear the discussion and questions that followed those presentations. We were excited for our session, looking forward to the feedback and discussion. Alas, one person showed up for our session. We invited him—Michael Robertson, a Crane scholar who would become active in literary journalism—to join us in the bar.

In those early days, Sims, Eason, and I seemed to be howling at the moon, with an occasional "wolf" from Pauly. But, of course, all that changed, not the least due to the founding, growth, and development of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, begun in France in 2006, as well the birth of the association's journal in 2009. No more howling at the moon. And Sims, Eason, and I could watch it all grow.

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**Notes**

[1] Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," 51–65. See also Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," in *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, 191–205.

[2] Connery, "Fusing Fictional Technique and Journalistic Fact."

[3] Formerly the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ), the name was changed in 1982 to the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). Folkerts, "History of Journalism Education," 260.

[4] Connery, "Hutchins Hapgood," 2–9.

[5] Connery, "Julian Ralph," 165–73.


dix

# "The Past, the Present and the Perhaps" of *LJS* and the IALJS

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**Abstract:** This essay provides a reflection on and an introspection into the past, present, and future of the IALJS and *Literary Journalism Studies*. It details the history of both the association and the journal, including the debates held in Nancy, France, in 2006 about their chosen names and structures. The essay then looks briefly into the current status of the learned society and its journal, built up over these last ten years by dedicated scholars and tireless administrators who are working to ensure a seamless transition to the next generation of advisory board members and editors. The essay concludes with a nod to the discipline's future and the potential questions and issues facing not just the IALJS and *LJS* but literary journalism studies in general throughout the world.

**Keywords:** IALJS founding – Nancy (France) – *LJS* – literary journalism – discipline

As we commemorate the tenth volume of *Literary Journalism Studies* (and the twelfth anniversary of the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies), I would like to take a moment here to speak briefly about where we once were, where we are today, and where I think (or hope) we will be heading as a learned society. The title I have chosen for this piece comes from a Tennessee Williams essay I edited years ago, which, admittedly, shows my literary stripes and also hints at the fact that the views contained herein come from a literary perspective, especially concerning the "perhaps" of the association and the journal. There are enough pieces in this volume from journalism studies scholars that I do not feel remiss in speaking from the other side of the aisle.

## The Past

To set the record straight about the origins of the association and the journal, or as straight as my contorted memory will allow me these days, I will begin with the Past. Doing so will no doubt debunk any uber myths that could have risen over the next century about the founding of IALJS and *LJS*, but so be it. What I have most enjoyed about the association since its inception is that no one protagonist can claim credit for it; no one hero defends its borders. It has been from the start a group effort, and what a group it was/is.

Some backstory is perhaps needed. In May 2005, I had met with a couple of my colleagues here in France at what was then called Université Nancy 2. We were young(ish), dynamic (or seemed so at the time), but, above all, motivated, and we wanted to put these qualities to good use in our jobs. It was decided that we would organize a conference, but with specialties ranging from U.S. drama to corpus linguistics, we did not know exactly what kind of conference to host. I did what any serious scholar would do: I turned to Google. I typed in something like "100th anniversary in 2006," and among the entries listed was Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. I remember having read it in college—or at least the Cliff's Notes for it (full disclosure)—and loving its muckraking, journalistic quality. I was double-majoring in English and rhetoric then, and my specialty in rhetoric was literary journalism, as my teaching assistant (or TA, as we call them in the United States) called it back in 1986, a term he was familiar with, thanks in a large part to people like Norm Sims, Tom Connery, and Edd Applegate. So, I suggested to my colleagues that we organize a conference that would celebrate the hundredth anniversary of *The Jungle*.

Looking back now, the pure arbitrariness of that decision still haunts me. I really wish I could say the decision was based on some astute reading of an international need to bring the right people to the right place at the

right time. You know that if-you-build-it they-will-come kind of prescience. Alas, that was not the case. We were more Oedipus or the Kingfisher and less Tiresias. But our plan was nonetheless noble: to welcome in 2006 with a conference dedicated to a book that, arguably, does not merit its own conference, be it a literary or a journalistic one. Still, the stars were beginning to align, in spite of it all.

The Call for Papers was published in June 2005 for a conference to be held the following year. I remember receiving only a few queries, and even fewer proposals, and all from people whom I, admittedly, had never heard of before, a fact that speaks more to my journeyman status at the time than to any of their august statures in the field. One of those people was John Hartsock, author of *A History of American Literary Journalism*.[1] His email was polite and deferential, but one could sense the skepticism oozing out between the lines. Fair enough. Had he Googled my name back then, which knowing John today I am almost certain he did, he would have stumbled upon my work on Tennessee Williams. Literary journalism figured nowhere in my CV. But John was curious, determined even, and would not let a little thing like lapses in scholarship dissuade him:

> That the conference is being held in France suggests to me that there is some kind of critical recognition on the Continent of literary journalism. [*There wasn't . . .*] And it seems to me that it would arise either because of an awareness of the American experience [*It did*], or, more likely, that there is a homegrown variety there [*there was, but we just didn't know it yet*].

He continued, wanting to know more about the genre here in Europe:

In making your observation, are you referring to the American experience specifically (which is my focus), or are you referring to a Continental experience? [*Uhhh . . .*] If the latter, could you suggest, once again, any examples and scholarship on the topic? [*I couldn't . . .* ] If nothing else, what strikes me is the serendipity of the observation.[2]

Serendipity indeed.

By the following September, however, I had still received only three propositions. But what three people they were: Hartsock, of course, but also Alice Trindade and Isabel Soares (now both past presidents of the IALJS). Through their collective insistence that we not let the conference die, the CFP was rewritten (my colleagues here stayed on board but saw that the conference was heading in an entirely different direction), the deadline was extended, and people were courted directly by phone, by email, and by fax—anything short of homing pigeons. I say courting by design here. Little contacting could have been done then, since the very word connotes an exchange between

known parties, and I was obviously a *persona ignotum*. It was seduction, plain and simple, with the promise of a France in full spring bloom elided with scholarship. By November of that year, our numbers were up to ten or so; by January, we had fourteen. It was agreed that all the speakers would come to Nancy (Norm Sims had heard about the conference from either Hartsock and David Abrahamson, or both, but wisely waited in the wings to see where it would all go; thankfully, Norm joined us the following year in Paris, when the association really cut its teeth.)

In May 2006, the "First International Conference on Literary Journalism" took place. I do not recall who exactly came up with the new conference title, but it certainly bears Hartsock's fingerprints (or perhaps David's). Speakers from around the world—Canada, Scotland, Portugal, the United States, Australia, France, and England—convened in this small(ish) city in northeastern France, known mostly for its contribution to the Art Nouveau movement and, alas, for not being Paris. At the same time, I really think holding the conference in a small city was a good idea: It meant that we could easily see each other (or, depending on the perspective, not readily hide from one another). Paris the following year was great, but I think we all saw a lot less of each other, and that could have worked against the association's bright future had we not already established our close ties the year before.

Looking back now, I think what was most important about this first conference was not the papers read or the panels held, but rather the discussion immediately afterwards. The group sat down together and forged a plan to fashion serendipity into certainty. We all knew instinctively that, if we just left after the final panel and went home with only the promise to talk again after the summer break, we risked never speaking to each other again. So, although the details of the IALJS were not yet formulated, including the association-to-be's name, the foundation was firmly set in place. We were thus each assigned our summer homework to ensure that the momentum established in Nancy would not fall the way of many a good intention.

In the weeks that followed, a flurry of emails was exchanged. The first item on the agenda was the association's name. Believe me when I say that "literary journalism" was not unanimously agreed upon from the start, not even by the influential Anglo-American contingency. The term remains as contentious today as it was back in 2006 (and before that), and alternative names were floated: narrative journalism, narrative nonfiction, literary reportage, narrative literary journalism, etc. After much debate, *literary journalism* won out over second-place *reportage*, simply because we all felt that it already had a certain international cachet and equally avoided the latter's indeterminate (today) or Marxist (yesterday) connotations. Not long after, we had

the new association's mission statement and (thanks to David Abrahamson) by-laws, blueprints for a journal, and an elected executive committee and editorial board. I was elected president for an agreed-upon two-year term, and though I have been conferred with the title Founding President of IALJS, it is an honor that should rightly be shared among the fourteen original participants. David Abrahamson was elected vice-president (and secretary); Bill Reynolds, treasurer (a post he still holds, and we thank him for that); John Hartsock, Jenny McKay, and Bill Dow as editor, associate editor, and managing editor, respectively, of *Literary Journalism Studies* (a name which also took much negotiating); and Isabel Soares as membership chair; Alice Trindade, research chair; and Susan Greenberg, program chair. Bill Reynolds and David Abrahamson agreed to coedit the quarterly newsletter, *Literary Journalism*, which is the lifeblood of the association.

Soon after the nominations came the websites for both the association and the journal (with me serving as webmaster until it was clear I was out of my element). Nick Jackson, then a student of David's at Northwestern, was soon hired to replace me. David Abrahamson secured non-profit tax-exempt status (in Illinois) and a bank account for the association, and we finally agreed on a logo. (In all honesty, we tried out several versions before selecting the final one. I think we are all still a bit uncertain as to what our logo actually means, though for years I have declared that the enlarged letter "I" recalls the subjective "I" and "eye" witness of literary journalism. . . . but I really just made that up post hoc.) A new call for papers was soon in the works, with Paris being chosen as the site of the second conference. We had agreed that the conference needed to come back to Europe out of concern that sending it to North America so soon risked the international commitments of the association. Paris was the obvious choice because of its magnetic pull.

While many of us were preoccupied with the future of the IALJS, John Hartsock was concentrating on *LJS*. He had drafted a journal proposal, which was sent to publishers Sage and Routledge, both of whom showed initial interest but finally declined out of fear that the journal would not generate enough subscriptions to become self-sufficient. John turned to university presses, and the University of Illinois Press finally agreed to publish the journal, as long as the association agreed to contribute to the publication costs. I recall debating this for a few months. We were excited that *LJS* finally had a future, and with a reputed university publisher, but we all feared that the journal would tank the association, financially speaking. We had just collected our second-year membership dues, all of which would have had to be given over to Illinois for the first two issues of volume one. It had been agreed a year prior to this that *LJS* would be semi-annual. There was even early talk of a quarterly, but it was

decided that not enough scholarship was being produced in the field to justify four issues per year (and an annual journal risked declaring just how *little* scholarship there actually was). That early debate also centered on the journal's name, though "literary journalism" was inevitably going to figure into its title, given the association's name. Suggestions included: *Literary/Journalism Studies*, *Journal of Literary Journalism*, *Literary Journalism Quarterly*, etc. Each had its merits, but *LJS* was already in the association's name, and it was simple and elegant and said what it needed to without saying more than was necessary.

A letter of *dis*-intent was eventually sent to the University of Illinois Press, thanking them for their confidence in the journal's prospects but admitting that the costs of publication were beyond the young association's budget. David Abrahamson suggested the journal be "self-published" for the first couple of issues, and this is what was eventually done. Once the first contributions were peer-reviewed and accepted, John Hartsock, using InDesign, established the journal's layout. The issue was then printed in Evanston and mailed out to paid members of the association. (Membership fees continue to keep the journal alive.) A lot has changed over the years concerning *LJS,* including its editor-in-chief (now Bill Reynolds), its look, and its sponsor (now Northwestern University Press).

## The Present

The Present of both the IALJS and *LJS* has been sound, a testament to the leadership both have regularly received over the last decade. Membership in the association, for instance, continues to grow steadily, from the original fourteen members in 2006 to more than 150 in 2018.[3] Moreover, its influence has spread to nearly every continent on the planet. (I guess we should consider holding the IALJS once in Antarctica, if only for bragging rights; sadly, with the current U.S. President's myopic eco-policies, the continent will likely become temperate sooner than expected.) And the number of IALJS outreach panels (e.g., American Comparative Literature Association [ACLA]; Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication [AEJMC]; European Society for the Study of English [ESSE]; Study English in Canada [SEC]; Brazilian Association of Journalism Researchers [SBPJor]) held yearly or biennially at various journalism and literature conferences worldwide ensures the IALJS will continue to publicize the association's work and attract new members. The IALJS has managed to stay true to its roots these past ten years (attracting internationally renowned keynote speakers, respecting gender parity in executive positions, recruiting and training younger colleagues for future leadership roles), and has still managed to evolve, which is all that we can ask of any learned society.

Similarly, *LJS* has been a driving force in the advancement of literary journalism studies around the globe. It continues to receive submissions on a regular basis, and its acceptance rate hovers around a respectable forty percent.[4] Moreover, the many collections and monographs on literary journalism studies that *LJS*'s book review editor Nancy Roberts receives and assigns for review attest to the genre's growing interest among academes. With Miles and Roberta Maguire's tireless work in brokering *LJS*'s inclusion in Thomson Reuters's Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) of the Web of Science Core Collection (the gold standard of citation indices), the journal is sure to remain an important scholarly mouthpiece for the field. And as literary journalism studies grows and expands it will eventually produce more scholarship and the need for other academic reviews, just as journalism and literature have plenty of journalism dedicated to their research. While already drawing literary journalism scholarship away from journals such as *Prose Studies*, *LJS* would nonetheless welcome competition from newer journals, as their creation would imply a supply of scholarship greater than the avenues available to publish it.

Literary journalism has undeniably evolved from its marginalized position as an alternative genre and form to the early stages of a recognized and independent discipline, and the IALJS and *LJS* both have had a hand in that success.

## The Perhaps

As for the Perhaps of both the association and the journal, the current executive and editorial boards are eager to find and train the future scholars who will carry the IALJS and *LJS* through to the next decade. We are certainly on the cusp of transition, with some of the early members growing closer and closer to retirement (words that frighten me as I type them) and a few having already retired. Yet there is the promise of youth in our membership and the strong belief that this next generation, when their services will have been called upon, will reinject new energy into both the association and the journal. In lieu of predicting where literary journalism is heading, and with it literary journalism studies, I will offer a few observations I have developed over the last decade. I will leave it to future scholars to debate the value of these comments.

I believe the next great step for literary journalism studies in the years ahead will be to become an independent discipline, one that educates both practitioners *and* scholars alike, just as literature and journalism will have done for nearly a century or more. Sure, there are some degree programs already in place, such as Barry Siegal's Literary Journalism undergraduate

program at the University of California Irvine or Robert Boynton's Literary Reportage graduate program at New York University in the United States; Richard Keeble's literary journalism tutelage at the University of Lincoln in England; and Edvaldo Pereira Lima's Academia Brasileira de Jornalismo Literário (ABJL), a program to train Brazilian literary journalists and scholars of the genre, which Monica Martinez is poised to carry on, given her recent nomination as president of Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo (SBPJor).

By finally achieving disciplinary status, literary journalism will have advanced along many fronts. To start with, a discipline, of course, needs historians to determine its pedigree and to establish its moments of institutional crises, and literary journalism has certainly been blessed with many, from around the world: Norman Sims and John C. Hartsock in the United States[5]; Edvaldo Pereira Lima and Monica Martinez in Brazil[6]; Sonja Merljak Zdovc in Slovenia[7]; Myriam Boucharenc and Marie-Ève Thérenty in France[8]; Isabelle Meuret and Paul Aron in Belgium[9]; Lluís Albert Chillón in Spain[10]; Charles A. Laughlin in China[11]; Isabel Soares and Manuel João de Carvalho Coutinho in Portugal[12]; to name but a few. These historians have established the main periods of literary journalism's development over the centuries, which other scholars have since been fleshing out.

A discipline also needs a corpus of primary and secondary texts on which to found itself, and scholarship over the past decade or more has surely increased the number and visibility of the literary journalistic texts around the world. And yet, while recovering lost texts for the literary journalism canon and arguing cases for new recruits has been invaluable to the field, a discipline that has been idling in corpus building and textual analysis, which is where literary journalism studies arguably is today, is not entirely advancing. To move forward, a discipline also needs its own theories and methodologies, which, by this decade's end, will have been borrowed mostly from the disciplines of journalism and literature.

Given this current state of affairs, literary journalism studies will need to form theories and explore methodologies that will advance a unique scholarship. Literary journalism as a praxis has been flourishing these past couple decades, and its scholarship needs to keep apace. While some theoretical inquiry into literary journalism aesthetics has already been conducted by scholars who include Hartsock, Pereira Lima, Borges, and Aare,[13] and ad hoc research methodologies have frequently been imported from other disciplines (e.g., framing theory and life history from journalism/communication or deconstructionism and postcolonialism from literature/cultural studies), literary journalism studies is faced with the challenge to formulate its own theories

and research methods, which would allow it to both assert its own authority and autonomy and lend its epistemological resources to other disciplines that are faced with resolving similar quandaries surrounding textual hybridity, international specificities, and historical subjectivity. For example, the reading experience of literary journalism differs from that of traditional journalism and of literature, yet we are repeatedly borrowing theories from both of these fields to explain this reader–literary journalistic text experience. At the conclusion of the next decade, literary journalism studies will have surely benefitted from new theories on how a reader of a *New Yorker* article, who knows that the story is factual but who nonetheless takes pleasure in reading the text as if it were a short story, processes information differently from the reader of a story in, say, *Le Monde* or the *Folha de S.Paulo* or in a historical novel.

Future possibilities for scholars include looking into the epistemologies, methodologies, and praxes of literary journalism studies that are linked directly to the greater debate of disciplinary identity, such as: the theorization of literary journalism's aesthetics (text-, author-, reader-, and environment-based theories); a bibliographic assessment of the current state of research in international literary journalism studies (including suggestions for future research topics); an examination of other disciplinary theories and methods being imported into literary journalism's analytical framework; the application of inter-, pluri-, and transdisciplinary literary journalism studies around the world (that is, scholarship of literary journalism studies will likely come from other disciplines, such as history, sociology, media studies, communication studies, etc.; thus it might be considered an emerging post-academic science); and the exploration of literary journalism's theories and methodologies that could be taken up by other disciplines; to suggest a few possible directions.

One area that has interested me considerably these past years, given my literary affinities noted earlier, is who or what determines the "literary" of literary journalism. I am a firm believer that the reader makes journalism "literary." Too often we focus on the author and the text, looking for scenes, for dialogue, for metaphors, for imagery . . . for obvious "traces" of literary journalism, per Wolfe and others. But this approach leaves the reader out of the formula. When I teach literature, I never ask a student, "Is this literature?" (it is assumed a priori) but rather, "What precisely makes this literature?" (Literary analysis rarely asks this question but instead provides answers indirectly by looking for various insights into the text.) For example, writers of literature, just like writers of literary journalism, trust their readers to interpret, to analyze and, ultimately, to find meaning and pleasure in the text—not just to recognize the presence of stylistic elements in the text but, instead, to recognize *how* those elements are being used or are working *on the reader*. For me,

this is what makes a text "literary" from Hersey's understatement, Capote's free indirect speech, Wolfe's unorthodox punctuation, Herr's impressionism, to Didion's deceptive objectivity.

Though a far cry from literary journalism here, I have, in this piece, tried to give it a literary boost by intentionally writing much of the narrative past in the passive voice, so as to make it seem as if all the decisions about the IALJS were being made for us, by some greater power, and that we were not actively making those choices ourselves. In the section on the present situation, I opted for the perfect tense, which links our successes of today to those of our past, but with the implications that are ongoing. And, finally, I used the future perfect for this section on the Perhaps, because talking about IALJS's and *LJS*'s future in the past tense confirms that both will have a rich and promising future, one both near and far, always arriving in waves and always ebbing out to some intangible horizon. Ultimately, though, it is the combination of what I intended in and with my prose and what my readers uncover that makes it literary. So if this piece *is* literary, it is for them to decide, not me.

## Conclusion

The IALJS and *LJS* have experienced amazing growth over the past decade. We have added to both an international consortium of colleagues from around the world and on nearly every continent—and we are not through yet. To this day, I receive emails from new colleagues, thanking us for the IALJS and *LJS* and asking: "Where have they been all this time?" It seems that nearly every democratic nation is experiencing a schizophrenic rift between its traditional journalistic modes and those that resemble what we collectively call "literary journalism." The IALJS and *LJS* are poised to offer a home to the global community of scholars who have for too many years felt abandoned or isolated. Literary reportage, narrative journalism, creative nonfiction, the New Journalism, *nuevo periodismo*, *Jornalismo Literário*, *crónica,* reportage literature, *reportage littéraire*, literary nonfiction and narrative nonfiction—call it what you wish in your own country, the genre of writing that involves immersion reporting, factual accounting, and narrative voice—and the merging discipline that studies and celebrates it—has long been denied its proper hermeneutics. And for that one reason alone, we exist and, arguably, will grow in the years ahead.

## Notes

[1] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*.

[2] John C. Hartsock, email to the author, June 27, 2005.

[3] Bill Reynolds, email to the author, September 12, 2018.

[4] Bill Reynolds, email to the author, September 12, 2018.

[5] Sims, *True Stories*; Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*.

[6] Pereira Lima, *Páginas ampliadas*; Martinez, *Jornalismo Literário*.

[7] Zdovc, *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia*.

[8] Boucharenc, *L'écrivain–reporter au cœur des années trente*; Thérenty, *La Littérature au quotidien*.

[9] Meuret, "Le Journalisme littéraire à l'aube du XXIe siècle"; Aron, "Entre journalisme et littérature, l'institution du reportage."

[10] Chillón, *Literatura y periodismo*.

[11] Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage*.

[12] Soares, "Literary Journalism's Magnetic Pull," 118–33; Coutinho, "Desafios para a historiografia do jornalismo literário português."

[13] Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*; Pereira Lima, *Páginas ampliadas*; Borges, *Jornalismo Literário*; Aare, "A Narratological Approach to Literary Journalism," 106–39.


kymmenen

# Present at the Creation: Fortune Has Surely Smiled

David Abrahamson
Publisher, *Literary Journalism Studies*
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At the moment of the founding of our beloved association, there was a wide and deeply felt consensus that the essential purpose of a learned society was defined by a few key ingredients. And it was apparent to everyone that two activities were paramount: the organizing of an annual conference and the establishment of a credible, peer-reviewed scholarly journal. The overarching goals were clear. The association would exist to facilitate the creation of new knowledge; to encourage the sort of collegial interaction that would both intellectually inform and enrich members lives; and lastly, to help further members' professional growth needed for career success. The over-arching goal, however, was to further define literary journalism studies as a worthy academic discipline.

Certainly, it was agreed, producing a first-rate scholarly journal would be critical to the association's future. It would serve as the most visible and permanent manifestation of the association's role in enabling literary journalism scholars' contributions to the creation of new knowledge in the field. Since the founding of *Literary Journalism Studies* in 2009, I have been convinced that fortune has smiled on us, because we have been blessed with two extraordinary editors-in-chief. John Hartsock, the founding editor and now professor emeritus of communication studies at the State University of New York at Cortland, brought a deeply felt sense of academic integrity and intellectual rigor to the task. His incisive view of what was and was not worthy scholarship set the highest possible bar from the beginning, and his founding editorship went a long way toward defining the inherent worth of the publication. His successor and current editor, Bill Reynolds, professor of journalism at Ryerson University in Toronto, brought many decades of experience as a publication editor to the task, not only further defining *LJS*'s editorial processes but also bringing his acute and wide-ranging imagination to bear. The result has been the creation of new and useful kinds of articles that have enriched and broadened the journal's reach.

Under the nuanced leadership of John and Bill, the rest of the editorial staff helped bring the journal to life. Associate editors William Dow, Miles

Maguire, Roberta Maguire, and Marcia R. Prior-Miller, as well as book review editors Thomas B. Connery and his successor, Nancy Roberts, and designer Anthony DeRado, have all played important parts. It might be worth noting that the editorial staff is comprised of volunteers, so it can be argued that the journal benefits all the more in light of the fact that their wonderful efforts are labors of love. All of which sets up the question: What am I, with the title of "publisher," doing in this illustrious company?

Ah, there might be a story there, and I suppose that, now on the tenth anniversary of *LJS*, I am the one to tell it. It all began with a search for a university press or a commercial academic press that might be interested in printing, marketing, and distributing our publication. Drawn out negotiations—conversations, really—with almost a dozen possible partners all proved to be dead ends. The issue, of course, was money—money the association did not have for services we largely did not need. A great deal, it seemed, would go to pay for the prospective partners' overhead. In retrospect, we probably should have known.

But fortune smiled again, and a casual conversation with the owner of a local digital printing firm with a large course-packet business, near my university, revealed that he was interested in getting into the journal printing business. Not only that, he could handle the domestic and international mailing services needed to distribute our publication. And wonder of wonders, he offered his services to us at a fraction of the cost of the others' estimates. We could not have been more pleased, and a simple handshake sealed the deal. An aside: Due to both the quality of printing stock and binding, as well as our domestic and international mailing costs, your $50 annual dues largely go to pay for the manufacturing and distribution of our two semi-annual issues.

Since I was the interlocutor in that conversation with the printer, my colleagues graciously decided to honor me with the publisher's title. My role is perhaps best described as counsel to, or sounding board for, to the editor. In the words of Walter Bagehot, an early editor of the *Economist*, as publisher I have always considered that I have the right "to be consulted, . . . to encourage, . . . to warn."[1]

And there is another factor which, in truth, may take precedence over all the above. In all candor, I have long suspected that the bestowing of the lovely title of publisher may be less about me and more about my employer, the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. I am told the school has a certain standing in global journalism education circles. In response to a request shortly after the journal's founding and with my administration's kind permission, the journal's masthead page and back cover state that my school—nestled in the leafy groves of Evanston, Illinois, the first suburb north of Chicago—is the site of publication. But please do not misunderstand me. In the interest of a modicum

of transparency, I have to confess that I greatly enjoy being a figurehead. Honest.

So, what, as publisher, do I really do? When I can be of counsel to the editor in matters of content, presentation, scholarly worthiness, or whatever, I am more than happy to be called on—but the final word is always his. I have suggested possible volumes to the book review editor, but similarly the final decision is always hers. Moreover, when business issues of the journal arise, as they episodically do, related to matters such as printing, mailing, or print-run orders, I am happy to invoke my illustrious title and attempt to contribute to finding a solution. To date, it has rarely involved heavy lifting.

In its ten years of life, the journal has published many worthy articles that have clearly advanced and added new knowledge to the discipline. In addition, there is a tradition of publishing keynote speeches presented at the IALJS annual conference, which have been unusually insightful essays of analysis and interpretation. However, perhaps the ultimate validation of the journal's standing took place only a few years ago. As a result of the efforts of associate editors Miles Maguire and Roberta S. Maguire, *Literary Journalism Studies* is indexed in the Thomson Reuters Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) of the Web of Science Core Collection. As I am sure you know, Thomson Reuters suite of indices are generally regarded as the gold standard of citation indices. Most importantly, acceptance in ESCI is a step toward inclusion in Thomson Reuters flagship indices, the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI) and the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). These are the two indices that accept only the most rigorous, esteemed, and intellectually valid of the academy's peer-reviewed journals. And we are not shy about our aspiration to one day be included.

And, with your permission, one last closing observation. In terms of lifespan, a decade is a long time in the existence of a periodical publication. Every year more than a thousand are founded, but only the smallest fraction are still around three years later. Scholarly journals, particularly those that are both peer-reviewed and available in print, lead an even more precarious existence. Despite good intentions and the best of motives, a large number come and go, leaving barely a trace. That *Literary Journalism Studies* is not only here to celebrate its tenth anniversary but continues to serve as a robust forum of scholarship is a truly remarkable achievement. To the journal's staff, to all its contributors and to you, dear reader, please accept my heartfelt thanks.

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**Notes**

[1] Bagehot, *The English Constitution*, 208.


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# The Boundaries of Literary Journalism Scholarship: An Analysis of *Literary Journalism Studies* 2009–2017

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**Abstract**: This research examined the content of *Literary Journalism Studies* (*LJS*), the academic journal dedicated to the study of all forms of literary journalism, to determine the breadth and scope of its peer-reviewed articles and the extent to which the journal in its first ten years has achieved the international reach and multidisciplinary approaches envisioned in its founding mission statement. All research articles and essays from the seventeen issues published from spring 2009 through spring 2017 were analyzed to determine the breadth of the journal's international scholarship; the main research topics, approaches, and trends; the authors' disciplinary approaches to research; and the gender balance of authorship.

**Keywords:** literary journalism – literary journalism studies – creative nonfiction – narrative nonfiction – New Journalism – pedagogy – literary reportage – narrative journalism – literary reportage – literary nonfiction

*Literary Journalism Studies* (*LJS*) is regarded as a major scholarly publication in the academic field of literary journalism, a genre also known as literary reportage, narrative journalism, New Journalism, reportage, literary nonfiction, creative nonfiction, and narrative nonfiction, among others.[2] The International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS), an organization founded in 2006 following the first International Conference on Literary Journalism in Nancy, France,[3] created the journal in 2009 to inform and educate literary journalism scholars, practitioners, and educators about evolving trends in this growing field of research. Although the journal is published in English, its mission statement notes that the publication is "directed at an international audience" and "welcomes contributions from different cultural, disciplinary, and critical perspectives."[4]

This study examined the journal's content since its inception, to gain insights into its growth over the first decade of publication and to address the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent does the journal evidence breadth in international scholarship as envisioned in the mission statement?

RQ2: Has the journal achieved breadth in researchers' and authors' academic disciplines?

RQ3: What are the main topic themes of the research published in the journal from 2009 through spring 2017?

RQ4: Is there a gender balance in the journal's article and essay authorship?

## Literature Review and Methods

The journal has published two issues annually since 2009. Data for this study were drawn from the corpus of *LJS* issues published from the journal's founding in 2009, through spring 2017. The seventeen issues included each of the two issues published annually, from the first issue (vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 2009) through 2016, and the first issue of 2017 (vol. 9, no. 1). For this study of the journal's research contributions, a total ninety-five articles and essays were identified from the seventeen issues for examination. Book reviews, book excerpts, and interviews were not included in the analysis.

Data for RQs 1, 2, and 4, that is, researcher-authorship, affiliated institution and location, disciplinary expertise, and gender, are in their essence, demographic data. To that end, each article and essay was coded for each researcher/author's: (1) affiliated institution's location; (2) affiliated institution; (3) disciplinary expertise; and (4) gender, available from author listings and the *LJS* biographical sketch that accompanies each article and essay.

*Affiliated institution location* was defined as the country in which the in-

stitution where each researcher/author works is located; with the *affiliated institution* recorded by the institution name.

*Disciplinary expertise* was defined as the individual researcher/author's academic unit, as given in the biographical sketch that accompanies each *LJS* article and essay.

As a point of definition, a researcher's disciplinary expertise could include areas such as journalism, mass communication, media studies, literary studies (U.S./English/French literature, etc.), social sciences, physical and/or biological sciences, etc. Because "journalism studies" can be considered a subset of the general category "communication studies," this study conflated the two areas of research as one category.

*Gender* was coded male or female, also drawn from each researcher/author's biographical sketch.

Data for RQ3, research topic and approach were collected from a review and analysis of each article's content.

Norman Sims in "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies" in 2009 suggested studies might include: (1) international aspects of literary journalism, (2) historical frameworks of literary journalism, (3) literary journalism practices, (4) pros and cons of online literary journalism, and (5) literary journalism's relationship to reality.[5] Miles Maguire from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, in his 2016 research review, also listed several recent trends and topics in literary journalism scholarship and observed that research categories might include: (1) author studies, (2) national/regional studies of literary journalism, (3) international studies, (4) historical development, (5) "slow" journalism, (6) effects of digital technology, (7) ethics of literary journalism, and (8) narrative theory.[6] Comparing the two sets of categories gives evidence that Sims and Maguire identified several overlapping categories of research. Based on their findings and observations, this research, for analyzing all research papers and essays, put forward thirteen categories to address RQ3: "What are the main topic themes of the research published in the journal from 2009 through spring 2017?"

Sims and Maguire's categories were numbered 1 through 13 and used as the starting point for coding and analyzing each article and essay. Classifying each study into one category was not an easy task. Some research explored wide-ranging topics; thus, these classifications cannot be considered absolute in setting the boundaries of scholarship but can illuminate some interesting developments about the scholarship contained in the journal. A more detailed analysis of the research is found in the findings section of the categories that emerged from the analysis: (1) *national/regional studies* (different national manifestations or traditions in certain areas as well as comparative studies among different countries); (2) *function of literary journalism* (studies focusing on the role literary journalism plays in different nations or areas

under different cultural, historical, or political context, such as social reform, civic engagement, political significance, etc.); (3) *interdisciplinary approach* (approaches other than journalism or literature, that include anthropology, philosophy, and even biology); (4) *historical development/framework* (studies on important publishers, journalist figures and important works which contributed to the development of literary journalism or those who have broadened, primarily, the U.S. canon of this genre); (5) *narrative theory* (different narrative styles and theoretical frameworks and approaches; (6) *reality boundary* (devoted to discussions of the notions of truth, journalistic accuracy, subjectivity vs. objectivity, etc.); (7) *narrator, role of journalist* (discussions on journalist-as-a-narrator who deals with personal identity between self and the subject the journalist writes about, to what degree the narrator is involved in the subject and, even in some cases, the subject becomes the journalist); (8) *gender concerns* (studies on female writers or from a feminist perspective); (9) *Gonzo/immersion journalism*; (10) *research reviews*; (11) *(new) media platform studies* (studies on different media of presenting literary journalism pieces, from radio to internet); (12) *practice* (writer's workshop, writing techniques, relationship between scholarship and practice); (13) *teaching of literary journalism* (reflections and research on literary journalism pedagogy).

## Findings: Global and Diverse Scholarship

In addressing RQ1, "To what extent does the journal evidence breadth in international scholarship as envisioned in the mission statement?" the research found that the journal's goal to have an international perspective can be discerned in several ways: Over the first near-ten years of publication there have been several special issues devoted to works from a particular nation, region, or culture. For instance, the Spring 2013 special issue focused on Norwegian literary reportage, and the Fall 2013, on African American literary journalism. A special issue on francophone literary journalism appeared in fall 2016. Even so, the findings show a heavy presence of North American research.

*Locations of researchers' affiliated institutions*. Data on the institutional homes of authors and researchers of articles and essays published in *LJS* over the first near-decade of publication identified colleges and universities in seventeen countries (see Table 1). More than half the represented institutions were in North America (the United States and Canada), but the remaining near 40% were institutions in countries on four other continents: in Europe, from Britain on the west, the Scandinavian north, and a rich mix of countries throughout the central, eastern and southern parts of the continent. Institutions in Africa, Australia, and South America filled out the remainder.

TABLE 1. Country of researchers' affiliated institutions by frequency

| Country of location | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| United States | 50 | 46.73 |
| Canada | 11 | 10.28 |
| Australia | 7 | 6.54 |
| Belgium | 6 | 5.61 |
| United Kingdom | 6 | 5.61 |
| France | 6 | 5.61 |
| South Africa | 4 | 3.74 |
| Norway | 4 | 3.74 |
| Brazil | 3 | 2.80 |
| Germany | 2 | 1.87 |
| Portugal | 2 | 1.87 |
| The Netherlands | 1 | 0.93 |
| Slovenia | 1 | 0.93 |
| Denmark | 1 | 0.93 |
| Finland | 1 | 0.93 |
| Poland | 1 | 0.93 |
| Sweden | 1 | 0.93 |
| Total 17 | 107 | 100.00 |

Nearly half of the institutions, with which researchers whose work has been published in *LJS* were affiliated, are located in the United States (fifty, or 46.73%), followed by Canada (eleven, or 10.28%), Australia (seven, or 6.54%), and, Belgium, the United Kingdom, and France with six, or 5.61%, each. This evidence suggests that the United States remained a dominant producer of the journal's academic work. The findings also indicate the journal tended to publish more scholars from institutions in North America and Europe (86.92%), and from English-speaking countries (69.16%). Notably, no scholars were identified as coming from academic institutions in Asian countries during the period of the study.

Despite the predominance of research coming from English-speaking countries, notably in North America (two, for 73% of the articles and essays), the journal also published more than a third again as much scholarship from non-English-speaking countries (thirty-three articles and essays, or 27%). Specifically, these countries included Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Poland, Sweden, and Brazil. This scholarship concerned literary journalism in or related to the researchers' affiliated institutional locations.

*Researchers' affiliated institutions by country and frequency.* Of the top institutions affiliated with the research, twelve of eighteen were in the United States and Canada (Table 2). This is another indication of the predominance

TABLE 2. Researchers' affiliated institutions by country and frequency

| Institution | Country | Frequency* | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| University of Wisconsin Oshkosh | United States | 9 | 8.41 |
| Université libre de Bruxelles | Belgium | 6 | 5.61 |
| Columbia University | United States | 3 | 2.80 |
| University of Lincoln | United Kingdom | 3 | 2.80 |
| University of South Carolina | United States | 2 | 1.87 |
| Boston College | United States | 2 | 1.87 |
| State University of New York | United States | 2 | 1.87 |
| Towson University | United States | 2 | 1.87 |
| University of Missouri | United States | 2 | 1.87 |
| University of Iowa | United States | 2 | 1.87 |
| Ryerson University | Canada | 2 | 1.87 |
| Wilfred Laurier University | Canada | 2 | 1.87 |
| Université Laval | Canada | 2 | 1.87 |
| Brock University | Canada | 2 | 1.87 |
| American University of Paris | France | 2 | 1.87 |
| Rhodes University | South Africa | 2 | 1.87 |
| BI Norwegian Business School | Norway | 2 | 1.87 |
| Oslo and Akershus University | Norway | 2 | 1.87 |
| Other academic institutions** | 12 countries | 58 | 54.20 |
| Total 75 | 19 | 107 | 100.00 |

* Frequency represents the number of researcher-authors from listed institutions.

** Only 18 of the total 75 institutions of highest frequency are listed by name in Table 2, with 49 of the total 107 researcher-authors affiliated with the top 18 institutions. Of the remaining 58 researcher-authors, the affiliation of 3 was not identified or applicable; 55 were affiliated with a single institution in 13 different countries.

of contributors from North America. Five countries were home to top-eighteen institutions and their seventeen affiliated researcher-authors (Belgium, United Kingdom, France, South Africa, and Norway). Another twelve countries were home to the affiliated institutions of the remaining fifty-eight researcher-authors: Australia, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, and Brazil.

From a closer look at the research produced in non-English-language environments, one notable finding emerged: The analysis showed that scholars outside English-speaking nations emphasize the influence of U.S. "New Journalism" on the journalists and writers in their own nations. In essence,

they consider the literary journalism in the United States to be what might be called a paradigm of literary journalism. For instance, Danish scholar Christine Isager of the University of Copenhagen examined the work of Danish author and literary journalist Morten Sabroe, who, as Isager said, "evoked Hunter S. Thompson's American Gonzo paradigm in his own work on a regular basis"[7] and is "a Thompson wannabe."[8] Norwegian scholar Jo Bech-Karlsen, however, argued against this U.S. "paradigm" of literary journalism in his exploration of the Norwegian nonfiction novel *Two Suspicious Characters*. Bech-Karlsen considered the book a Norwegian equivalent to *In Cold Blood* and argued that the Norwegian version "is the better of the two"[9] although it has not obtained the same standing in literary journalism's canon.

There is no doubt that U.S. literary journalism is rich in its collection of noteworthy journalists, writers, works, and traditions. However, research on literary journalism of writers from non-English speaking countries has found its place in *LJS*. For instance, John C. Hartsock examined Russian Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich's writings.[10] Pablo Calvi, the first non-native English speaker to receive a Pulitzer Traveling Fellowship, looked at Argentinian literary journalist Leila Guerriero's work,[11] and Cuban-born Juan Orlando Pérez González explored the literary journalism in Fidel Castro's Cuba.[12] Certainly the research Hartsock and other English-speaking researchers conduct would not be possible without reliable and accurate English-language translations from the original texts.

*Distribution of researchers' affiliated disciplines*. RQ2 asked, "Has the journal achieved breadth in researchers' and authors' academic disciplines?"

Journalism and communication studies remained the major disciplines of the researchers (see Table 3) who have published their work in *LJS* (seventy, or 65.42%). Literary studies, as a general disciplinary category, followed with thirty-two, or 29.91%, of the researchers/authors. The remaining disciplin-

TABLE 3. Researchers' disciplines by frequency

| Discipline | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| journalism and communication studies* | 70 | 65.42 |
| literary studies** | 32 | 29.91 |
| science*** | 3 | 2.80 |
| social science**** | 2 | 1.87 |
| Total | 107 | 100.00 |

* includes journalism, mass communication, media studies, etc.
** includes English/U.S.-Canadian/Polish/Spanish/Dutch literature, literary theory, comparative literature, English and theatre studies, etc.
*** former science reporters or teaching a course combining journalism and science.
**** includes social and political studies, etc.

TABLE 4. Examination of co-authored, or collaborative research

| Issue | Article | Theme/About | Authors | Country |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2009 Spring | Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible in German and Australian Literary Journalism | Comparative study between German and Australian literary journalism and issues of verifiability and authenticity | Beate Josephi<br>Christine Müller | Australia<br>Germany |
| 2009 Fall | Unraveling the Webs of Intimacy and Influence: Willie Morris and *Harper's* Magazine, 1967–1971 | A study of a magazine that produced some radical examples of New Journalism | Berkley Hudson<br>Rebecca Townsend | U.S.A.<br>U.S.A. |
| 2010 Fall | The Chudnovsky Case: How Literary Journalism Can Open the "Black Box" of Science | A case study that reveals the possibilities of interdisciplinary approach and argues that literature plays a vital role in illuminating the moral complexities of contemporary health care | Mateus Yuri Passos<br>Érica Masiero Nering<br>J.M. de Carvalho | Brazil<br>Brazil<br>Brazil |
| 2011 Fall | Radio and Civic Courage in the Communications Circuit of John Hersey's "Hiroshima" | A study of how radio played a critical role in expanding the readership and amplifying the messages of a landmark work in the history of literary journalism | Kathy Roberts Forde<br>Matthew W. Ross | U.S.A.<br>U.S.A. |
| 2013 Fall* | The Afro-American's World War II Correspondents: Feuilletonism as Social Action | A study of the role literary journalism by war correspondents plays in civic life | Antero Pietila<br>Stacy Spaulding | U.S.A.<br>U.S.A. |
| 2014 Fall | Mapping Nonfiction Narrative: Towards a New Theoretical Approach to Analyzing Literary Journalism | A study that creates a model and theoretical framework for defining and analyzing a given literary non-fiction text | William Roberts<br>Fiona Giles | Australia<br>Australia |
| 2015 Spring** | Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa: A White Woman Writer Goes West | A study of the works of an African female nonfiction writer who succeeded in American magazines and gained an international audience | Anthea Garman<br>Gillian Rennie | South Africa<br>South Africa |
| 2016 Fall*** | Francophone Literary Journalism: Exploring Its Vital Edges | An essay that focused on francophone traditions within literary journalism | Isabelle Meuret<br>Paul Aron<br>Marie-Ève Thérenty | Belgium<br>Belgium<br>France |
| 2017 Spring | The Ammo for the Canon: What Literary Journalism Educators Teach | A study that examines readings lists of literary journalism educators to discern if a literary journalism canon emerges and if the use of a "canon" serves as a tool of exclusion | Brian Gabrial<br>Elyse Amend | Canada<br>Canada |
| 2017 Spring | Recent Trends and Topics in Literary Journalism Scholarship | A research review of literary journalism scholarship intended as a guide to recent trends and topics in the field | Roberta Maguire<br>Miles Maguire | U.S.A.<br>U.S.A. |

* 2013 (Fall) is a special issue on African American literary journalism
** 2015 (Spring) is a special issue on women and literary journalism
*** 2016 (Fall) is a special issue on francophone literary journalism

ary categories were from the physical, biological, and social sciences. (This research did not place journalism or communication studies within the disciplinary category of a social science as it is often done.)

The further findings indicated the journal has published a limited number of interdisciplinary studies (see Table 4). Mateus Yuri Passos, a former science journalist, and his colleagues, in their article "How Literary Journalism Can Open the 'Black Box' of Science" argued that by adopting narrative resources and a journalistic model, "literary journalism offers an important way for explaining the complexity of the scientific world to a lay audience."[13] Amy Snow Landa, from the University of Minnesota, described an approach to teaching investigative journalism and bioethics and noted that it may be the first course offered at a U.S. university that combines "journalism" and "bioethics" in its title.[14] She argued there is growing recognition within bioethics that "studying the narrative techniques used in literature can help bioethics scholars develop their own narrative skills."[15] Bruce Gillespie from Wilfrid Laurier University explored ways literary journalism can serve as an interdisciplinary bridge and noted, for example, that "it is time for greater

collaboration between ethnographers, literary journalists, and literary journalism scholars . . . to enrich disciplines with similar goals, techniques, and products through collaboration and exchange."[16] As Gillespie noted, their similarities are reflected in writings that "are based on in-depth qualitative research, emphasize lived experience[s] and apply the techniques of literature (e.g., narrative arc, character development, rich description, subjectivity, point of view, and emotionality) to nonfiction . . . to make the material as engaging as possible for a general, non-academic audience."[17]

Details of ten collaborative articles by twenty-two co-authors are listed in Table 4. Three of the articles are authored by researchers from different disciplines: "The Chudnovsky Case: How Literary Journalism Can Open the 'Black Box' of Science"; "Francophone Literary Journalism: Exploring Its Vital Edges"; and "Recent Trends and Topics in Literary Journalism Scholarship."

**Findings: Thematic Directions in Research**

The answers to RQ3, "What are the main topic themes of the research published in the journal from 2009 through spring 2017?" gave some interesting results (Table 5). Of the total ninety-five articles and essays, the topics most often explored were: *national/regional studies* (twenty-eight articles and essays, or 29.47%), *Gonzo/immersion journalism* (ten, or 10.53%) and the *function of literary journalism* (seven, or 7.37%), followed by six

TABLE 5. Article and essay research focus by frequency

| Focus | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| National/regional studies | 28 | 29.47 |
| Gonzo/immersion journalism | 10 | 10.53 |
| Function of literary journalism | 7 | 7.37 |
| Interdisciplinary approach | 6 | 6.32 |
| Historical development/framework | 6 | 6.32 |
| Narrator, role of journalist | 6 | 6.32 |
| Narrative theory | 5 | 5.26 |
| Reality boundary | 5 | 5.26 |
| Gender concern | 5 | 5.26 |
| (New) media platform studies | 5 | 5.26 |
| Practice of literary journalism | 5 | 5.26 |
| Research reviews | 4 | 4.21 |
| Teaching of literary journalism | 3 | 3.16 |
| Total 13 | 95 | 100.00 |

articles and essays, for 6.32% each, that used *interdisciplinary approaches*, provided a *historical development/framework*, and examined the *narrator/role of the journalist*. (As earlier noted, this research can only approximate such classifications and recognizes that the risk of ignoring nuance exists.)

(1) *National/regional studies.* The journal published several special issues devoted to a specific country or region linked by language or culture. For example, the *LJS* Spring 2013 issue delved into Norwegian literary reportage and explored the similarities and differences between Norwegian and U.S. literary journalism; the *LJS* Fall 2013 issue focused on African American literary journalism, noting that "the African American presence . . . has not been studied nearly enough,"[18] as editor John C. Hartsock wrote in his introduction to the issue. The Fall 2016 issue was devoted to francophone literary journalism and provided "extended glimpses into the similarities and differences between anglophone and francophone literary journalism."[19]

Beate Josephi and Christine Müller explored the differences between German and Australian notions of literary journalism "when it comes to claims of verifiability and authenticity"[20] to better understand different cultural responses to the genre; Pablo Calvi compared Latin American narrative journalism during the 1950s through the 1970s with Anglo-American "New Journalism" of the same period.[21] Bill Reynolds examined Canadian writer Tom Hedley's work and argued that he is "one of the central—if not the central—promoter of Canadian New Journalism," and his writings deserve better attention.[22] As earlier noted, John Hartsock examined the work of Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich's writings. Other research included Bernhard Poerksen's study of German-language "New Journalism."[23] Thomas Vaessens did the same for Dutch writers.[24] Finally, the journal published Nick Mulgrew's work on South African narrative journalism.[25]

(2) *Function of literary journalism*. John Pauly suggested that literary journalism can provide those "imagined commons in which our hopes for humane, peaceful, and equitable social relations dwell," adding that it "gives voice to the drama of civic life," something that conventional journalism cannot do adequately because "human experience is revealed most compellingly and authoritatively through artful storytelling."[26] Thus, examining literary journalism's function as a social agent of change produced interesting scholarship. For example, Cheryl Renee Gooch's analysis looked at a black journalist and literary writer who used his works in 1904 to challenge racial injustice and promote black advancement.[27] Nancy L. Roberts noted that during the Great Depression in the United States, "many female social activists . . . turned to literary journalism as a way to tell the stories of the poor and oppressed"[28] through participant and immersion research. Roberta S. Maguire's research

explored the work of African American novelist Albert Murray. According to Maguire, Murray wrote literary journalism pieces to counter New Journalism's failure to deal with race in the United States and claimed that writers like Tom Wolfe "did not help to correct, and in fact reinforced, the prevailing view of blacks as a race apart, or marginalized, from the mainstream."[29]

As noted, Pablo Calvi's comparative work on Latin American literary journalism and U.S. New Journalism supported his argument that Latin American writings served as "a form parallel and supporting of politics"[30] that had "a political-programmatic quality that Anglo-American nonfiction has lacked."[31] As Calvi asserted, U.S. New Journalism was always "subject to the needs and pressures of the market."[32] Juan Orlando Pérez González's work on Cuban literary journalists suggested that, despite "the institutional, political, and ideological obstacles they had to overcome,"[33] they stayed away from propaganda-oriented reporting style in their writings, as a way to challenge state-owned, party-controlled media and bring up new interpretations of this country.[34]

(3) *Historical development/framework*. Professor Nancy L. Roberts cautioned that while widely recognized names and works in literary journalism history are important, scholars and educators "shouldn't overlook other, less elite sources—where we may find not the 'usual suspects'."[35] Roberts cited seminal figures, such as Tom Wolfe, who, for example, with E. W. Johnson included only two women in their *New Journalism: An Anthology*. The deliberate omission of women in important edited editions should force scholars and others, as Roberts urged, to look elsewhere, such as in women's magazines and other sources, to find those writers whose rightful place in literary journalism history has been "devalued."[36]

To enrich the historical framework of literary journalism, other scholars found rich sources in places normally overlooked. Katrina J. Quinn, for example, explored the nineteenth-century epistolary journalism, which is "often overlooked by scholars" and should be considered "a form of narrative literary journalism."[37] Both Joshua M. Roiland and William Dow studied works of African American writers whose important work has been overlooked. Roiland argued that Langston Hughes's reporting for the Baltimore *Afro-American* is "historically significant"[38] and could "broaden the US canon that heretofore has consisted predominantly of white writers."[39] Roberta Maguire pointed to William Dow's work in her introduction to the *LJS* Fall 2013 special issue on African American contributions to literary journalism: Dow in his contribution to the issue argues that many of Richard Wright's writings have been, in Maguire's words, "miscategorized as travel writing" and "are best read as literary journalism for their conjoining of literary and journalistic

technique."[40]

(4) *Narrative Theory***.** As to narrative theoretical frameworks, William Roberts and Fiona Giles argued that the study of frameworks presented a rich vein of scholarship because "this genre [called literary journalism] currently lacks a fixed working definition and normative terminology."[41] Employing David L. Eason's typology of ethnographic realism and cultural phenomenology, Roberts and Giles argued for a theoretical framework "that is suitable for defining and analyzing any given text in this genre."[42] One important piece of research by Swedish scholar Cecilia Aare presented a model that examines "the interplay between different kinds of narrator (voice) and different kinds of perspective (point of view)."[43] As Aare observed, Eason's two-type division of U.S. New Journalism "has for a long time been one of the starting points for theoretical discussions."[44] Aare's work expands Eason's model and creates a typology that split literary journalism into five groups: "reconstructed third-person narration"; "touched-up, third-person narration"; "dimmed first-person narration"; "consonant first-person narration"; and "dissonant first-person narration."[45] Aare's innovative approach offers a much more nuanced theoretical framework for scholars to explore literary journalism.

As for narrative styles, Stacy Spaulding's research put forth the notion of "urban community narrative," referring to the work of writers who "document city life, history, culture, and identity."[46] As Spaulding argued, such narratives are "important sites of civic memory—explaining the city's traditions; profiling its citizens, politicians, heroes, and villains; . . . celebrating shared values and mourning shared tragedies. . . . illustrating the role narrative journalism can play in the city-citizen connection."[47] Christopher P. Wilson in his research examined "off-stage" or "underwater" narratives found in Joan Didion's *Miami*, claiming she employed an oblique form of storytelling as a way to present a clearer picture of "the distortions in contemporary political rhetoric that scandal epitomized."[48]

(5) *Reality Boundary*. Articles categorized as "reality boundary" studies focused on literary journalism and notions of truth, journalistic accuracy, and the subjectivity vs. objectivity question. Ruth Palmer, after analyzing three book-length examples, argued that the blurring of lines between the literary journalist and real-life subject gives way to uncertainty because it leaves "readers uncertain as to where facts end and interpretation begins."[49] Michael Jacobs examined Tom Wolfe's documentary method in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* and observed that Wolfe managed to access a surrealism because his subjects were "engrossed in unreality"[50] of their own through their near-perpetual drug use.

Regarding truth claims, Lindsay Morton emphasized the value of epistemological inquiry in the scholarship of literary journalism through her analy-

sis of Lorraine Code's works. As Morton noted, the importance of such inquiry lies in the fact that Code's approach to epistemology "has the potential to enhance confidence in the genre's claims to represent reality both reliably and responsibly."[51]

(6) *Narrator, role of journalist*. When journalists act as narrators, their own characteristics may be reflected in the subjects and stories about which they write. Robert Alexander noticed the problem in examples of literary journalism. He detected an "uncanny" correspondence or "doubling" between the subjects of the stories and certain characteristics of the literary journalists.[52] As Alexander found, when a first-person narrator prevails, there can be a blurring of truthfulness. Of course, literary journalism offers more flexibility for journalists to go beyond a conventional approach. Alexander observed, "It is the 'literary' element of literary journalism, finally, which permits the literary journalist to confront and acknowledge those aspects of his or her self, repressed and alienated in conventional journalism, in the Other into whom they have escaped."[53]

Norwegian scholar Steen Steensen, in his examination of *The Bookseller of Kabul*, delved deeply into the controversy over the book's truth claim and ethics after one of the book's subjects sued the journalist-author. To avoid similar future conflicts, the journalist changed the narrative from a third-person to a first-person narrator. As Steensen argued, the "humble I" narrator, "characterized by open subjectivity, self-reflection,"[54] is a more ideal narrator and more aligned with the Norwegian literary journalism tradition of reportage that empathizes "the journalist's presence as eyewitness,"[55] because it makes no absolute claim to objectivity or truth.

(7) *Gonzo/immersion journalism*. *LJS*'s Spring 2012 issue was dedicated to Hunter S. Thompson, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the publication of his *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the most representative work labelled as Gonzo journalism. Earlier, the Spring 2010 issue looked at Gonzo journalism practice in Germany, Finland, and the Netherlands, examining the transnational influence of Hunter's style in Europe. As already noted in the discussion of RQ1, Isager examined how the Danish author and journalist Morten Sabroe in his own work imitated Thompson's style. While this enabled Sabroe to become recognized as a literary journalist, it also opened his writings to criticism of being derivative.[56]

Patrick Walters discussed Ted Conover's method of immersion as a literary journalism technique, by which Conover "involves himself in a participatory way . . . but avoids being a spectacle . . . much like an anthropologist, but with a storytelling purpose."[57] Holly E. Schreiber examined Stephen Crane's 1894 *New York Press*'s "An Experiment in Misery," with the goal of "both

celebrating the genre's strengths and exposing its weaknesses."[58]

Norwegian scholars Kristiane Larssen and Harald Hornmoen focused on ethical and moral issues that often concern immersive journalism. Larssen and Hornmoen noted that "the uncertainty surrounding ethical and moral issues tied to methods applied in literary journalism persists today,"[59] especially when "entering the private sphere of vulnerable sources."[60]

(8) *(New) media platform studies*. This literature focused on studies of how past and present media platforms have become venues for literary journalism. Kathy Roberts Forde and Matthew W. Ross, for example, discussed the role radio played in expanding the readership of John Hersey's *Hiroshima* in the United States and how the broadcasting of Hersey's work exposed millions of U.S. citizens to the horrors of atomic warfare.[61]

*LJS*'s Fall 2016 issue provided its first "Digital Literary Journalism" column, the goal of which is to encourage literary journalism scholars to explore the digital frontier. Jacqueline Marino was among those who recognize the digital environment as a positive space in which to situate literary journalism. She cited the *New York Times*' Pulitzer Prize-winning piece "Snow Fall," as a long-form journalism piece that "found a suitable home in the digital world."[62] Marino's research includes the results of an eye-tracking study that suggested readers spent the most time "fixating" on meaningful text, that is, "words that still fulfill a purpose, one that images and sound cannot supplant."[63]

David O. Dowling also offered positive observations about "digital" literary journalism in what he calls the "literary journalism's digital renaissance."[64] Dowling, whose study paid attention to mobile platform and mobile audiences, argued those devices with their "leaner aesthetic orienting multimedia elements . . . increased automated activation via scrolling."[65] Dowling argues that this made the readers' immersive experience better, and "even more potent than in the first wave of products following 'Snow Fall'."[66]

Some scholars expressed concern about literary journalism's move to multiplatform presentations. Miles Maguire questioned the value of insisting on multimedia approaches. While noting that literary journalism has "lagged behind its apparent potential"[67] in multimedia production, he argues that a "way . . . the opportunities of multimedia may be deceptive is that the opening of possibilities for cross-platform storytelling may not result in stories being told in more satisfying ways."[68] Similarly, Amy Wilentz said the digital era is "an era of great potential but that also poses many problems for us"[69] because there are so many distractions from words themselves. Her take on "Snow Fall" is that it is storytelling that is "overburdened with links and attachments that the narrative, moving quickly but with little character devel-

opment. . . could not support."[70] She argued in the instance of "Snow Fall," literary quality and depth are "sacrificed to surface appeal."[71]

(9) *Practice*. What is the relation between the scholarship of literary journalism and the practice of literary journalism? In 2011, the journal's editors reviewed a study by Matthew Thompson, who is both a literary journalist and a scholar in this field, and observed that for Thompson, "scholarly inquiry is an attempt to better understand his practice."[72] Other research included David Dowling's look at the contribution of the University of Iowa's Iowa Writers' Workshop and its influence on literary journalism. Dowling argued that it has had a "profound influence on literary journalism within the broader world of creative writing" yet has "received little notice."[73]

(10) *Teaching of literary journalism*. David Abrahamson, the former president of the IALJS, reflected on teaching literary journalism after receiving an inquiry from a New York University professor who asked him about key readings that might illustrate the six concepts of literary journalism. The concepts, Abrahamson noted, are character, setting, plot, theme, voice, and structure, "which anyone contemplating literary journalism might usefully bring to bear."[74] Abrahamson provided the suggested readings in his reflections. Brian Gabrial and Elyse Amend examined literary journalism syllabi from thirty-three respondents who had an average of 9.7 years of teaching experience.[75] The research findings included suggestions for reframing and reconstructing reading lists to broaden the scope. And, in a separate article, Richard Lance Keeble suggests that journalism students explore the literary dimensions of all forms of journalism, "not just those hived off into 'literary journalism' programs."[76] As he noted, these dimensions include "descriptive color, deep background details, fascinating dialog, scene setting, insightful analysis, eyewitness evidence, and so on."[77]

### Authorship: Gender Balance

The fourth question, RQ4, asked, "Is there a gender balance in the journal's article and essay authorship?"

The data suggest that slightly more work by male scholars (fifty-eight, or 54.21%) has been published than work by their female counterparts (forty-nine, or 45.79%) in the journal's first years (Table 6).

TABLE 6. Researcher demographics by gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 58 | 54.21 |
| Female | 49 | 45.79 |
| Total | 107 | 100.00 |

In 2015, *LJS* took a step toward addressing a historic disparity when it published a special issue, "Women and Literary Journalism." Editor Leonora Flis noted that, despite progress, "the persistent, ongoing problem of gender discrimination has affected the careers of some of the female writers in this special issue."[78] Included in the issue was Isabelle Meuret's research on female reporters and war journalism, an area typically dominated by men. From her study of three women who were war correspondents, Meuret found the femininity of these writers "was used to serve their journalistic calling and access an almost exclusively male public sphere."[79] These writers "resorted to emotional journalism as a strategy to alienate their inner selves and get closer to their subjects."[80] Other studies by female scholars have included Vanessa Gemis's research on the work of female journalist and writer Simone Dever, who published "under a male pseudonym," Marc Augis.[81] She did so because in 1930s Belgium "few women dared embrace a career in journalism."[82] As Gemis noted, Augis's career sheds light on "the poetics of aviation advertorial writing" in French-speaking Belgium "through the angle of gender."[83]

## Conclusion

This analysis of the content of *LJS* examined all research articles and essays published in *LJS* from its founding in spring 2009 through spring 2017, to address four research questions: To what extent does the journal evidence breadth in international scholarship as envisioned in the mission statement? Has the journal achieved breadth in researchers' and authors' academic disciplines? What are the main topic themes of the research published in the journal from 2009 through spring 2017? And, finally, is there a gender balance in the journal's article and essay authorship?

The study found that the journal has tended to be heavily dominated by North American/European contributions and contributors. Perhaps not surprisingly, scholars from the United States remain the main source of literary journalism research in the journal, with Canadians in a somewhat distant second place. The literary journalism "paradigm" (if there is one) is still a U.S.-centric one, especially as it concerns the influence of New Journalism on the journalists and writers of non-U.S. countries. In terms of disciplinary approaches, the study results suggest that journalism and communication scholars' work prevails, although attempts at interdisciplinarity have been made. As to research topics, national/regional studies, immersion journalism, and function of literary journalism were among the most studied areas.

From a theoretical and methods perspective, the present study's categories may provide a starting point, but future scholars may need to review and establish categories that are more exhaustive or fewer in number.

This research also found that scholars hold positive perceptions about the impact of digital platforms on literary journalism but also expressed concern that technology might diminish the quality of literary journalism production. Finally, concerns about gender imbalances in the journal were noted.

In conclusion, *LJS* in its tenth year of publication is still a relatively young journal. The results of this brief research may provide current and future scholars and editors with insights to broaden the scope of scholarship. Certainly, as a primarily English-language journal, difficulties in translation will always restrict contributions from non-English speaking scholars. Still, creative editorial outreach may encourage scholars from around the world to submit to the journal. In this way, all scholars of literary journalism studies will have access to meaningful points of view and may gain a richer understanding of just what literary journalism is.

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**Notes**

[1] *Acknowledgements:* This research was conducted during Xiaohui Wu's academic visit in the Department of Journalism of Concordia University in fall 2017. She wishes to express her thanks to the department for providing access to academic resources and to Professor Brian Gabrial, whose insight and expertise improved the research. She also thanks Professor Gabrial for allowing her to attend his literary journalism course, rarely taught in China, and exposing her to the genre, its writers, and its historical framework.

[2] "Mission Statement: *Literary Journalism Studies*," 128.

[3] IALJS, "About Us."

[4] "Mission Statement," 128.

[5] Sims, "The Problem and the Promise," 7–16.

[6] Maguire, "Recent Trends and Topics," 140–51.

[7] Isager, "Playful Imitation at Work," 79.

[8] Isager, 79.

[9] Bech-Karlsen, "The 1933 Norwegian Nonfiction Novel," 40.

[10] Hartsock, "The 'Elasticity' of Literary Reportage," 82–123.

[11] Calvi, "Leila Guerriero and the Uncertain Narrator," 118–30.

[12] Pérez González, "Revolution Is Such a Beautiful Word!," 9–28.

[13] Passos, Nering, and Carvalho, "The Chudnovsky Case," 27.

[14] Landa, "How Literary Journalism Can Inform Bioethics," 59.

[15] Landa, 47.

[16] Gillespie, "Building Bridges," 67–68.

[17] Gillespie, 68.

[18] Hartsock, "Note from the Editor," 5.
[19] Reynolds, "Note from the Editor," 5.
[20] Josephi and Müller, "Differently Drawn Boundaries," 67.
[21] Calvi, "Latin America's Own 'New Journalism'," 63–78.
[22] Reynolds, "Recovering the Peculiar Life and Times of Tom Hedley," 79.
[23] Poerksen, "The Milieu of a Magazine," 9–26.
[24] Vaessens, "Making Overtures," 55–72.
[25] Mulgrew, "Tracing the Seam," 9–30.
[26] Pauly, "Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life," 74, 75, 76.
[27] Gooch, "The Literary Mind of a Cornfield Journalist," 79–87.
[28] Roberts, "Meridel Le Sueur," 45.
[29] Maguire, "Riffing on Hemingway and Burke," 19.
[30] Calvi, "Latin America's Own 'New Journalism'," 78.
[31] Calvi, 77.
[32] Calvi, 78.
[33] Pérez González, "Revolution Is Such a Beautiful Word!" 10.
[34] Pérez González, 11.
[35] Roberts, "Firing the Canon," 82.
[36] Roberts, 83.
[37] Quinn, "Exploring an Early Version of Literary Journalism," 33.
[38] Roiland, " 'Just People' Are Just People," 17.
[39] Roiland, 18.
[40] Maguire, "African American Literary Journalism," 13; see Dow, "Unreading Modernism," 59–89.
[41] Roberts and Giles, "Mapping Nonfiction Narrative," 101.
[42] Roberts and Giles, 101.
[43] Aare, "A Narratological Approach to Literary Journalism," 111. See also Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World." 191–205.
[44] Aare, 133.
[45] Aare, 133–34.
[46] Spaulding, " 'Love Letters to Baltimore'," 46.
[47] Spaulding, 46.
[48] Wilson, "The Underwater Narrative," 11.
[49] Palmer, "The Hoax," 86.
[50] Jacobs, "Confronting the (Un)Reality of Pranksterdom," 133.
[51] Morton, "Rereading Code," 48.
[52] Alexander, " 'My story is always escaping into other people'," 58. Alexander observed that, in some cases, as in Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, the journalist and subject are one that "may express itself in a rupturing of the writer's persona." When the journalist and subject are melded, the writer can still find his or her persona in the subject.
[53] Alexander, 63.
[54] Steensen, "The Return of the 'Humble I'," 62.
[55] Steensen, 64.

[56] Isager, "Playful Imitation at Work'," 79.
[57] Walters, "Ted Conover and the Origins of Immersion," 27.
[58] Schreiber, "Journalistic Critique through Parody," 31.
[59] Larssen and Hornmoen, "The Literary Journalist," 83.
[60] Larssen and Hornmoen, 94.
[61] Forde and Ross, "Radio and Civic Courage," 31–32.
[62] Marino, "Reading Screens," 142.
[63] Marino, 145, 148.
[64] Dowling, "Toward a New Aesthetic," 104–105.
[65] Dowling, 101.
[66] Dowling, 101.
[67] Maguire, "Literary Journalism on the Air," 48.
[68] Maguire, 62.
[69] Wilentz, "The Role of the Literary Journalist in the Digital Era," 31.
[70] Wilentz, 39.
[71] Wilentz, 40.
[72] Editors, "When a Journalist's Scholarly Inquiry Informs," 73.
[73] Dowling, "Beyond the Program Era," 54.
[74] Abrahamson, "A Narrative of Collegial Discovery," 88.
[75] Gabrial and Amend, "The Ammo for the Canon," 86, 82–99.
[76] Keeble, "The 2011 Keynote," 86.
[77] Keeble, 86.
[78] Flis, "Women and Literary Journalism," 7–8.
[79] Meuret, "Rebels with a Cause," 94.
[80] Meuret, 82.
[81] Gemis, "Occupation: Flying Parcel," 40.
[82] Gemis, 40.
[83] Gemis, 49.


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# Literary Journalism Past and Future: A Journey of Many Miles in Intriguing Directions

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**Abstract:** This essay reflects on the last decade of literary journalism scholarship, noting such strengths as the development of literary journalism theory. Scholars have developed an increasingly sophisticated and diverse set of perspectives that has recently led to extensive scholarly study of international literary journalism, including both studies of individual regions and countries and comparative, transnational studies. Over the past ten years, scholars have admirably diversified literary journalism's canon through study of individuals and subjects historically overlooked, from sources also largely ignored. These include women and African Americans, as well as alternative published sources of literary journalism rather than solely elite sources, such as farming women's magazines and the epistolary content of nineteenth-century U.S. newspapers. This area will be enriched by further development, including study of alternative, non-elite sources such as religious tracts and periodicals, social movement publications, African American newspapers, muckraking/investigative reporting, and travel writing. Recent scholarship on aspects of digital literary journalism is promising, though much more inquiry is needed to develop this area. Finally, ethical aspects of literary journalism are beginning to attract scholarly attention and further research is also needed to flesh out this area.

**Keywords:** digital literary journalism – African American literary journalism – literary journalism scholarship trends – literary journalism theory – women and literary journalism

It's hard to believe that some three decades ago when I started teaching literary journalism at the University of Minnesota, a number of academics still viewed the term as an oxymoron. Then, most English departments in the United States disdained the prospect of teaching yet a second, "lesser" literary nonfiction form. (The first was the essay.) Thus, it was largely journalism faculty who developed the literary journalism curriculum, teaching students both to appreciate reading it and to produce it.

In the old days, a conventional working journalist, much like the young Hemingway, might have aspired, when off-duty, to write the next great American novel. Indeed, he kept pages of his novel-in-progress in his desk drawer. Today that journalist might as easily be a woman, and she or he is far more likely to produce a memoir or book-length literary journalism on the side. This is because literary nonfiction, especially literary journalism, has demonstrated its ability to address the complexities of the modern age in the meaningful, eloquent way that has long been thought to be the territory of literary fiction. And so literary journalism has vigorously expanded as part of the college curriculum, now taught not only in journalism schools, but also in departments of English, American studies, and comparative literature, among others.

The genesis of the IALJS, a history recounted elsewhere in this issue, speaks to the prominence of literary journalism in our age, both as a genre and as an area of scholarly inquiry. The development of the latter is particularly impressive over the past decade or so. This essay will note some strengths of the scholarship during this period, with an eye toward charting where it next might fruitfully go.

## Literary Journalism Theory

When Tom Wolfe famously defined literary journalism as reading like a novel or short story, he inadvertently reminded us of the need to study it on its own terms.[1] For example, just as scholars of colonial U.S. women's history have rejected the conceptual framework of traditional "male" history (i.e., military, diplomatic, political history) in favor of a lens informed by women's historical experience (i.e., social history), so too we need to view literary journalism through its own categories of analysis.

Over the years, several scholars have taken steps to do just that, starting with Norman Sims in his 1984 introduction to *The Literary Journalists*, the first anthology of literary journalism. Here he identified certain specific, signature characteristics of literary journalism, such as immersion reporting, factual accuracy, the use of complex structures, symbolism, and distinctive voice.[2] In 1992, in the first book-length scholarly analysis of literary journalism, the editor, Thomas B. Connery, contributed a pathbreaking introduction

that tackled the challenge of "defining and naming"[3] this newly recognized genre. Literary journalism, Connery wrote, is a "distinct literary form" and "a type of cultural expression" that flourished especially during three distinct periods in the United States: the late nineteenth century, the nineteen-thirties, and the nineteen-sixties and beyond.[4] In a subsequent, 1995 anthology that Sims edited with Mark Kramer, the latter laid out what he called the "breakable rules" of literary journalism, which included: "Literary journalists immerse themselves in subjects' worlds and in background research . . . work out implicit covenants about accuracy and candor with readers and with sources . . . write mostly about routine events . . . develop meaning by building upon the readers' sequential reactions."[5]

Sims had also edited a 1990 anthology of scholarly articles entitled *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, which greatly advanced inquiry. The book included an important chapter by David Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," which laid out two distinct ways that literary journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Hunter S. Thompson, Gay Talese, and Norman Mailer respond to reality. These writers' reports, Eason wrote, "can best be understood as embodying two different ways of responding to the problem of social and cultural diversity and of locating the reporter in regard to the traditions of journalism and the broader history of American society." Eason termed these different responses to reality as "*realist*" and *modernist*."[6] He argued that the former, characteristic of literary journalism written by Capote, Talese, and Wolfe, "assures [that] conventional ways of understanding still apply." And "in contrast, modernist texts," such as works by Didion, Mailer, and Thompson, "describe what it feels like to live in a world where there is no consensus about a frame of reference to explain 'what it all means'."[7] Although Eason's theory of realism and modernism developed specifically from his study of the New Journalism, it continues to inspire much consideration about, as well as application to, the literary journalism of other periods. An example is the thoughtful revision of literary journalism theory shared by Fiona Giles and William Roberts in *LJS* in 2014.[8] And even more recently, scholars such as Cecilia Aare are publishing new insights about literary journalism theory,[9] while John S. Bak and Monica Martinez's call for papers on this very same subject for the December 2018 issue of *Brazilian Journalism Research* is very promising. At last, recent scholarship seems to be proving wrong the oft-made assertion over the years that literary journalism's very nature defies taxonomy.

Yet it must be said that much of the scholarship produced over the past decade or so has admirably aimed to interpret literary journalism on its own terms. What has emerged is an increasingly sophisticated and diverse set of

perspectives. The abundance of recent scholarly monographs, books, and scholarly articles about, and collections of, literary journalism attests to the discipline's vibrant growth.[10]

**International Perspectives**

Extensive scholarly study of international literary journalism is the most striking recent development in the field. In his essay "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," in the inaugural issue of *Literary Journalism Studies,* Norman Sims importantly called for "elucidating the form's international nature and how it relates to different national cultures."[11] This was a huge gap in the literature, which scholars across the globe have begun to bridge through many different works. Reflecting the transnational origins of the IALJS, Isabel Soares in *LJS*'s very first issue explored the work of Portuguese journalist Miguel Sousa Tavares,[12] and Beate Josephi of Australia and Christine Müller of Germany studied the concepts of verifiability and authenticity relative to Australian and German views of literary journalism.[13] From this auspicious start, *LJS* went on to feature guest-edited special issues focused on international topics, such as the Spring 2013 one featuring Norwegian literary journalism, edited by Jo Bech-Karlsen.[14] More recently, the Fall 2016 issue, edited by Isabelle Meuret, focused on francophone literary journalism of France, Belgium, and Canada.[15]

Also commendable is the rich trove of research about non-U.S. literary journalism topics that *LJS* has published, and occasionally, as well, important original works of literary journalism, translated into English. The range of this scholarship is impressive. It includes examination of literary journalism in Australia,[16] Britain,[17] Canada,[18] Cuba,[19] Denmark,[20] Finland,[21] Germany,[22] Ireland,[23] Latin America,[24] The Netherlands,[25] Poland,[26] Portugal,[27] and South and southern Africa,[28] as well as comparative, transnational studies.[29]

The vitality of recent international scholarship is amply demonstrated in books such as *Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds.[30] This book represents a major contribution to the development of a comparative understanding of international literary journalism, featuring analyses of, for example, social movements and Chinese literary reportage as well as literary journalism in 1930s New Zealand and in Slovenia. (An earlier work which also contributes to this inquiry is Sonja Marljak Zdovc's *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia*.[31]) Considering that just a dozen years ago there was a dearth of scholarship about international literary journalism, this recent explosion of interest and inquiry should only be encouraged, with the goal of illuminating literary journalism within the context

of the different national cultures that nourish it. This includes, of course, the translation and publication of non-English works of literary journalism, which *LJS* has commendably undertaken from time to time. However, still true today is something that Sims observed in 2009: "The strictly English speakers among us are impoverished by our lack of access to works of literary journalism from China, Russia, Portugal, Brazil and other parts of Latin America, Africa, and eastern Europe."[32]

**Literary Journalism's Other Voices**

Over the past decade or so, scholars have admirably diversified literary journalism's canon through study of individuals and subjects historically overlooked. *LJS*'s recent special issue devoted to women, guest edited by Leonora Flis,[33] is an example of this expansion. The issue's content includes an interview with the contemporary writer Barbara Ehrenreich.[34] Another recent addition is Jan Whitt's *Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism*, a book that examines five women writers (Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Joan Didion, Sara Davidson, and Susan Orlean), as well as three male writers of fiction (poetry, short stories, and novels) who were greatly influenced by journalism, yet little studied by literary journalism scholars: Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and John Steinbeck.[35]

A different sort of contribution is made by Amy Mattson Lauters, whose book, *The Rediscovered Writings of Rose Wilder Lane: Literary Journalist*, sheds light on Lane (1886–1968), a U.S. writer whose literary journalism was overlooked because it was published in less prestigious periodicals, such as women's magazines.[36] Lauters's work reminds us to consider alternative published sources of literary journalism, not just elite ones. So too does a recent book by Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them*.[37] As I have argued elsewhere, such alternative, non-elite sources could include: religious tracts and periodicals; social movement publications; African American newspapers; muckraking/investigative reporting; and travel writing.[38]

Along this line, Katrina J. Quinn shows us a form of narrative literary journalism that scholars have rarely recognized: the epistolary journalism of nineteenth-century U.S. newspapers.[39] Jonathan D. Fitzgerald also contributes to this inquiry with a stellar study of "Nineteenth-Century Women Writers and the Sentimental Roots of Literary Journalism."[40]

We need further studies of literary journalism from such unheralded sources. Scholarly scrutiny of them could greatly expand and enrich our understanding of literary journalism. Only then will we achieve a truly representative history of the discipline.

Progress toward this goal is also demonstrated by a superb new anthology of literary journalism by women, edited by Patsy Sims: *The Stories We Tell: Classic True Tales by America's Greatest Women Journalists*.[41] This anthology includes works by such famous journalists as Lillian Ross, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Joan Didion, and Susan Orlean—and by lesser known ones such as Joyce Wadler and Mimi Swartz. A key step in sparking study of women's literary journalism is, simply, to make it available for study, and this volume admirably does that.

Another recent *LJS* special issue has shed welcome light on the understudied subject of African American literary journalism.[42] Guest edited by Roberta Maguire, it featured articles about Langston Hughes and Richard Wright,[43] as well as Ollie Stewart, a writer for the *Baltimore Afro American* who has been little known outside of that community.[44] Maguire is an exemplary scholar on this subject, as also shown by her earlier work.[45] Continued inquiry by the scholarly community is needed and strongly encouraged to give us a thorough understanding of African American literary journalism.

**Digital Literary Journalism**

The promising area of scholarship on digital literary journalism is still in its nascence, although Susan Jacobson, Jacqueline Marino, and Robert E. Gutsche argue in a recent study of fifty long-form, web-produced journalism pieces that literary journalism has reached a new evolutionary phase of digital storytelling: "Such digital storytelling encompasses more than the fragmented, de-centered, hypertextual blocks of the Web and furthers the field's understandings of the Web's potential for dramatic and immersive journalism."[46] *LJS*'s recent addition of a section on digital literary journalism is needed and timely. Marino's intriguing recent eye-tracking study showed that a sample of millennials paid attention to the text and not just the multimedia (photos and video) components of digital literary journalism.[47] More research is needed to parse out digital literary journalism's unique characteristics and impact on audiences.

Finally, another area that has attracted more study lately is ethics and literary journalism. Lindsay Morton points the way as she discusses Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's *Random Family*, relative to epistemology: that is, how these two literary journalists make and support their claims of fact.[48] Morton's conceptual framework is based on Lorraine Code's idea of "epistemic location."[49] Scholarly inquiry into ethics and epistemology is promising and relevant in this digital age of innumerable jousting truth claims.

This brief essay has tried to lay out a few especially promising areas for future research. Of course, others will have their own additions and refine-

ments. As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of *Literary Journalism Studies,* we can surely look forward to the next decade of scholarship.

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**Notes**

[1] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 10–22.

[2] Sims, introduction to *The Literary Journalists*, 3–25.

[3] Connery, "Discovering a Literary Form," introduction to *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 3–5.

[4] Connery, preface to *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, xi, xi–xiii.

[5] Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," 22–23, 27, 33.

[6] Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," 192, 204n4; see also Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, 67–73.

[7] Eason, 192.

[8] Giles and Roberts, "Mapping Nonfiction Narrative," 100–117.

[9] Aare, "A Narratological Approach to Literary Journalism," 106–39.

[10] The many recent books of note (both scholarly works and collections) include: Bak and Reynolds, *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*; Berner, *The Literature of Journalism*; Boynton, *The New New Journalism*; Caminero-Santangelo, *Documenting the Undocumented*; Canada, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*; Canada, *Literature and Journalism: Inspirations, Intersections, and Inventions*; Chance and McKeen, eds., *Literary Journalism: A Reader*; Connery, *Journalism and Realism*; Farr and Pearson, *Wood Carving*; Flis, *Factual Fictions*; Forde, *Literary Journalism on Trial*; Harrington and Sager, *Next Wave*; Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*; Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*; Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century*; Joseph, *Behind the Text*; Keeble and Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, 2 vols.; Keeble and Wheeler, *The Journalistic Imagination*; Kramer and Call, *Telling True Stories*; Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*; Sims, *True Stories*; Underwood, *Journalism and the Novel*; Underwood, *The Undeclared War between Journalism and Fiction*; Whitt, *The Redemption of Narrative*; Whitt, *Settling the Borderland*.

[11] Sims, "The Problem and the Promise," 7.

[12] Soares, "*South*," 17–30.

[13] Josephi and Müller, "Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible," 67–78.

[14] Bech-Karlsen, "Norwegian Literary Reportage," 9.

[15] Meuret, "Francophone Literary Journalism," 8.

[16] McDonald, "A Vagabond," 65–81; McDonald, "John Stanley James Writes as 'A Vagabond' in 1877," 82–93; Joseph, "Preferring 'Dirty' to 'Literary' Journalism," 100–117.

[17] Griffiths, "Literary Journalism and Empire," 60–81.

[18] Reynolds, "Recovering the Peculiar Life and Times of Tom Hedley," 79–104; "*The Boy in the Moon . . .* and Writing," 43–44*;* Brown, "The Boy in the Moon," excerpts, 45–55; Brown, "Writing What You See," 57–62; Gillespie, "The Works of Edna Staebler," 58–75.

[19] Pérez González, "Revolution Is Such a Beautiful Word!" 9–28.

[20] Isager, "Playful Imitation at Work," 78–96; Sabroe, with Isager, "Overreacting with Style," 97–104.

[21] Kero, "Bangkok," 31–38; Lassila-Merisalo, "Exploring the Reality Boundary of Esa Kero," 39–47.

[22] Poerksen, "The Milieu of a Magazine," 9–29; Schlesinger, "Paul 'Sling' Schlesinger's Crime Reportage," 28–34; McQueen, "Into the Courtroom: Paul 'Sling' Schlesinger," 8–27.

[23] McNamara, "Myles of Writing," 29–44.

[24] Calvi, "Latin America's Own 'New Journalism'," 63–83; Roe, "An Interview with Alma Guillermoprieto," 118–29; Calvi, "Leila Guerriero," 118–30.

[25] Grunberg, "Among Soldiers," 51–73; Harbers, "Between Fact and Fiction," 75–83; Vaessens, "Making Overtures," 55–72.

[26] Horodecka, "The Hermeneutic Relation," 118–31.

[27] Soares, "*South*," 17–30.

[28] Mulgrew, "Tracing the Seam," 9–30; Garman and Rennie, "Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa," 132–45; Cowling, "Echoes of an African Drum," 7–32.

[29] Australian and German literary journalism in Josephi and Müller, "Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible," 67–78; and German-French-Polish-U.S. literary journalism in Meuret, "Rebels with a Cause," 76–98.

[30] Bak and Reynolds, *Literary Journalism across the Globe*.

[31] Zdovc, *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia*.

[32] Sims, "The Problem and the Promise," 10.

[33] Flis, "Women and Literary Journalism."

[34] Dow and Flis, "An Interview with Barbara Ehrenreich," 146–58.

[35] Whitt, *Settling the Borderland*.

[36] Lauters, *The Rediscovered Writings of Rose Wilder Lane*.

[37] Rooks*, Ladies' Pages*.

[38] Roberts, "Firing the Canon," 81–93. A good example of travel writing is Soares, "*South*."

[39] Quinn, "Exploring an Early Version of Literary Journalism," 32–51.

[40] Fitzgerald, "Nineteenth-Century Women Writers," 8–27.

[41] Sims, *The Stories We Tell*.

[42] Maguire, "African American Literary Journalism," 8–14.

[43] Roiland, "Just People," 15–35; Pietila and Spaulding, "The *Afro-American*'s World War II Correspondents," 37–58.

[44] Dow, "Unreading Modernism," 59–89.

[45] Maguire, "Riffing," 9–26.

[46] Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism," 527–46; 540.

[47] Marino, "Reading Screens," 138–49.

[48] Morton, "Evaluating the Effects of Epistemic Location," 244–59.

[49] This concept also undergirds Morton, "Rereading Code," 34–50.


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# *Literary Journalism Studies*: Opportunity and Repository

Isabel Soares
Centre for Public Administration and Policies
Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

In 2008, at the third IALJS conference, I read a paper titled "*South*: Where Travel Meets Literary Journalism."[1] By then, this was nothing more than the reflex of my latest incursion into the realm of literary journalism and my interest in bridging travel writing with this polyvocal genre of journalism. Far was I from imagining the future of that paper and of research in literary journalism, for that matter.

*Literary Journalism Studies* became a reality for the IALJS in the spring of 2009. John Hartsock was at the helm of the journal as its maiden issue saw the light of day. In his editorial note, he wrote not solely about the timeliness for such a journal but also insisted on the scholarly imperative to study literary journalism, "in order to illuminate aesthetic, critical, cultural, and historical contexts for not only students but society at large."[2] For us, self-titled scholars of literary journalism, the journal was a thing of awe, a giant leap forward, an accomplishment. Therein was an article by Norman Sims with the most appropriate title of "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism,"[3] which, evidently, pointed towards the future. Right after that was an article on Portuguese literary journalism, as if to say that a door had been opened to new research horizons. "*South*"[4] was published as a research article in that fine début of *LJS*. It is to this day one of the pivotal moments in my academic career.

Much has happened in the meantime. The journal has established itself as the specific forum for publication of literary journalism research. It has affirmed itself as a plural, international journal and has made its way to the restricted circles of indexation. A decade ago, research in literary journalism was scattered, scarce, and found mostly in books by towering figures such as Thomas B. Connery, Sims, or Hartsock. In addition, it was overwhelmingly anglophone and focused on the demigods of literary journalism that we know by heart: Capote, Wolfe, Mailer, Hersey—need I go further? Of course, I am not even approaching the gender issue.

When *Literary Journalism Studies* surfaced, the path widened, meandered, and bifurcated beyond measure. *LJS* not only became a place of opportunity for the publication of research outside the scope of the English language and (famed) U.S. literary journalists, it became a repository of accumulated, intergenerational, international knowledge. Because of *LJS* we have gained access to the limitless, borderless world of literary journalism, a world of infinite possibilities and thus infinite research ideas.

I am indebted and grateful to *LJS* for the opportunities it has given me and for being my first go-to when I am immersed in my own research projects. That it continues as relevant for the field as it has been, is my wish for the decades ahead.

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**Notes**

1 Soares, "*South*," Paper, IALJS-3.
2 Hartsock, "Note from the Editor," 5.
3 Sims, "The Problem and the Promise," 7–16.
4 Soares, "*South*," *Literary Journalism Studies*, 17–30.


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# The IALJS and *LJS*: A Decade of Pioneering Scholars and the New Wave

Willa McDonald
Macquarie University, Australia

I join the chorus of thanks flowing to the IALJS on the tenth anniversary of *Literary Journalism Studies*. As was the aim of the founders of the IALJS, literary journalism is now established internationally as a field of academic inquiry. Without a peer-reviewed academic journal, particularly one the quality of *LJS*, this could not have happened.

From the beginning, *LJS* has encouraged a wide range of contributions. The first issue, published in 2009, included articles analyzing literary journalism from countries as diverse as Canada, Germany, and Australia, not just the United States. In this way, the journal has played a key contributory role in the development of a global cultural history of journalism—mostly through the publication of research done locally by passionate researchers in their home countries.

I personally would like to thank the IALJS and *LJS*—and the people behind them—for setting me on my current research path of examining the history of Australia's literary journalism. It is a fascinating area of study and one that has been inspired by the pioneer researchers in the literary journalism field and further enabled by the framework of inquiry established by the IALJS and *LJS*.

By tracing the cultural history of Australian literary journalism, I hope to fill a gap in the knowledge of our national literature, while placing the form within a cultural, economic, and political context, both locally and internationally. This has been possible only because of the work that is being completed on literary journalism, by a diversity of researchers from a range of countries, published largely in the pages of this wonderful journal.


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# Through Global and Gender Lenses: The IALJS and *LJS* at the End of the First Decade

Sue Joseph
University of Technology Sydney, Australia

In 2015, Tom Connery invited me onto the host's panel in Minneapolis for a tenth anniversary discussion, "What Is Literary Journalism?" at the IALJS conference. I took that opportunity to crunch some numbers, with a view of assessing if the IALJS is truly international, and how *LJS* scrubs up through a gender lens. I was also hoping, with these data, to open a discussion about how better to reach into countries and communities which perhaps do not know we are here, according to our own mission: "The journal is *international* in scope and seeks submissions on the theory, history, and pedagogy of literary journalism *throughout the world*."[1]

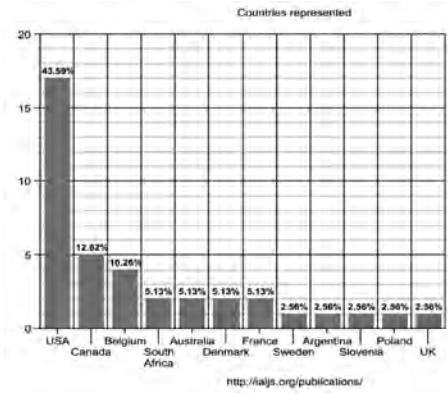
**2009–2014**

At that time, I found we had published sixty-seven papers (not including extracts but including keynote speeches). This figure was from the twelve journal issues from Spring 2009 (vol. 1, no. 1) to Fall 2014 (vol. 6, no. 2). Seventy-three authors contributed to the sixty-seven papers. Of those seventy-three authors, forty-four, or 60.28%, were men and twenty-nine, or 39.72%, were women. Fifteen countries were represented but U.S. publication comprised 53.73% (thirty-six papers). Next was Canada at 11.94% (eight papers); then Norway with its special issue at 5.9% (four papers). The United Kingdom and Netherlands were next with 4.47% (three papers, each). Australia, Portugal, and South Africa each contributed 2.98% (two papers, each); with Argentina, Belgium, Cuba, Finland, Germany, and Ireland contributing 1.49% (one paper, each).

Capturing these data was by no means to criticize the journal, its editors or its scholars and writers. *Literary Journalism Studies* is an exciting and creative publication. It has collated and continues to collate a growing canon of scholarly work and opinions constellating literary journalism in its many guises; its editorial doors are open globally; and the more scholars internationally who know of it, the greater the spread of coverage. I am more than confident this

will happen throughout time, growing and gaining a foothold in the world of academia, positioning and privileging a field of study long overdue.

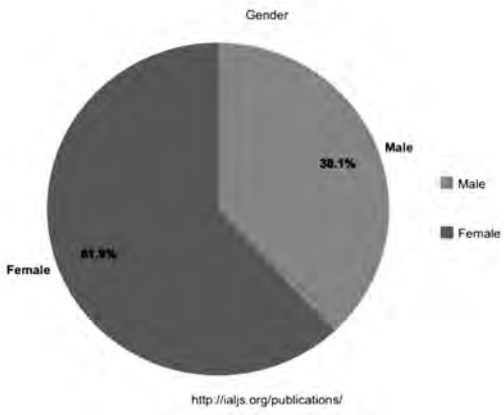
**2015–Present**




It seems apt to update these statistics here. There have been five issues since the 2015 capture of the figures, reported above. The five issues add a total of thirty-nine papers. Twelve countries are represented, and the United States, still with the greatest contribution of 43.59% (seventeen papers), dropped by approximately 10%. Canada again came in next, but with a greater percentage at 12.82% (five papers). Belgium was next with 10.26% (four papers). And then South Africa, Australia, Denmark and France with 5.13% (two papers, each); followed by Sweden, Argentina, Slovenia, Poland, and the U.K. with 2.56% (one paper, each).

So, what do these new stats tell us? To begin with, although a smaller sample, the percentage spread is greater. This is a good and sound move, making the *LJS* appear more inclusive to non-U.S. scholars and researchers, creating a space for welcoming a greater international diversity, with potential for more.

On the note of diversity, the current gender split differential is thoroughly laudable. In 2015, seventy-three authors had contributed to the sixty-three papers. As mentioned above, of those seventy-three authors, forty-four, or 60.28%, were men, and twenty-nine, or 39.72%, were women. In the five issues since that first capture, and across the latest thirty-nine papers, there are forty-two writers: twenty-six (or 61.9%) are female and sixteen (or 38.1%) are male. This makes *LJS* vastly more female representative: So much so that perhaps our male counterparts soon will be asking for affirmative action.



### A Personal Perspective

Editor Bill Reynolds asks what *LJS* means to me; what *LJS* means to literary journalism scholarship; and what *LJS* means to my country's literary journalism scholarship. Through the IALJS and *LJS* I feel a part of a creative and generous tribe. We are peers, colleagues, and friends, and although several of us live more than twenty-four hours' flying time away from wherever the conference is held, it always feels like home when we are all together. We are writers and scholars and teachers, and I come away from each meeting intellectually nourished and somehow "heard," and bring everything I learn back to my classroom.

The journal itself is a repository of our growing scholarly canon—*LJS* gatekeeps, collates, and then publishes. Embryonic at first, now its traction is pronounced; and it grows from strength to strength, year to year, thanks to the tireless efforts of editorial staff in fighting for its academic status. It is clear from the stats above that it is a considered and equitable publishing site, attempting to be more considered and more equitable each issue.

Strangely, membership has somehow brought Australian scholars in this field together—we leave Down Under in order to gather somewhere else far away in the world and begin conversations, continued back home. In many ways, the IALJS and *LJS* have created their own microcommunity in Australia: We are proud to see our research side by side with scholars from around the world; we feel less geographically distant; and we feel part of something bigger, growing and gaining momentum. A diverse space full of imagination and passion I am ever grateful I stumbled across.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the founding members, every president since inception, our executive members, all *LJS* staff,[2] and the membership. It is an honor and a privilege to know you, to work with you, and to count you as colleagues and friends.

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### Notes

[1] IALJS, "Journal," homepage (emphasis mine).

[2] A particular thank you to book review editor Nancy Roberts, who ran a ten-page (!) review of my 2016 book *Behind the Text*, by Martha Nandorfy—a cogent, generous, and critically constructive review. Thank you, both. *Editor's note*: See Nandorfy, "The Implications of Genre in Nonfiction," 142–51.


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# For *Literary Journalism Studies* on Its Tenth Anniversary

Beate Josephi
University of Sydney, Australia

A big thank you goes to *LJS* and the IALJS for giving literary journalism its own status. It is to the great credit of both journal and organization that they have been instrumental in conceptualizing literary journalism as a distinct discipline. They brought together scholars from a diversity of areas—be they journalism, magazine journalism, literary nonfiction, creative nonfiction or literature—to fuse the whole into one field of study. The early difficulty in defining the field is well documented in the provenance of the distinguished scholars who backed and continue to back their efforts. To have the focal points the journal and association provide has turned out to be of great importance. The journal is the most important tool in demonstrating the discipline's research possibilities and capabilities. The journal supports and is supported by the annual conferences, which are a vital forum for presenting new inquiries, criticism, and reflection.

*LJS*, just like the IALJS, is also to be highly commended for staying so staunchly international. Given the paradigmatic power the United States possesses in this area, it would have been easy to subsume all other scholarship into its vortex. But the IALJS and *LJS* have resisted this pull. The journal has championed comparative studies and introduced readers to literary journalism in the many parts of the world, be they the Lusophone, English-speaking, or Slavic-speaking countries. Most importantly, *LJS* has consistently strengthened literary journalism's theoretical foundation.

From an Australian point of view, its scholars, who in the past have somewhat suffered from a "tyranny of distance,"[1] are appreciative of seeing the standards of literary journalism scholarship set by *LJS*, and of the connections provided by an international association such as the IALJS.

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**Notes**

[1] Originally the title of Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey's 1966 book, the apt, "tyranny of distance" expression is commonly and frequently used in Australia.


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# Literary Journalism and Editing: IALJS and *LJS* as Unifying Forces

Susan L. Greenberg
University of Roehampton, United Kingdom

I have two big interests in my teaching and research, and *Literary Journalism Studies* brings those two together.

The first is, of course, literary journalism, which the journal puts into a new frame of reference that helps the subject become more fully visible. I am pleased to be part of the small band that first formed the IALJS in 2006, but the institution building did not stop there. Like other new, interdisciplinary fields, literary journalism has need of a shared language, and the journal is vital in supporting that. I felt it keenly when coediting a special issue on the field for another journal; our feet were planted on the ground provided by that first issue of *LJS*.

The second big concern of my working life is the history, theory, and practice of publishing; and, in particular, the editing function. I offer a working definition of editing as a process of selecting, shaping, and linking the text, to deliver its meaning and importance to the reader. The mostly invisible work of editing helps to create a context and identity for texts that allow them to survive as they move through time and space, from one group of readers to another, and from one purpose to another. For periodicals in particular, the voice of the publication *is* the accumulated voice of these acts of editing. As the veteran film editor Walter Murch puts it, editing is "not so much a putting together as it is a discovery of a path."[1] The *LJS* journal is an example of this shaping consciousness.

Most importantly, *LJS* helps create a conversation that is international, stretching beyond North America, where the need for definition and legitimation is perhaps even stronger. This reflects its roots in the IALJS, which from the start took a deliberately international stance.

One small example from my own experience: The seeds of a book review that I wrote for *LJS* grew into a book chapter on Polish reportage, which drew in turn on the work of other IALJS colleagues. That conversation has evolved over the years and informed a conference panel for IALJS–13 in Vienna on the oddly internationalist nature of populist nationalism and the insights that might be gained by considering it through the lens of narrative journalism.

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**Notes**

[1] Murch, *Blink of an Eye*, 3.


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# Literary Journalism as a Discipline and Genre: The Politics and the Paradox

Richard Lance Keeble
University of Lincoln, United Kingdom

**Abstract**: A paradox lies at the heart of literary journalism (otherwise termed creative nonfiction, long-form journalism, narrative journalism and, more recently, slow journalism and multi-platform immersive journalism). On the one hand, it has emerged since the 1970s as a distinct, theoretically rich field of study (with an international reach). On the other hand, its separateness as a discipline in higher education has, on many levels, impeded its growth and created debilitating epistemological disputes within the academic community and confusions (as well as hostility) among practicing journalists. This study will attempt to trace, briefly, the history of literary journalism both as a discipline (comparing it to that of English) and a genre and go on to tackle the genre's inherent elitism. In its final sections, the essay will argue, radically, that the parameters of both genre and discipline need to be erased for literary journalism to thrive.

**Keywords:** literary journalism – genre – discipline – politics – elitism

It is interesting to compare the history of English as a subject of study in universities with the history of literary journalism—and identify the crucial historical, political, and economic factors influencing both.

The emergence of the study of English essentially accompanied Britain's rise to pre-eminence as a global, imperial, capitalist power in the later part of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. The study was, in effect, one of the many manifestations of the cultural and ideological dominance of British imperial values at the time. Of note, one of the first recorded advocates of the teaching of English was Adam Smith (1703–1790), the eminent Scottish philosopher, economist, and author who laid the foundations of the classical free market economic theory. Indeed, "Smith's approach to English literature was in keeping with his theories about the need to develop a free market economy [to] serve the needs of an independent and competitive citizenry."[1] Above all, he stressed that "training in literature served a specific utilitarian function for the sons of the middle class."[2] Studying English literature "was a way to teach conduct, not as Renaissance humanists before him had as a measure of 'polite learning' for the sons of the aristocracy, but as a way to transcend class-based distinctions of refinement and to promote English citizenship."[3]

English as an academic subject was also "institutionalised" in the U.K. in "Mechanics' Institutes and working men's colleges."[4] Some critics have even argued that "English was literally the 'poor man's Classics,' a way of providing an education for those who would never attend public schools and Oxford or Cambridge."[5] The political aspects remained always to the fore: In the early days of the discipline, the stress was on solidarity between the social classes, national pride, and the cultivation of moral values. In effect, one of the main functions of English was to help "prevent . . . social unrest."[6]

The English poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold (1822–1886) was appointed Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, in 1845 and played an important role in the development of English.[7] And from these British roots, the discipline spread in the latter half of the nineteenth century to North America, to European countries such as France and Germany, and to the colonies across the globe. The emergence of English has been associated with the decline in religion (with secular texts replacing biblical ones)—and this certainly created tensions, for instance, among Christian missionaries in India. In 1852–1853, a parliamentary select committee report called for the promotion of British material interests and Western knowledge in India.

Professorships, professional associations, subject specializations, the publication of academic journals and textbooks, the identification of a dominant literary canon and pedagogic principles, and the creation of working

definitions are among the crucial elements that go toward the formation of a distinct academic disciple. And all these were featured as English became embedded in curricula around the world.

**The Emergence of Literary Journalism: Some Parallels with English**

Let us now turn to the emergence of literary journalism—and perhaps identify some parallels. The publication of Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson's *The New Journalism*: W*ith an Anthology*[8]—bringing together the works of (largely white, male, and U.S.) journalists such as Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Barbara Goldsmith, Michael Herr, Norman Mailer, George Plimpton, Gay Talese, and Hunter S. Thompson—in 1973 proved to be the seminal moment. Here was Wolfe, a practicing journo (how amazing!), reflecting on his practice, identifying various elements of the unique style he was promoting (the New Journalism, no less)—and being, at the same time, highly combative and confident. Its effect was rather like that of a small earthquake in the fertile ground of Western culture: The aftereffects are still being felt. The U.S. academic community and, to a much lesser extent, British academics were the first to respond—and a highly influential series of texts appeared, cementing the position of literary journalism as a distinct style. These included Sims,[9] Sims and Kramer,[10] Campbell,[11] Kerrane and Yagoda,[12] Hartsock,[13] Treglown and Bennett,[14] Applegate,[15] Talese and Lounsberry,[16] and Berner.[17]

How can we account for this extraordinary flowering of the literary journalism canon led by U.S. scholars (and with a few Brits in the background)? Susan Sontag reminds us of the importance of placing our understanding of artistic, literary styles in their historical and geographical context:

> . . . the notion of style, generically considered, has a specific, historical meaning. It is not only that styles belong to a time and place; and that our perception of the style of a given work of art is always charged with an awareness of the work's historicity, its place in a chronology.[18]

In part, and in complex ways, it could be argued that the emerging awareness and celebration of literary journalism as a genre in the 1970s and 1980s were a manifestation of the political, cultural, and ideological power of the United States (as the leader of the Western, capitalist world in its confrontation with communist Soviet Union) at the time. As Edward Said commented:

> So influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism and opportunity, that imperialism in the United States as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of the United States culture, politics and history. But the connection between imperial politics and culture in North America, and in particular in the United States, is astonishingly direct.[19]

Later, in his seminal text *Culture and Imperialism*, Said was to expand on this idea:

> The connection between imperial politics and culture is astonishingly direct. American attitudes to American "greatness," to hierarchies of race, to the perils of *other* revolutions (the American revolution being considered unique and somehow unrepeatable anywhere else in the world) have remained constant, have dictated, have obscured the realities of empire, while apologists for overseas American interests have insisted on American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom.[20]

Moreover, there was a wealth of literary talent among the U.S. journalists whose work Wolfe and Johnson highlighted in their anthology. A range of prestigious journals—such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, the *Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone*, and *New York* magazine—were on hand to provide outlets for their writings. In addition, there was an academic community with a long-standing tradition of journalism studies (taking in both practical and theoretical strands)—and a number of imaginative, highly intelligent, and risk-taking university lecturers determined to explore and expand on the ideas in Wolfe and Johnson's inspirational text.[21]

## Literary Journalism as a Discipline

Slowly and hesitantly, then, literary journalism (otherwise termed literary nonfiction or creative nonfiction) emerged as a discipline in the United States. Thomas B. Connery, currently emeritus professor of communication and journalism at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, and author of *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism: Representative Writers in an Emerging Genre*,[22] taught a course titled "Journalism and Literature" in a master's program at Ohio State University in the early 1970s and, with others elsewhere, led modules in "New Journalism" in the early 1980s.[23]

According to Norman Sims, author of the seminal 1984 text, *The Literary Journalists:*

> I think you should look to the 1970s or 1980s in the U.S. for the true start of literary journalism as a discipline. The New Journalism made such a splash that lots of journalism departments started teaching courses on the subject in the seventies (as they will in the future on "fake news," probably). It was certainly something in the air, not as important as standard news writing but important enough to inform students about. Not all the people teaching it loved it. My former colleague Larry Pinkham taught a course on New Journalism at Columbia University in the School of Journalism in the seventies; he had mixed feelings. Of course, most professors were older . . .
>
> Those New Journalism courses faded away by the late seventies in

> most cases as the New Journalism acquired a negative connotation. When I came to UMass Amherst in 1979, I proposed teaching a course in literary journalism. Larry Pinkham, who was then the department chair, as I remember, was encouraging. But I titled it something about the New Journalism. I later renamed the course as literary journalism and taught it in a couple different forms until I retired, but I would not say that it was a discipline at UMass. Close but not quite.
>
> My anthology in 1984, *The Literary Journalists*, seems to have resulted in a lot of courses being taught because I argued that the New Journalism had not expired in the 1970s and was still being practiced by quality professionals who did not have the in-your-face attitude of folks like Tom Wolfe. (And Wolfe was still writing then.) I expanded the range beyond New Journalism to include people like Joe Mitchell. Complicated. But single courses do not a discipline make. Columbia had a course, as did Princeton (in the English department, taught by John McPhee) and many other universities.[24]

In Britain, paradoxically, while a vast tradition of literary journalism dates back to Daniel Defoe (1660–1731), and a number of the early seminal texts on literary journalism were by British academics, it has been very slow to emerge as a discipline in British universities. As Jenny McKay, writing in 2011, commented:

> What university courses in the U.K. don't usually include at either the undergraduate or the postgraduate level is any serious consideration of journalism as a branch of literature. Among a few exceptions was a course taught at the University of Stirling until autumn 2009, one module in a master's course at the University of Lincoln and the more recent master's in literary journalism at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow.[25]

Today, the situation is very different. Type "Journalism and Creative Writing" into the UCAS (U.K. university course database) and information on seventy-seven undergraduate courses appears; at postgraduate level there are thirteen programs. For "Magazine Journalism," which incorporates feature/long-form/immersive writing, there are eleven undergraduate and eleven postgraduate programs.

The situation in Portugal remains bleak. Isabel Soares, of the Instituto Técnica de Lisboa, commented:

> Here in Portugal, literary journalism is not (yet) an autonomous discipline. However, after a lot of effort by myself and colleagues it has been accepted at my institute as part of a program in investigative journalism. Students can also opt to develop a thesis in literary journalism. Thus, it has been mainly introduced at the postgraduate levels: in the Master's in communication studies and Ph.D. in communication sciences.[26]

In France, John Bak at Université de Lorraine and one of the founders of the IALJS, comments bluntly:

> As for literary journalism as a discipline in France, it does not exist. Even literary journalism as a topic in France is difficult to talk about. Some colleagues work on "moocs" for their research, and I know two professors who do have research projects on French reportage from the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries.[27]

In Australia, Matthew Ricketson and Sue Joseph record the introduction of the program, Contemporary Writing Practice: Creative Non-Fiction at the University of Technology Sydney, in 1999, and the literary journalism course at RMIT, Melbourne, the following year.[28] The formation of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, at a conference in France in 2006, proved to be another pivotal moment as it helped inspire the development of both the study of the genre and its teaching as an academic discipline across the globe. According to David Abrahamson, of the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, Chicago: "What might be termed 'Literary Journalism Studies' started to feel like a legitimate academic discipline around 2010 or 2011 following the sixth annual IALJS conference in Brussels."[29]

## The Waning of the U.S. Empire in Literary Journalism

In recent years, interestingly accompanying the waning of the U.S. empire and the disastrous interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Chad, Yemen, and elsewhere, the emphasis in literary journalism studies has been to try to break away from the U.S./U.K. grip and incorporate global perspectives.[30] Recent articles in *Literary Journalism Studies*, the journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies, have included studies focusing on South Africa, France, Germany, Poland, Argentina, Australia, and Russia. Yet the influence of the dominant cultural (alongside the political) ideology persists. For instance, the publisher description of *Literary Journalism across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, of 2011, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, reads as follows:

> Though largely considered an Anglo-American phenomenon today, literary journalism has had a long and complex international history, one built on a combination of traditions and influences that are sometimes quite specific to a nation and at other times come from the blending of cultures across borders.[31]

Holland, Spain, China, Brazil, Finland, New Zealand, Slovenia, Australia, and Poland are among the countries examined. Yet the crucial opening, scene-setting section, exploring the theory of international literary journalism, is covered entirely by U.S. or U.K. academics.

Similar tensions appear in the texts on literary journalism I have jointly edited: The aim was to globalize the study, yet still vast tracks of the world lay beyond the gaze of literary journalism academics. In the introduction to the first volume of *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination*,[32] John Tulloch and I begin frankly:

> Best to come clean at the outset: like Dr Faustus, the present collection makes bold and overreaching claims to a world-encompassing inclusiveness. But the claim to globalism can hardly be sustained in a selection of studies that explores the work of eleven European writers, six from the United States and Canada, one each from Latin America and India and a solitary essay on literary journalism in the Middle East.[33]

The introduction to *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination*, Vol. 2,[34] again jointly edited with John Tulloch, begins with this quote from Rupert Hildyard, one of the contributors to the first volume, rightly warning that the "global tag . . . often conceals Anglo-American interests and hegemony," and I concede: "This new volume, indeed, has its fair share of chapters on US and UK writers," though the gaze did spread "further afield—to Australia, Brazil, France, India, Ireland, and Portugal."[35]

The persisting power of the North American tradition was highlighted by Sue Joseph in an analysis of the contributions to the IALJS's journal *Literary Journalism Studies* from the Spring 2009 (1, no. 1) through the Fall 2014 (6, no. 2) issues.[36] Of the seventy-three authors, the U.S. accounted for thirty-six (53.73%), Canada, eight (11.94%), Norway, four (5.97%), the U.K. and Netherlands, three (4.47% each), Australia, Portugal, and South Africa, two (2.98% each), with just a single paper from each of Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, Finland, Germany, and Ireland (1.49% each). Ricketson and Joseph comment: "The data shows that even in the most well-meaning and hopeful of enterprises, as the IALJS certainly is, an international association and its journal are still heavily weighted towards the country of publication, in this case, the US."[37]

Indeed, while a special issue of the *Australian Journalism Review* was titled: "Literary Journalism: Looking beyond the Anglo-American Tradition," many of the contributors still framed their studies with references to the seminal U.S./U.K. texts. For instance, as I pointed out in my afterword to the issue, Christopher Kremmer:

> examines three works of book-length narrative non-fiction by well-known Australian authors. They are Helen Garner's *This House of Grief: The Story of a Murder Trial* (2014); *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (1994) by Geraldine Brooks; and Anna Funder's *Stasiland* (2003). He . . . begins his study referring to Tom Wolfe's celebrated definition of

> 'new journalism' (1973). He cites the American Norman Sims (1984) on literary journalism as a hybrid form of narrative using literary techniques to convey deeper journalistic truths than is possible in brief expository news reports.[38]

Elsewhere Kremmer refers to "criteria offered mainly by the Americans Lounsberry (1990), Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) and Kramer (1995)."[39] "And in his analysis of Garner's *This House of Grief*, Kremmer begins by acknowledging [her] debt to Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*: 'Her desire to exercise her literary art on the canvas of the law suggests obvious parallels'."[40]

I also in the afterword noted that Carolyn Rickett, while analyzing "Pamela Bone's writing about her cancer," highlighted "the work of two English journalists, John Diamond and Ruth Picardie, and the theories of the English academics Rosalind Coward and John Tulloch, in her important, opening, contextualising section. Rickett also quotes Bone herself who . . . cites the Americans Philip Roth and Susan Sontag (together with the Australian Doris Brett)" as writers who "reassure her about the value of writing about illness."[41] Isabel Soares, in her "study of Portuguese literary journalism, acknowledges the importance of (all-male) Anglo-American practitioners such as Charles Dickens, W. T. Stead, Jack London, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, the theories of Americans such as John Hartsock, Thomas Connery, and Norman Sims—and the 'living' long-form journalism currently found in the *New Yorker*."[42]

Similarly, McDonald and Davies highlight "the work of Anglo-American literary journalism theorists such as Bak and Reynolds (2011), Hartsock (2000), Keeble and Tulloch (2012) and Sims (1990)" in their analysis of four Melbourne journalists' 1880 reporting of Ned Kelly's "last stand."[43] McDonald and Davies also point to Tom Wolfe's essay that introduces the New Journalism anthology he coedited with E. W. Johnson, in which Wolfe describes the ways that "he and his fellow journalists, writing for magazines in North America in the 1960s and '70s, were inventing a new genre of accurate reporting that incorporated literary techniques to enhance the storytelling; specifically dialogue, scenes, point of view and telling detail."[44]

## Celebrating the Blur of Literary Journalism

While the emergence of literary journalism as a discipline has had its many positive aspects (the vital internationalizing impetus being still countered—as a result of complex, historically rooted political/cultural/economic factors—by the potency of the U.S.-led tradition), it has also had a number of negative consequences. Professionalism, academic administrations, and curriculum organization all normally require disciplinary clarity. And yet, literary journalism is at core a messy term. Indeed, it has in its

essence "a provisional quality" that captures "many of the uncertainties and contradictions of the writer's predicament" today.[45] As the British critic Mark Lawson observed: "We live in a culture of blur and hybrids."[46] Too much time is inevitably spent in an endless haggle over definitions and terminology (since the underlying politics of professionalism require it) when really the blur of the discipline should be celebrated! John Tulloch and I argue:

> . . . rather than a stable genre or family of genres, literary journalism defines a *field* where different traditions and practices of writing intersect, a disputed terrain within which various overlapping practices of writing—among them the journalistic column, the memoir, the sketch, the essay, travel narratives, life writing, "true crime" narratives, "popular" history, cultural reflection and other modes of writing—camp uneasily, disputing their neighbors' barricades and patching up temporary alliances.[47]

Clearly literary journalism is the Big Brother in the epistemological Oceania. But with journalism academics duelling with literary studies colleagues, a number of upstart notions have appeared on the margins: creative nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, literary nonfiction, narrative journalism, long-form journalism, book-length journalism, even more recently, slow journalism—and so on. Increasingly, a tone of irritation is evident. Ricketson and Joseph highlight the "internecine, obscure turf war" over the definitions of literary journalism and conclude: "This debate has been trundling along for years and, frankly, is getting nowhere."[48]

The obsession with genre definitions and disciplinary clarity has also meant, it could be argued, that literary journalism has been slow to embrace a vast range of potentially exciting perspectives. Politics, propaganda, cultural studies, psychology, humor studies, theories of ideology, history, narrative studies, political economy, computer/internet studies, fandom research, media ethics, sociology, ethnography, colonial and post-colonial studies, gender and race studies—all these have appeared in some guise in literary journalism research to date. But, I believe that without the disciplinary constraints the results from the cross-fertilization of ideas could be far more fruitful.

**Literary Journalism's Uneasy Relationship with Practicing Journos**

Bak appears to seek refuge from the "turf war" over genre definitions into the warm embrace of the discipline, proclaiming:

> . . . we have to stop writing definitional manifestos that show by default that literary journalism lacks cohesion, take charge of the discipline ourselves, conduct the research that needs to be conducted, and wait for the rest to catch up with us. They will, eventually.[49]

But this approach fails to acknowledge the many problematics (highlighted above) associated with the disciplinary. Most importantly, the stress on the academic discipline creates more problematics in literary journalism's uneasy relationship with the actual world of practicing journalists. I have been a journalist in the U.K. since 1970 and never once heard colleagues describe themselves as "literary journalists" or "creative-nonfiction writers." Most would find any discussion of the terms alienating: too abstract, academic, and irrelevant. George Orwell commented, in his 1946 essay "Why I Write":

> The aesthetic motive is very feeble in a lot of writers, but even a pamphleteer [his, somewhat derogatory, word for journalists] or a writer of textbooks will have pet words and phrases which appeal to him for non-utilitarian reasons. . . . What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art.[50]

More recently, the investigative journalist and broadcaster John Pilger has commented:

> By giving priority to the writing, I have tried not always successfully to draw together the literary, the analytical and the historical. This is true of my films as well as my written work. The essence I've aimed for is humane and to give the widest possible audience a sense of how "things work" and perhaps to provide an antidote to the cliché and stereotype congested view that is the voice of authority's propaganda so often heard in parts of the media.[51]

But I would surmise Orwell and Pilger are the exceptions. Joseph, in her recent discussions with journalists in Australia, finds generally a reluctance to adopt the term "creative nonfiction"—or else hostility.[52] Three of Joseph's favorite authors—David Marr, Helen Garner, and Chloe Hooper—went so far as to refuse to take part. Fairfax war reporter Paul McGeough, the first of Joseph's interviewees, is clearly uninterested in the debate. "I've never thought about it," he says. "Beyond journalist reporter, I've never tried to define myself."[53] Margaret Simons, who won the Walkley Award for Social Equity Journalism for her essay "Fallen Angels" in 2007, says she "hate[d]" the term creative nonfiction. She prefers such terms as "dirty journalism," or even "disinterested journalism."[54] The one person who seriously understands Joseph's question about defining creative nonfiction is fellow academic John Dale.[55]

## Tackling Literary Journalism's Inherent Elitism

At the heart of the literary journalism problematic is its inherent elitism which must be confronted head-on. Historically, as I have pointed out elsewhere, complex factors (cultural, ideological, political) lie behind journalism's low status in the broader culture.[56] Since their emergence in the early

seventeenth century in Europe's cities, particularly London, the "news media" (variously known as corantos, diurnals, gazettes, mercuries, and proceedings) have been associated with scandal, gossip, and "low" culture. During the 1720s, Grub Street came to be associated with an impoverished area of London where poor writers lived, just as the word "hack" came to be associated with writers and prostitutes—basically anything overused, hired out, or common.

On a basic level, journalism has provided writers with an income. Yet this very fact has reinforced journalism's position as a sub-literary genre. For literature is considered the fruit of "scholarship"—hence pure and disinterested and above market considerations, including those of being readable and accessible—while journalistic writing is viewed as distorted by the constraints of the market, tight deadlines, and word limits. All this has meant that journalism has long struggled to be considered a worthy academic discipline and genre worthy of special attention for its literary elements. Until quite recently the journalism of writers such as Dickens, George Sand, Oscar Wilde, Willa Cather, D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Mahatma Gandhi, Marguerite Duras, Mary McCarthy, R. K. Narayan, and Angela Carter has not been worthy of attention by the academy. Moreover, writers themselves have often looked down on their journalism: George Orwell, as noted earlier, looked down on his journalism as "mere pamphleteering."

In the face of journalism's generally low cultural status, advocates of literary journalism have promoted it as a Higher Form of Journalism. As Tulloch and I wrote in the introduction to a collection of essays on literary journalism worldwide: "The addition of 'literary' to 'journalism' might be seen as dignifying the latter and giving it a modicum of cultural class."[57] For each national grouping of literary journalists there is a dominant canon: with a few writers (for instance, Svetlana Alexievich) and journals (say, the *New Yorker*) highlighted as being worthy of serious analysis, critique, and celebration. Alongside this, in the academy, literary journalism studies are somehow elevated above the more mundane activities of journalism academics. The latter busy themselves with teaching students how to bash out lively intros and well-structured stories to deadlines and to use the constantly changing media technologies while literary journalism colleagues ponder the deeper literary, ethical, epistemological issues buried in the texts.

### The Radical Response 1: Democratizing the Genre

In response to the condescension of the academy toward journalism as a legitimate field for study, we should argue that, in fact, *all* journalism is worthy of attention as *literature*. So away with the canon, away even with

the notion of literary journalism as a separate genre! And away with all those tedious debates about what precisely constitutes literary journalism that have dulled so many conferences over the years. Immediately, the problem of academics confronting practicing journos with a concept they feel uncomfortable with is solved. Their work becomes interesting—not because it falls within a specific genre (that needs careful explaining), but because of its inherent literary elements.

But, you argue, how can tabloid journalism be considered literature? Yet, let us take as an arbitrarily chosen extreme example, a day's edition of the *Sun* (October 5, 2017). This red-top, trashy U.K. tabloid was acquired by Rupert Murdoch in 1969, and its mix of titillation, sleaze, celebrity gossip, sports, and randy royals (together with extreme right politics) has helped it secure the largest daily newspaper circulation in the U.K. That day's main front-page headline simply uses the slogan from which letters disastrously fell off during the crucial keynote address of Prime Minister (PM) Theresa May to the Conservative Party conference: "BUI DING A C NTRY THA ORKS." The smaller headline above this (the strapline, in the jargon) jokes: "Things can only get letter" while the caption reads: "Words fail . . . after letters fall off slogan." All this is clever, humorous, slightly mocking punning. This tone continues in the copy as it reports (slightly scurrilously): "Referring to a missing letter 'F', shadow justice secretary Richard Burgon taunted: 'It's an F off to the country from Conservative Party Conference'."[58]

Notice how the newspaper, fiercely loyal to the Conservative Party (and virulent in its hatred of the Jeremy Corbyn–led Labour Party), is still able to joke about the PM's embarrassment. (Indeed, an accompanying photograph shows her looking rather glum and gormless.) Puns, after all, are important in newspapers, particularly the pops. They play with language and its many faceted meanings. Some can be forced (as here). But their contrivance is part of their appeal. And their humor contributes to the tabloid's overall hedonistic approach. No one (even the Pope, the Queen, the PM) can escape their barbed wit.

In many respects, the *Sun* here is playing the role of the modern-day court jester. During the Middle Ages, one of the most important roles at courts throughout Europe (and in India, Persia, and China) was occupied by the jesters whose function was to mock their employer. Rulers know they will always be mocked and attacked—but clever are those rulers who control the mockery. The court jester system did just that.[59] Today, the corporate media are clearly members of the U.K. "court," and their mockery of the system and its leaders provides a useful legitimizing function for the "democratic" state. John Fiske goes further and argues that the tabloids' witty approach carries a

necessary and "subversive" agenda critical of the state and the hypocrisies and pretensions of those who presume to be our moral guardians.[60]

### The Radical Response 2: Democratizing the Discipline

If then all journalism is to be seen as worthy of attention as literature, it follows that this democratizing impulse can be applied to literary journalism as a discipline. In other words, the fences separating the many specialisms in the academy need—as far as possible—to be pulled down: All journalism teachers need to see the creative, imaginative elements of the field. English, creative writing, and journalism programs too often operate completely separate from each other. Collaborations need to develop—with the ultimate aim of breaking down the disciplinary barriers.

Universities today are highly bureaucratized, in many ways inflexible institutions, and such changes are unlikely to happen for many years. Yet radical steps are already being taken—in Europe and North America—to form higher education institutions outside the increasingly market-driven, hyperspecialized public sector, based, instead, on cooperative, social justice, nonhierarchical, and ecological principles.[61] Often in these universities, not only is the separation of disciplines being challenged but even that between student and teacher—with all participants being seen as "scholars." There's the Free University Brighton,[62] the Manchester Social Science Centre,[63] Leicester Peoples University,[64] and the Ragged University Edinburgh.[65] In the U.S., there's Tampa Free Skool[66]; in Canada, there's the Edmonton Free School[67]; in Spain, there's Mondragon University.[68] And those are just a few examples. The Lincoln Social Science Centre, another progressive, higher-education institution, interestingly uses this self-description: "All classes are participative and collaborative in order to ground inquiry in the experiences and knowledges of the participants. . . . One key guiding principle of the Centre is that 'teachers' and 'students' have much to learn from each other."[69]

### Conclusions

Literary journalism studies have failed to give adequate attention to the subject as an academic discipline, concentrating too much on its development as a genre. Why did literary journalism as a discipline emerge in this country at this particular period and not earlier? How important are the political/economic factors? In France, there is a vast tradition of literary journalism in the industry and yet it is still to emerge as an academic discipline there. Why? With the emergence of literary journalism studies across the globe, to what extent does the U.S. canon remain influential? These are all fascinating questions around which, to date, there has been insufficient inquiry.

The development of the discipline has certainly been dogged by both

constant epistemological disputes in the academy and bewilderment in the industry. The radical solution promoted in this essay—to view all journalism (and not just the body text but also headlines, captions, and standfirsts) worth considering as literature—certainly has important pedagogical implications. During more than thirty years of teaching journalism, I have always asked my new students why they have chosen the subject. Virtually all come up with the same reply: "Because I like writing." In other words, the creative/imaginative impulse lies behind the journalistic bug. And those creative/literary dimensions I've tried to incorporate in all my teaching (and writing on) practical journalism. Take, for instance, a conventional hard news story: There's the conciseness and immediacy of the intro section (capturing the news value); the overall tone to consider, the use of quotations (to invest the coverage with a "human interest" element); the often subtle handling of attribution; perhaps the brief description of a person or place; the insertion, appropriately, of background, contextualizing information; the close attention to the specific style of the publication; and the clear structuring of the report. And so on. Isn't all that creative! I've even highlighted the "kind of poetry" in the headlines of the *Sun*: One screamed, for instance "NITWIT HITS TWITTER WITH WRIT."[70] In the October 5, 2017, edition considered above, a story about a factory worker whose boss penned a rhyme about her breast on her fortieth birthday card and won £10,000 compensation was headlined: "Titty ditty not so witty."[71]

Breaking down the disciplinary boundaries in today's hyper-specialized, higher-education environment is not going to be easy. But as indicated above, there are many initiatives outside the mainstream challenging the dominant academic ideologies. There is room for optimism.

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**Notes**

[1] Kijinski, "The Rise of English Studies in Britain," 340.
[2] Kijinski, 340.
[3] Kijinski, 340.
[4] Academy, "History of English as a Discipline," para. 5.
[5] Academy, para. 5.
[6] Academy, para. 5.
[7] Lucas, "The Birth of Eng Lit," 29.
[8] Wolfe and Johnson, *The New Journalism*: *With an Anthology*.

[9] Sims, *The Literary Journalists*.

[10] Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism: A New Collection*.

[11] Campbell, *Journalism, Literature and Modernity*.

[12] Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*.

[13] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*.

[14] Treglown and Bennett, *Grub Street and the Ivory Tower*.

[15] Applegate, *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary*.

[16] Talese and Lounsberry, *Writing Creative Nonfiction.*

[17] Berner, *The Literature of Journalism*.

[18] Sontag, *Against Interpretation*, 18.

[19] Said, "Culture and Imperialism," Lecture, para. 4.

[20] Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 7.

[21] Keeble, "Afterword: Literary Journalism," 151–55.

[22] Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*.

[23] Thomas B. Connery, email message to author, September 13, 2017. John Hartsock also provided useful background information to the author in an email, September 14, 2017.

[24] Norman Sims, email message to author, September 14, 2017.

[25] McKay, "Reportage in the U.K.: A Hidden Genre?" 52.

[26] Isabel Soares, email message to author, September 14, 2017.

[27] John Bak, email message to author, November 13, 2017; "moocs," stands for "massive open online courses."

[28] Ricketson and Joseph, "Literary Journalism: Looking Beyond the Anglo-American Tradition," 27–32.

[29] David Abrahamson, email message to the author, September 13, 2017.

[30] Keeble, "Afterword: Literary Journalism," 152.

[31] Bak and Reynolds, "Description," para. 1.

[32] Keeble and Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Vol. 1.

[33] Tulloch and Keeble, "Mind the Gaps," 1:1.

[34] Keeble and Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Vol. 2.

[35] Keeble, ""Introduction: Literary Journalism as a Disputed Terrain—Still," 2:1.

[36] Ricketson and Joseph, "Literary Journalism: Looking Beyond," 28–29.

[37] Ricketson and Joseph, 29.

[38] Keeble, "Afterword: Literary Journalism," 152–53.

[39] Keeble, 152–53.

[40] Keeble, 153.

[41] Keeble, 153.

[42] Keeble, 153.

[43] Keeble, 153; McDonald and Davies, "Creating History," 34.

[44] Keeble, "Afterword: Literary Journalism," 153; McDonald and Davies, "Creating History," 34.

[45] Keeble and Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, 1:3.

[46] Lawson, "I Heard the News Today, Oh Boy," para. 11.

[47] Tulloch and Keeble, "Introduction: Mind the Gaps," 1:7.

[48] Ricketson and Joseph, "Literary Journalism: Looking Beyond," 27.

[49] Bak, introduction to *Literary Journalism across the Globe*, 19.

[50] Orwell, "Why I Write," 26, 28.

[51] Pilger, in e-mail to Zollmann, 372, 372n8.

[52] Joseph, *Behind the Text*.

[53] Joseph, 3, quoting Paul McGeough.

[54] Joseph, 132, quoting Margaret Simons. Martha Nandorfy, in her review of *Behind the Text*, comments wryly (and in parentheses) on Simons's comments: "(And I find myself wondering if such course titles might actually increase student enrolments [sic])." Nandorfy, "The Implications of Genre," 148.

[55] Joseph, 98.

[56] Keeble, "Introduction: On Journalism," *The Journalistic Imagination*, 1–14.

[57] Tulloch and Keeble, "Introduction: Mind the Gaps," 1:5.

[58] "Bui ding a C ntry Tha orks," 1.

[59] Otto, *Fools Are Everywhere*.

[60] Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, xliv, 83–102.

[61] Swain, "Could the Free University Movement Be the Great New Hope for Education?"

[62] Matthews, "Altogether Now."

[63] Swain, "Could the Free University Movement Be the Great New Hope for Education?"

[64] Social Science Centre Manchester.

[65] Leicester People's University.

[66] Ragged University Edinburgh.

[67] Tampa Free Skool.

[68] Edmonton Free School.

[69] Mondragon Unibertsitatea.

[70] Lincoln Social Science Centre, para. 2.

[71] Tulloch and Keeble, "Introduction: Mind the Gaps," 1:7, quoting Nick Parker, *Sun* [United Kingdom], May 20, 2011.

[72] "Titty Ditty Not So Witty."

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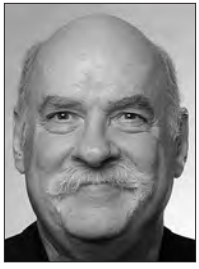

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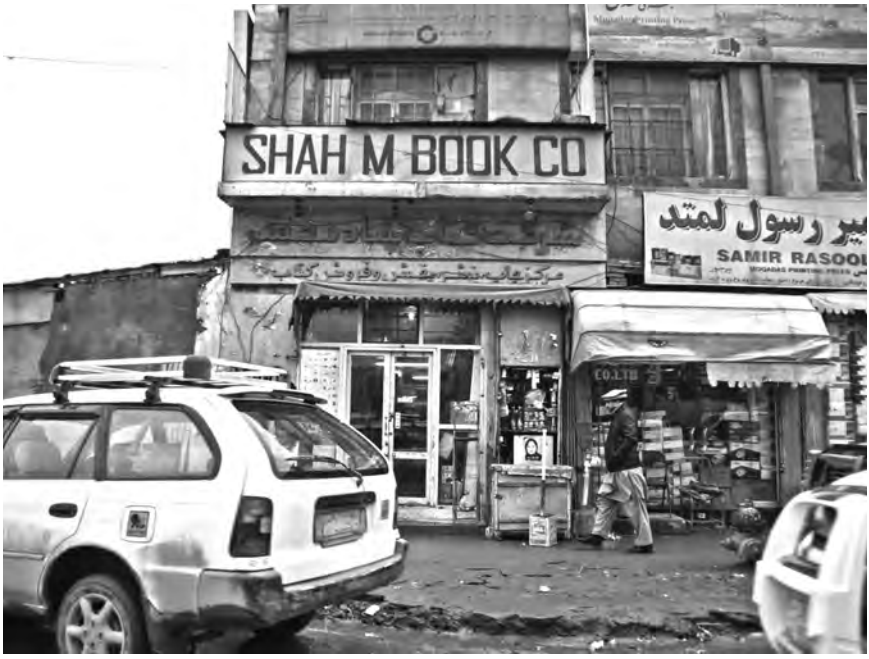


Shah M Books, Kabul, May 19, 2011 (Peretz Partensky, SF)_WikiMedia.org.

# Literary Journalist as Woman Traveler: The Legacy of Harem Literature in *The Bookseller of Kabul*

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**Abstract:** Åsne Seierstad's *The Bookseller of Kabul* (2002) displays the characteristics of literary journalism, yet the main motif of the book brings to mind the literary innovations of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *harem literature*. This term refers to a body of British women's travel writings from the period 1718–1918 that reported on the domestic lives of Muslim women living in the Middle East. Literary journalism and this subgenre of travel literature share an interest in reporting on the details of private, rather than public, life. Like the Victorian writers, Seierstad engaged in the representation of women's cross-cultural intersubjective experiences. She immersed herself in the more or less segregated daily lives of the women of the Rais family. *The Bookseller of Kabul*, in its narrative focus on hygiene, eating habits, clothing, and the physical appearance of Afghan women, recalls the formulas for writing harem literature. The elaborate descriptions serve to represent the women as immoral when they accept traditional ideals of femininity in a patriarchal society. As New Orientalism, Seierstad's book reinforces the classic opposition of colonial discourses between Westerners and Muslims. The rhetorical strategy of describing the bookseller's family in the image of a Western bourgeois family of the nineteenth-century places Afghan women historically at a stage of emancipation that Western women presumably passed more than a hundred years ago. As a whole, the narrative can be read as a warning to the West against trusting in military solutions to the societal problems Afghan women face.

**Keywords**: Seierstad – *The Bookseller of Kabul* – literary journalism – women's travel writing – harem literature – New Orientalism – cross-cultural reporting – gender

Norwegian journalist Åsne Seierstad went to Afghanistan to report on the United States-led invasion of the country in October 2001. She accompanied the forces of the Afghan Northern Alliance as they advanced from remote districts of deserts, mountains, and valleys into the capital. In Kabul, she met a bookseller named Shah Muhammad Rais. He invited her home for supper, and she encountered Afghan women for the first time. The family meal inspired Seierstad to write a book on the Rais household. She proposed the idea to the bookseller, and he accepted.[1]

There can be little doubt that Seierstad gained access to the private sphere of the Rais family because she herself is a woman, as men and women live largely separate lives in Afghanistan. She stayed in the household for nearly four months, moving more or less freely as a Western woman between the public world of Afghan men and the domestic lives of Afghan women.

It is important to consider the significance of gender to modern literary journalism when discussing the legacy of *harem literature* in relation to *The Bookseller of Kabul*. Historian Billie Melman coined the term in her study of British women who wrote about the Middle East during the period 1718–1918.[2] Harem literature refers to a specific body of women's travel writings that report on the private, domestic lives of Muslim women.[3] As such, it is an artifact to women,[4] with traveling writers describing actual intersubjective encounters and observations. The writings engage in and transform the formulas of classic colonial discourses, that is, the political, academic, and cultural writings of European colonial powers on colonized peoples, and develop complex rhetorical strategies in order to report on eyewitness observations of Muslim women's lives for the reader.[5] Like the writers of harem literature, Seierstad in Kabul engages in immersing herself in women's cross-cultural, intersubjective experiences. Her reporting provides an opportunity to investigate further how a twenty-first century literary journalistic narrative from Afghanistan can evoke the rhetorical strategies of nineteenth-century harem literature. A close reading of *Bookseller* and the literary analysis that follows lead to a discussion of the textual representation of the opposition between Western and Afghan women in New Orientalist discourses.

## New Orientalism

Fatemeh Keshavarz-Karamustafa, hereafter referred to as Fatemeh Keshavarz, introduced the term *New Orientalism* in her study of popular Western writings on Muslims, post-September 11, 2001.[6] The term refers to works, *Bookseller* among them, that responded to the urgent need in the West to become acquainted with and understand Muslim societies.[7] What the writers who can be grouped under the New Orientalist heading have in common

is that they tend to reproduce the same kind of Orientalist discourse Edward Said analyzed in *Orientalism*, his influential work from 1978: that is, they continue to represent the local Muslims as paternalistic, uncomplicated, and unchangeable.[8] The knowledge they convey reduces and simplifies the complexity of Muslim societies and culture for Western readers: "For example, it explains almost all undesirable Middle East incidents in terms of Muslim men's submission to God and Muslim women's submission to men."[9] The New Orientalists write from a semi-inside perspective, while they more or less openly declare their preference for a Western cultural and political takeover.

When Seierstad was conducting her research in Kabul, the West's attention focused on the continuing war against terror under the Afghan Interim Administration of December 2001, led by Hamid Karzai. In order to legitimize the military invasion, Western political rhetoric evoked the obligation of Westerners to liberate Afghan women.[10] Seierstad's work supplemented as well as challenged that rhetoric by allowing the reader to connect with the lives of individual Afghan women. The core question that fuels the narrative is what would this new political era—post-Taliban, spring 2002—have in store for women? On the one hand, the narrative shows women being optimistic about the future because the Taliban-imposed restrictions on them are now history. On the other hand, the story also bears the characteristics of a tragedy.[11] As the narrative unfolds to reveal the suppressive power of tradition, initial hope gives way to silent resignation.

In the foreword to *Bookseller*, Seierstad openly admits that she can lose her temper when challenged by Afghan males asserting their superiority: "The same thing was continually provoking me: the manner in which men treated women."[12] The narrative of Afghan family life as a whole can be read as a warning to the West against trusting in a military solution to the societal problems Afghan women face. After the book was published, several reports on living conditions for women justified Seierstad's pessimism. And ten years after the U.S.-led forces removed the Taliban from power in 2001, Afghanistan was rated the most dangerous place in the world for women.[13]

## Literary Journalism and Harem Literature

John Hartsock has suggested that literary journalism differs from travelogues in that, while the reporting of the former might be based on a journey, the journey itself is never the central theme of the narrative.[14] Still, he admits that a clear dividing line between the categories of travel writing and of literary journalism cannot be identified:

> There is, however, another reason why travelogue and a narrative literary journalism cannot be so discretely separated. When we keep a narrative

> account we keep a journal or journalism. When we travel, in all the meanings such a term can evoke, we journey. And the common Latin root for these in English is the diurnal, or the passage or journey of the day. After all, the Latin for journalist is *diurnarius*. Thus John Hersey's *Hiroshima* is a journal or journalism of a journey (consisting in that instance of a number of days) in all its existential meaning. We see it in Gunnar Larsen's Norwegian murder account discussed in this issue. We see it in the controversial *Bookseller of Kabul* by Norwegian Åsne Seierstad.[15]

Melman comments that harem literature stands out from travelogues in that the journey does not structure the narrative, since the central motif is the separate space of the *haremlik*: "By harem literature I mean writing concerned, mainly or wholly, with the material conditions of life and everyday domestic experiences of Muslim women."[16] With its focus on the daily events of the domestic sphere, this kind of travel writing redefined the sphere of action: "More significantly harem literature as its very name implies focuses on the private life rather on the public, civic, or political one."[17] Most literary journalists share these women writers' interest in what goes on in the private sphere. Norman Sims states that practitioners of the form tend to focus on day-to-day living:

> Reporting on the lives of people at work, in love, going about the normal rounds of life, they confirm that the crucial moments of everyday life contain great drama and substance. Rather than hanging around the edges of powerful institutions, literary journalists attempt to penetrate the cultures that make institutions work.[18]

At the family meal, Seierstad realized that reporting on domestic life in Afghanistan could hold a key to understanding the dramatic changes that were taking place in society as a whole: "When I left I said to myself: 'This is Afghanistan'."[19] She took part in the everyday routines of the Rais family from February to May 2002, in order to report for *Bookseller*:

> Slowly I was introduced into family life. They told me things when they felt like it, not when I asked. They were not necessarily in the mood to talk when my notebook was at hand, but rather during a trip to the bazaar, on a bus, or late at night on the mattress.[20]

Seierstad skillfully structures her reporting in *Bookseller* as a complex narrative, which relates her work further to literary journalism, as Hartsock defines the genre: "a body of writing that, to provide a working definition, reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes a truth claim to phenomenal experience."[21] Reading *Bookseller* is reminiscent of getting to know a large family in real life: One by one, the personal narratives of individual family members unfold over time and intertwine with the narrative

of the entire family, and of Afghan society—historically and contemporarily.

In his 2007 book *True Stories*, Sims comments on the powerful use of suspense in a literary journalistic narrative: "Literary journalism—based on character and evolving scenes—holds the reader in a forward-moving web of time, often without knowledge of the outcome. In that way, it produces an experience similar to fiction rather than a report."[22] The evolving plot of *Bookseller*—how the women will fare in the new political era—engages the reader on a multitude of levels: politically, intellectually, and emotionally.

Long-term reporting, or immersion, characterizes the work of literary journalists. "Unlike standard journalism, literary journalism demands immersion in complex, difficult subjects,"[23] Sims wrote in 1984. In 2007, he said several contemporary U.S. literary journalists were seeking cultural immersion, ". . . creating portraits of everyday life and of different cultural communities."[24] One of those literary journalists, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, spent eleven years preparing and reporting from inside a family living in the Bronx, for her 2003 book, *Random Family*.[25] Both Seierstad and LeBlanc make women the central characters in their respective narratives, but where LeBlanc's voice appears as neutral, Seierstad's ideological stance towards the characters and the events in *Bookseller* can be detected. The subject of *Bookseller* also relates to Katherine Boo's 2012 book, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*.[26] Boo engages in transcultural reporting when she explores daily life in a community of families living in the slum quarter Annawadi of Mumbai. All three writers, Seierstad, LeBlanc, and Boo, focus on marginalized members of society—nationally or globally. In its representation of women's intercultural experiences in the domestic sphere, Seierstad's work from Afghanistan recalls harem literature.

## Literary Innovations of Harem Literature

The majority of examples of harem literature in Melman's study date from the second half of the nineteenth century.[27] The rise in women's travelogues, published in book form as well as in periodicals, corresponded with a historical change in travel opportunities for middle-class Victorian women,[28] some of whom worked as professional journalists. One of the writers in Melman's study is the first British female sociologist, and journalist, Harriet Martineau (1802–1876). Melman refers to Martineau's 1848 book *Eastern Life: Present and Past* as harem literature.[29]

Melman notes that in harem literature reporting on the domestic lives of Muslim women typically shifts between passages of general information and eyewitness descriptions. The informative sections do not necessarily derive from observation, but more often draw on external textual authorities on a

topic such as, for instance, the legal status of Muslim women in society.[30] In *Bookseller*, the narrative line regularly digresses into topics concerning Afghan history and culture in general and more specifically on subjects of importance to women—proposal, marriage, divorce, and childbirth. Sims discusses the use of expanding digressions in a narrative as a common strategy of literary journalists in order to "put their characters into a social world,"[31] and the strategy further allows the journalist to educate the reader on the subject in question.[32] Sims refers to the "explanatory narrative," drawing from Jack Hart's typology of narrative structures: "This is the John McPhee/*New Yorker* model of an action line broken by segments of expository digression."[33] Seierstad's digressions on cultural, political, and geographical topics are not lengthy, maybe a paragraph or so, and she weaves them eloquently into the action line. Often she introduces a topic briefly in one chapter, only to pick it up later and elaborate on it in a chapter where the information sheds light on the ongoing action. For instance, she refers to the Afghan Mujahedeen commander Ahmed Shah Massoud as "legendary" in chapter two, "Burning Books," while she explains the impact of his life and death on Afghan society and on the international war on terrorism; and having "achieved mythic status" in chapter thirteen, "The Call from Ali," where she reports on a religious event where prominent Afghan leaders, including Karzai, are present. Two Tunisian suicide bombers assassinated Massoud two days before September 11, 2001.[34]

The most meaningful innovation of harem literature lies in the transformation of the clichés of the harem in colonial discourses to become a main motif for reporting on the domestic lives of Muslim women. In classic colonial discourses, the harem represented Oriental sexuality: "From the earliest encounters between Christians and Muslims till the present, the harem as the *locus* of an exotic and abnormal sexuality fascinated Westerners. It came to be regarded as a microcosmic Middle East, apotheosising the two characteristics perceived as essentially oriental: sensuality and violence."[35] The writings of this kind of women's travel literature normalize the harem by reporting on actual intersubjective encounters between British and Muslim women. Mary Roberts, in her 2007 study *Intimate Outsiders*, finds a realistic approach to details in harem literature: "These texts contain a plethora of descriptive detail that functioned to convince their readers that these were real harems rather than imaginary places."[36] According to Melman, the writers tend to compare the status of Muslim women in society to their own status as women at home. Their comparisons often lead to more or less open criticism of the restrictions placed on British women in their own society.[37] For instance, in the eighteenth century the writers would acknowledge the freedom the veil and polygamy gave Ottoman women: "Yet, . . . veiling

not only liberates Ottoman women sexually, but makes them more mobile than their English sisters."[38] The Victorians of the nineteenth century did not share their predecessors' preoccupation regarding sexual liberty for women in society: "The most important, most dramatic change that took place in the literature on harems in the nineteenth century is the desexualisation of the Augustan notion of liberty and the domestication of the Orient."[39] The Victorians shift the focus from comparing sexual freedom for Muslim and British women to comparing degrees of domestic freedom. Melman quotes several writers of the period who find that women of the Middle East possess legal, personal, and priority rights equal if not superior to their own. When describing Muslim women's lodgings as an autonomous, feminine sphere of society, they recreate and feminize the harem in the Victorian image of an ideal middle-class home.[40]

## Reporting on Afghan Domestic Life

If Seierstad had been looking for a family to represent a majority of Afghans, she would have found one that is poor, illiterate, and living in the countryside. But she was not looking for this kind of symbolic family. In the foreword to *Bookseller*, she comments on her choice of characters: "I did not choose my family because I wanted it to represent all other families but because it inspired me."[41] This is not difficult to imagine, as the bookseller's family was educated. Yet Seierstad's approach to the bookseller's family recalls the strategic approach to cross-cultural representation found in harem literature: that is, using the literary device of synecdoche that allows for "a detail," a manner or a group of people "to evoke a cultural whole" for the reader.[42] And so, despite choosing an atypical family, Seierstad's reporting on the Rais family evokes women's manners and morals in Afghanistan.

As for the decision to change the family name in the book from Rais to Khan (all of the family members were given pseudonyms), it was Seierstad's. After the book was published, however, Rais identified himself as the real bookseller of Kabul to Norwegian media.[43] Outside of family members, the identities of most of the other characters in the narrative are to this day unknown to the public. The analysis of *Bookseller* that follows refers to the family members by their respective pseudonyms in the narrative.

Despite its title, the central character in the book is Leila, the bookseller's youngest sister. She is one of twelve Khan family members residing in the apartment in Kabul. The bookseller's mother Bibi Gul; another two of his sisters, Shakila and Bulbula; his two wives Sharifa and Sonya; and five of his children also live there. During her stay, Seierstad shares a room with Leila, among others, and does most of her reporting in or near the family home. On

one occasion, she accompanies the bookseller on a business trip to Peshawar, about 140 miles east of Kabul. Another time, she joins the bookseller's eldest son Mansur on a pilgrimage to Mazar-i-Sharif, about 200 miles north of Kabul. Otherwise, the majority of chapters focus on family life. The chapter titles, including "The Proposal," "The Matriarch," "The Smell of Dust," and "An Attempt," show that the narrative's focus revolves around issues such as polygamy, sexuality, hygiene, motherhood, and overall daily life in the domestic, feminine sphere of the Afghan family.

Seierstad's narrative offers no parallel to harem literature's criticism of the writer's own society back home. Nor does it project ideals of contemporary family life in the West onto the Khan family. Rather, the bookseller's family is described in the image of a Western bourgeois family of the nineteenth century. The themes of literary realism and naturalism recur in the narrative's focus on the conflicts between individual freedom and being bound by tradition, and between private and public spheres, as well as unjust class differences and the struggle for women's rights.

Seierstad's use of nineteenth-century Western literary devices serves as a rhetorical strategy to familiarize the reader with reported events. The well-known themes and conflicts of Western literature diminish the cultural gap between the reader and the Afghan family members. This further allows the reader to identify and empathize with Afghan women. The downside of this approach is that the framework of nineteenth-century novels tends to draw the reader toward thinking of Afghan women as underdeveloped. The narrative appears to place them historically at a stage of emancipation that Western women presumably passed more than a hundred years ago.

## The Sultan and His Harem

A textual analysis of the legacy of harem literature in *Bookseller* relies on classic Orientalist discourses, not only with reference to the historical harem system, but also to the harem as a locus of Western imagination.[44] Melman comments on the endurance of the stock figure of the Muslim sultan and his harem in Oriental discourse: "And for a long stretch of time, a particularly *longue durée*, the odalisk, the domestic despot and the harem had been the most repeated, most enduring *topoi* of the Muslim eastern Mediterranean."[45] The Rais family flat in Kabul might not immediately be reminiscent of a Middle Eastern harem. The narrative evokes the stereotype of the exotic sultan and his women slaves by the choice of the bookseller's pseudonym: Sultan Khan, a name that combines two titles associated with Muslim leaders of authority and strength. The title of the book itself refers to the bookseller's position as the breadwinner and head of the family.

In the narrative Sultan Khan is portrayed as a liberated man. Originally educated as an engineer, his passion for literature made him change career paths in the 1970s. He went from constructing buildings to buying, printing, and selling books. The pro-Communist government imprisoned him in the 1980s for selling banned Islamic literature, and for behaving like a petit bourgeois. In 1992, the civil war between the Mujahedeen factions broke out, and their family flat in the Mikrorayon area in Kabul was situated right on the frontline. The bookseller brought his family to safety in Peshawar while he managed to visit Kabul from time to time to see to his bookstores.[46] When the Taliban came to power in 1996, the religious police burned his books and persecuted him for anti-Islamic behavior.[47] Apart from his second wife, Sharifa, and their daughter, Shabnam, the family returned from Peshawar to the apartment in Kabul soon after the Taliban fell, in November 2001.[48]

Sultan Khan saw himself as a moderate Muslim and had nothing but contempt for the illiterates of the Taliban movement.[49] He looked forward to his country being modernized and prospering economically and intellectually. The bookseller welcomed the new policies on women: "He often referred to the burka as an oppressive cage, and he was pleased that the new government included female ministers. In his heart he wanted Afghanistan to be a modern country, and he talked warmly about the emancipation of women."[50] Sultan Khan even encouraged the women in his family to throw away their burkas as soon as the new political era made it possible.

The narrative draws on the sovereign and unpredictable despot of Orientalist discourses more when describing Sultan Khan's patriarchal rule of his family: "When his father died Sultan took over the throne. His word is law. Anyone who does not obey him will be punished."[51] The bookseller reigns over his relatives and his three bookstores in Kabul. He mercilessly persecutes a poor carpenter for stealing postcards from his store and fires his nephew Fazil for no reason. He commands his sons Mansur, Eqbal, and Aimal to work for him twelve hours a day. Seierstad sympathizes with the youngest, twelve-year-old Aimal, who would rather go to school.[52] Sultan Khan refuses him permission without discussion.

Sultan Khan does little to support the initiatives of the women in his family to seize the opportunities offered in spring 2002. Two of his sisters, Leila and Shakila, are educated and can get professional employment. Leila is qualified to be an English teacher, all she needs to do is to register with the Ministry of Education, and Shakila already worked as a math and biology teacher before the civil war.[53] Shakila went back to teaching after she married. Sultan Khan took action only to arrange for the basic education of Sonya, his second wife. She was young when the Taliban closed schools for girls and

never learned to read or write. Sultan Khan did not want his wife to stay illiterate and decided to provide her with a private tutor.[54]

The narrative of Sultan Khan's marriage to Sonya brings to mind the image of an Oriental tyrant driven by his own sexuality.[55] The opening chapter of the book recounts the story of how he became a polygamist. His relatives objected to his plans and the women refused to aid him in proposing to the girl's parents. He disregarded the Afghan custom of arranged marriages by proposing himself.[56] He bribed the parents of his young fiancée to allow him to meet with her alone before the wedding,[57] unheard of in Afghan culture. He even violated Afghan custom in his practice of polygamy: "In contrast to Sultan, men with more than one wife usually keep a balance in the relationships, spending one night with one wife, the next night with the other, for decades."[58] And Khan did not spare his first wife Sharifa humiliation: "At first Sultan would lock himself and Sonya into the bedroom for days on end, only occasionally demanding tea or water. Sharifa heard whispering and laughter commingling with sounds that cut her to the heart."[59] Seierstad tries to distance herself from Sultan Khan when describing the expression on his face while longing for Sonya on his way home from the business trip to Peshawar: "Sultan laughs. He twitches a bit. He is nearing Mikrorayon and the delicious child-woman."[60] Sonya was sixteen when they married. Sultan was about fifty.

## Manners and Morals of Afghan Women

The Victorian writers of harem literature developed complex textual strategies to report on the daily lives of Muslim women. The literary devices of describing an Oriental women's character by references to her physical appearance had already become a cliché in the travel literature of the 1820s–1830s.[61] In harem literature, elaborate descriptions of physical details served to refer to the manners and morals of Muslim women. Melman identifies four themes of the descriptions of women in these writings:

The first theme is the features of the *orientale* and her physique. The second is costume: dress and undress are used rhetorically and metaphorically as tropes and symbols of women's status and their position in society at large. Third is eating and table-manners, a particularly large category that comprises cookery, dietary habits, table etiquette, the nurture of infants and children, and so on. Fourth and last is hygiene, especially personal hygiene.[62]

Melman finds that elaborating on physical descriptions proved useful for Victorian writers when the observation of Muslim women confronted them with areas of life of which they themselves could not speak. Melman's analysis does not refer to restrictions on textual representation set by the individual

writer on herself by herself. The analysis refers to the limits set by Victorian society of dominant discourses on femininity.

Women's sexuality was the most critical area Victorian writers could not textually represent. Confronted by the sensuality of Muslim women, the narrating voice of harem literature changes its tenor by starting to moralize, characterizing Muslim women as morally degraded by sensuality.[63] Elisabeth Oxfeldt identifies a similar Orientalist gesture of representation in her study of the nineteenth-century paintings and writings of the Danish-Polish artist Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann. Confronted by the sexuality of four Jewish dancers, Jerichau-Baumann loses her composure and moralizes on the degradation of the Oriental women in general, "tapping into an Orientalist discourse, establishing the strong lines of division between East and West and thus also fixing her own identity."[64]

In *Bookseller*, contemporary dominant Western discourses on femininity do not restrict Seierstad when it comes to textual representation of women's sexuality. Nevertheless, she moralizes while describing certain aspects of Afghan women's lives. The following analysis of the workings of Melman's four themes as found in *Bookseller* investigates the shifts from sympathy to moralization in the tenor of Seierstad's voice when reporting on the lives of Afghan women.

### The Morals of Appearance

The descriptions of the young wife Sonya allude to the Victorian clichés of an Oriental woman in travel literature: Her eyes were "dark and almond-shaped," her hair "shining black," and her body "shapely, voluptuous."[65] The portrait of Sonya reminds us of the inactive, sensual concubine of the Oriental harem.[66] She seems content with her idle life in the family flat: "She wants nothing more than to sit at home, with a few visits to or from relatives, a new dress from time to time, every fifth year a gold bracelet."[67] Sultan Khan took her on a trip to see their relatives in Tehran, but she did not care to do anything else but play with her daughter on the floor: "She had only just glimpsed Tehran and had no wish to explore further."[68] In the narrative, Sonya aspires to nothing. The private instructor could not teach her to read and write: Sonya "gave up and asked Sultan if she could stop."[69] Sonya seems to want nothing more than to be the preferred wife of her husband and mother to his children. The narrating of Sonya's fear of giving birth to a second daughter reveals the distance in the moral standards between Seierstad and Sonya:

She prays to Allah that it will be a son. She asked me if I could pray for her too.

"What if it's another girl!"

Another little catastrophe in the Khan family.[70]

From the perspective of Seierstad, Sonya's confirmation of the value of a son in Afghan tradition is not morally acceptable. Seierstad refers several times to the importance of giving birth to sons in Afghan culture. For instance, when reporting on Sultan's mother: "A woman gains stature by being a mother, especially of sons."[71] Also, when Sultan's sister Mariam recounts her children being born: "She remembers the birth and the joy of having a boy. A big feast was held and she and her son received wonderful gifts. There were visits and much rejoicing. Two years later she gave birth to a girl; no more feasting or presents."[72]

The tone of Seierstad's voice shows glimpses of sarcasm when describing the bookseller's sister Shakila as bride:

> Her costume is red, green, black, and gold. It looks as though the Afghan flag, strewn with gold dust, has been draped over her. Her breasts stand out like mountain peaks. The bra she bought, measured by eye, obviously fits. The waistline is drawn in tightly, under the dress. She has applied a thick layer of Perfact on her face, the eyes have been outlined with kohl, and she is wearing the new red lipstick. Her appearance too is perfect. A bride must look artificial, like a doll. The word for doll and bride is the same—*arus*.[73]

The phrase "stand out like mountain peaks" does not praise Shakila's appearance but ridicules the artificial ideal of femininity she embodies. When referring to the common linguistic root for "doll" and "bride" in the local language and to the colors of the Afghan flag appearing in the bridal costume, the narrative could lead the reader to think of the artificial ideal of a bride-doll as being specifically Afghan. Furthermore, a reader familiar with Henrik Ibsen's 1879 drama, *A Doll's House*, could make associations to the bourgeois ideal of femininity opposed by the protagonist Nora in the play. The artificial ideal seems to be the same as Western women discarded more than a century ago.

## The Status of the Burka

The burka was the one Afghan garment that was most heatedly debated in the West at the time Seierstad did her reporting in Kabul. It served as the very symbol of the Taliban regime's suppression of women. An entire chapter in *Bookseller* is dedicated to this item of women's clothing, when Seierstad reports on her own experience of wearing the burka to the market. According to Roberts, British writers of harem literature generally "refrained from . . . cultural cross-dressing" even though they eagerly adopted the disguise of the veil to explore the capacity of harem women to see while retaining their anonymity.[74] Seierstad reports in a more satirical tone on the experience of losing sight of her own and of other women's identities:

> Burka women are like horses with blinkers: they can look only in one direction. Where the eye narrows, the grille stops and thick material takes its place; impossible to glance sideways. The whole head must turn; another trick by the burka inventor: a man must know what his wife is looking at.[75]

The tone of Seierstad's voice shifts from ridiculing the scene to angrily pointing the finger at the suppressive patriarchal system. The chapter title, "Billowing, Fluttering, Winding," refers to the shapelessness of the garment itself, which in turn reflects upon the women wearing it. From the viewpoint of being inside a burka, other women cease to exist as individuals. They are referred to as "a heavily pregnant burka," "the lead burka" and "the two more energetic burkas."[76]

In the foreword, Seierstad informs the reader more directly on her own horrific experience of wearing the burka. She lists the physical pain inflicted upon her before she claims: "How liberated you feel when you get home and can take it off."[77] The tradition of wearing a burka restricts women's movements and confines them to the home.

Indeed, in *Bookseller* overall, to wear or not to wear the burka becomes a question of women seizing or not seizing this post-Taliban opportunity to liberate themselves at this juncture. The person who seems most likely to succeed in this respect is Leila. She has promised herself that she will take off the burka as soon as the ex-king of Afghanistan returns: "The April morning when ex-king Zahir Shah set foot on Afghan soil, after thirty years in exile, she hung up her burka for good and told herself she would never again use the stinking thing." Sharifa, the educated first wife of Sultan Khan, soon follows her example. His second wife Sonya is more reluctant, and the narrative explains that she grew up during the Taliban regime and was accustomed to wearing it. Ultimately, Sultan Khan forbids Sonya to put on the garment because he does not want to appear to be a fundamentalist.[78]

Sonya's seeming comfort with the burka is actually a relatively recent phenomenon. Many women were unaware of the recent origin of the burka tradition in Afghanistan: "Only a small number of Kabul women renounced the burka during the first spring after the fall of the Taliban, and very few of them know that their ancestors, Afghan women in the last century, were strangers to the burka."[79] Seierstad's ideological position is clear: there is no cultural, religious, or historical reason for Afghan women to accept the status quo.

### Leila's Refusal

From time to time, Seierstad describes Leila with an empathic tone. She is the one Afghan woman in the family who appears most determined to stand out as an individual against tradition. The approval of Leila's moral character is noticeable in the descriptions of family eating habits.

For Melman, in traditional literature, food and eating habits of the Muslim East are symbols of the Orient as a *locus sensualis*. The Orientalists depicted the Muslim Others as generically lascivious and associated them with the vices of gluttony and promiscuity.[80] The *Bookseller* narrative elaborates on the Khan family's diet: "The fat and the cooking oil they pour over their food are manifested on their bodies. Deep-fried pancakes, pieces of potato dripping in fat, mutton in seasoned cooking-oil gravy."[81] The moralizing tone indicates that the family indulges in comforting but unhealthy food.

Leila does most of the cooking in the family, and as a rule men and women are served different food. Sultan is served his favorite dishes. His preferred wife Sonya shares her husband's delicious meals, an arrangement to which she never objects. Leila expresses anger at her family's mindless acceptance of the unjust dietary system by refusing to eat leftovers from the indulging couple. As for Leila, "If she is condemned to eat beans, eat beans she will."[82] The scene reveals her inner character and commitment to stand by her own truth.

The contrast between Leila and the other Afghan women in *Bookseller* who accept the status quo runs throughout the narrative. Her mother, Bibi Gul, allows herself to overeat: "She loves the taste of cooking oil, warm mutton fat, and deep-fried pakora, or sucking marrow from bones at the end of the meal."[83] The differences in eating habits between Leila, Sonya, and Bibi Gul match their status within the family system. Bibi Gul, as the mother of the male head of the family, is the top woman: "After Sultan, she is second in command."[84] Sonya has the second top position, as the bookseller's favorite wife. Leila comes last in every respect: "She is the afterthought at nineteen and at the bottom of the pecking order: youngest, unmarried, and a girl."[85]

Melman's analysis of descriptions in harem literature of the eldest woman in a Muslim household illuminates the portrait of Bibi Gul: "The husband's mother was at the top of the domestic hierarchy. A few travellers went so far as to imply that the privileged position of sons' mothers was a relic of an archaic matriarchalism."[86] Bibi Gul enjoys the benefits of her privileged position as an Afghan matriarch: "Bibi Gul doesn't do a lick of work anymore. She sits in the corner, drinks tea, and broods. Her working life is over. When a woman has grown-up daughters, she becomes a sort of warden who bestows advice, guards the family's morals—in practice, the morals of the daughters."[87]

The mother decides when and whom her daughters will marry. For a long time, Bibi Gul refuses to let her youngest daughter leave the household. She enjoys Leila's competent care and burdens her with the responsibility for her own health: "Leila makes sure that her mother does not eat herself to death."[88] The narrative places the real contrast between the three women not in their difference in status, but in the fact that Bibi Gul and Sonya enjoy whatever

benefits they may get within the suppressing system. They accept the status quo. Leila, on the other hand, has the inner power to say no to whatever benefits the system occasionally might throw in her direction. She does not want leftovers; she wants to liberate herself.

### Mothers and Daughters

Descriptions of hygiene in Victorian harem literature metaphorically refer to the degraded sexual morals of Muslim women. When confronted with the eroticized aura of the *hammam*, women writers tended to moralize:

> To distance themselves from the overtly sensuous atmosphere of the public bath, the writers resort to elaborate stratagems. A few are altogether silent. . . . The majority of writers, however, resort to excessive representation. They itemise the architectural detail, the paraphernalia of the bathers and the stages of bathing. Yet when they fix on bathers themselves, the tenor of the reporters changes and the descriptions become openly moralising.[89]

When describing the *hammam* in *Bookseller*, Seierstad does not moralize about Afghan women's degraded sensuality. On the contrary, the description elaborates on the Afghan women's bodies worn out by childbirths: "Thin teenage girls have broad stretch marks from births their bodies were not yet ready for. Nearly all the women's bellies have cracked skin from giving birth too early and too frequently."[90] Mothers prepare their daughters for a future with lives much like theirs: "Mothers scrub their marriageable daughters while carefully scrutinizing their bodies."[91] Seierstad moralizes about Afghan women being degraded by their own acceptance of traditional family life.

The *hammam* represents the one place in the narrative where the naked truth of the burdens of Afghan women in society surfaces. The women try hard to reduce the damage done to their bodies: "This is not pleasure but hard work."[92] However, their efforts prove futile: "The women are now spotlessly clean under the burkas and the clothes, but the soft soap and the pink shampoo desperately fight against heavy odds. The women's own smells are soon restored. The smell of old slave, young slave."[93] The description of women's hygiene in *Bookseller* turns into a resentful comment on Afghan women's traditional status in society.

### Confronted by Dust

In the book's foreword, Seierstad recounts her reporting: "[I] have tried to gather my impressions of a Kabul spring, of those who tried to throw winter off, grow and blossom, and others who felt condemned to go on 'eating dust,' as Leila would have put it."[94] The reference to her spring in Kabul implies that there might be a difference between the hopes raised by the change of seasons and the hope raised by the change of political regimes. In politics, there is no guarantee of summer.

Nevertheless, in the early months of 2002, the defeat of the Taliban raised Leila's hopes of freeing herself from the restricted life of the house. Leila's words in the foreword are echoed in the description of her daily chores—some people are condemned to eat dust, and she was determined not to be one of them. Not only did she attempt to go back to school, but she also made efforts to get a license to work as an English teacher. And last but not least, her hopes were raised of being able to marry a man who would allow her a professional vocation. In the end, societal resistance, tradition, and, ultimately, her own mother, overwhelmed Leila. In the final chapter, Bibi Gul accepts a proposal of marriage on Leila's behalf. Seierstad writes, "Leila has always done what her mother wanted. Now she says nothing. Wakil's son. With him her life will be exactly as it is now, only with more work and for more people"[95] The narrative leaves Leila heartbroken. She is one of the many people condemned to eating dust for the rest of their lives.

The descriptions of the actual dust of the capital Kabul metaphorically refer to Leila's fight against tradition. She is constantly sweeping dust off the floor of the apartment and off her skin: "This is the grime she now tries to scrub off her body. It rolls off in fat little rolls. It is the dust that sticks to her life."[96] Seierstad sympathizes with Leila's investment in the task. The tone changes radically in the close-up on Bibi Gul's nude body in the hammam: "She sits as in a trance, eyes closed, enjoying the heat. Now and again she makes a few lazy efforts at washing. She dips a facecloth in the bowl Leila has put out for her. But she soon gives up; she cannot reach round her tummy, and her arms feel too heavy to lift."[97]

According to Melman, the description of the elderly woman in the *hammam* serves as a moral lesson: "Almost every description of the bath boasts of the figure of the old bather, or better, the bath-keeper, or, *hammamci*, a living lesson to all women."[98] The message of the Victorian age was that giving in to sensuality degrades women's morals. In *Bookseller*, the description of Bibi Gul serves as a warning of degradation to women who accept the status quo in a traditional patriarchy.

One by one, Leila's attempts to free herself from tradition fail and, as they do, Seierstad starts to moralize even on her character: "Leila is not used to fighting for something—on the contrary, she is used to giving up."[99] The tone continues to shift between sympathy and resentment when commenting on Leila's situation: "Leila is at a standstill; a standstill in the mud of society and the dust of tradition. She has reached a deadlock in a system that is rooted in centuries-old traditions and that paralyzes half the population."[100] In the final chapter, titled "A Broken Heart," the sympathy of Seierstad's narrator pours out when describing Leila's having accepted her fate:

> Leila feels how life, her youth, hope leave her—she is unable to save herself. She feels her heart, heavy and lonely like a stone, condemned to be crushed forever. . . . Her crushed heart she leaves behind. Soon it blends with the dust, which blows in through the window, the dust that lives in the carpets. That evening she will sweep it up and throw it out into the backyard.[101]

The factual dust of Kabul blends with the metaphorical dust of tradition, and Leila herself must throw away the scattered parts of her hopes of a better life. The final blow to her dreams has come from Bibi Gul, and Leila knows she cannot oppose her own mother. The book's most severe criticism of Afghan society is reserved not for men but for women who uphold traditional patriarchy.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the tropes and narrative strategies of harem literature in *The Bookseller of Kabul* brings out the textual challenges of reporting on women's intercultural encounters. Seierstad's voice loses its composure when confronted with areas of women's lives about which dominant contemporary Western discourses on femininity cannot speak. By adopting the Orientalist gesture identified by Melman and Oxfeldt, the tone shifts from empathy to sarcastic moralizing when confronted by Afghan women giving in to traditional ideals of femininity in a patriarchal society. The elaborate descriptions of physical appearance, clothing, dietary habits, and hygiene serve to represent the Afghan women as morally degraded.

The majority of Afghan women in the narrative seem unable to detect the workings of the mechanisms of patriarchal suppression and the effects on their own lives and bodies. Metaphorically speaking, they do not see where the dust comes from. The harshest criticism in Seierstad's narrative strikes out against mothers who pass on the woman's burden to their daughters. Bibi Gul herself married Leila off. She did not ask what Leila wanted, and Leila could not oppose traditional custom by telling her. The narrative demonstrates that Afghan women will not succeed in their efforts to liberate themselves as long as they do not identify these suppressive mechanisms in traditional society.

The literary air of the nineteenth century draws the Western reader closer to the lives of Afghan women while at the same time creating a historical distance between contemporary Western societies and the Afghanistan of 2002. The rhetorical strategy evokes a time in Western history for the reader when the status of women in society changed dramatically. Yet the narrative allows the reader to think of Western women as having long ago passed this early stage in the unfolding history of emancipation. Afghan women seem to be inextricably stuck in the status quo.

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**Notes**

[1] The article refers to the 2003 first English edition published by Little, Brown of New York, Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul*.

[2] Melman, *Women's Orient*, 16–17.

[3] Melman, 16.

[4] Melman, 16.

[5] Melman, 101–3.

[6] Keshavarz, *Jasmine and Stars*, 2–3, 51.

[7] Keshavarz includes Seierstad's *Bookseller* in her analysis of Geraldine Brookes's *Nine Parts of Desire*, Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Teheran*, and Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*. She finds that the New Orientalism retains the attitude of superiority of classic Orientalism towards the Muslims: "Most importantly, it replicates the totalizing—and silencing—tendencies of the old Orientalists by virtue of erasing, through unnuanced narration, the complexity and richness in the local culture." Keshavarz, *Jasmine and Stars*, 3.

[8] In a new preface to *Orientalism* from 2003, Said identified a reinforcement of the classical opposition between Westerners and Orientals as opposition between Westerners and Muslims in contemporary Western political rhetoric. Said, *Orientalismen*, ii–iii.

[9] Keshavarz, *Jasmine and Stars*, 3.

[10] On the topic of Western political rhetoric, see Mackie, "The 'Afghan Girls'," 120, and Lewis, "Feminism and Orientalism," 211.

[11] The *Bookseller*'s original title in Norwegian includes the subtitle *En familietragedie*, which translates as *A Family Tragedy.* See Seierstad, *The Bookseller*.

[12] Seierstad, foreword to *Bookseller of Kabul*, xiv.

[13] On the topic of the living conditions for Afghan women, see, for instance, the UNAMA / OHCHR reports, "Silence Is Violence," and Anderson, "TrustLaw Poll."

[14] Hartsock suggests distinguishing between the genres by their main function, if it is topical or modal: "Travel narratives, on their face, belong to a topical genre." Hartsock, "Note from the Editor," 6–7.

[15] Hartsock, 7.

[16] Melman, *Women's Orients,* 16.

[17] Melman, 16.

[18] Sims, "The Literary Journalists," 3.

[19] Seierstad, foreword to *Bookseller of Kabul*, x.

[20] Seierstad, xi.

[21] Hartsock, introduction to *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 1.

[22] Sims, *True Stories*, 236.

[23] Sims, "Literary Journalists," 3.

[24] Sims, *True Stories*, 279–80.

[25] LeBlanc, afterword to *Random Family*, 406.

[26] Boo, *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*.

[27] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 10–11.

[28] For more on harem literature in Victorian society, see Lewis, "Harem Literature and Women's Travel," 48–49.

[29] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 50; see also Martineau, *Eastern Life: Present and* Past.

[30] Melman, 101.

[31] Sims, *True Stories*, 292.

[32] Sims, 294.

[33] Sims, 292.

[34] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 18–19, 150.

[35] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 60.

[36] Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 62. Roberts draws on Melman's study on harem literature when she analyzes the texts to investigate questions of spectatorship. Roberts, 51.

[37] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 16–17, 87–88.

[38] Melman, 87.

[39] Melman, 99.

[40] Melman, 101.

[41] Seierstad, foreword to *Bookseller of Kabul*, xv. Seierstad describes her reporting on the Rais family in the foreword, ix–xvi.

[42] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 102.

[43] Rais arrived in Norway in the fall of 2003 denying he had ever given Seierstad consent to write a book on his private life. On the topic of ethical aspects of Seierstad's reporting, see, for instance, McKay, "Åsne Seierstad and the Bookseller of Kabul," 175–90.

[44] On the historical harem system, see Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem," 521–34. For a post-colonial critique of the topos of harem in Western feminist discourses, see Zonana, "The Sultan and the Slave," 592–617.

[45] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 4.

[46] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 12–17.

[47] Seierstad, 10.

[48] Seierstad, 22; foreword, x.
[49] Seierstad, 12.
[50] Seierstad, 277.
[51] Seierstad, 114.
[52] Seierstad, 210.
[53] Seierstad, 71, 191.
[54] Seierstad, 184.
[55] The reading of Sultan Khan as the Oriental tyrant is indebted to Zonana's postcolonial analysis of the harem topos in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), where the male character Rochester is seen as a despotic sultan driven by sensuality. See note 44.
[56] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 3–4.
[57] Seierstad, 185.
[58] Seierstad, 26–27.
[59] Seierstad, 25.
[60] Seierstad, 66.
[61] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 114.
[62] Melman, 102.
[63] Melman, 130–36.
[64] Oxfeldt, *Journeys from Scandinavia*, 46.
[65] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 4.
[66] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 115.
[67] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 185–86.
[68] Seierstad, 185–86.
[69] Seierstad, 184.
[70] Seierstad, 288.
[71] Seierstad, 120.
[72] Seierstad, 199.
[73] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 95.
[74] Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders*, 93. Roberts finds that the writers enjoy wearing the veil: "Their texts disclose the scopic privilege they could accrue by playing with the veil as a means of seeing without being seen." Roberts, 106.
[75] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 85.
[76] Seierstad, 84.
[77] Seierstad, foreword, xv.
[78] Seierstad, 277.
[79] Seierstad, 90.
[80] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 122–23.
[81] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 165.
[82] Seierstad, 176.
[83] Seierstad, 107.
[84] Seierstad, 108.
[85] Seierstad, 120.
[86] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 145.
[87] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 108.

[88] Seierstad, 107.
[89] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 132–33.
[90] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 163.
[91] Seierstad, 163.
[92] Seierstad, 163.
[93] Seierstad, 170.
[94] Seierstad, foreword, xvi.
[95] Seierstad, 282.
[96] Seierstad, 168.
[97] Seierstad, 164.
[98] Melman, *Women's Orients*, 135.
[99] Seierstad, *Bookseller of Kabul*, 193.
[100] Seierstad, 193.
[101] Seierstad, 282–83.

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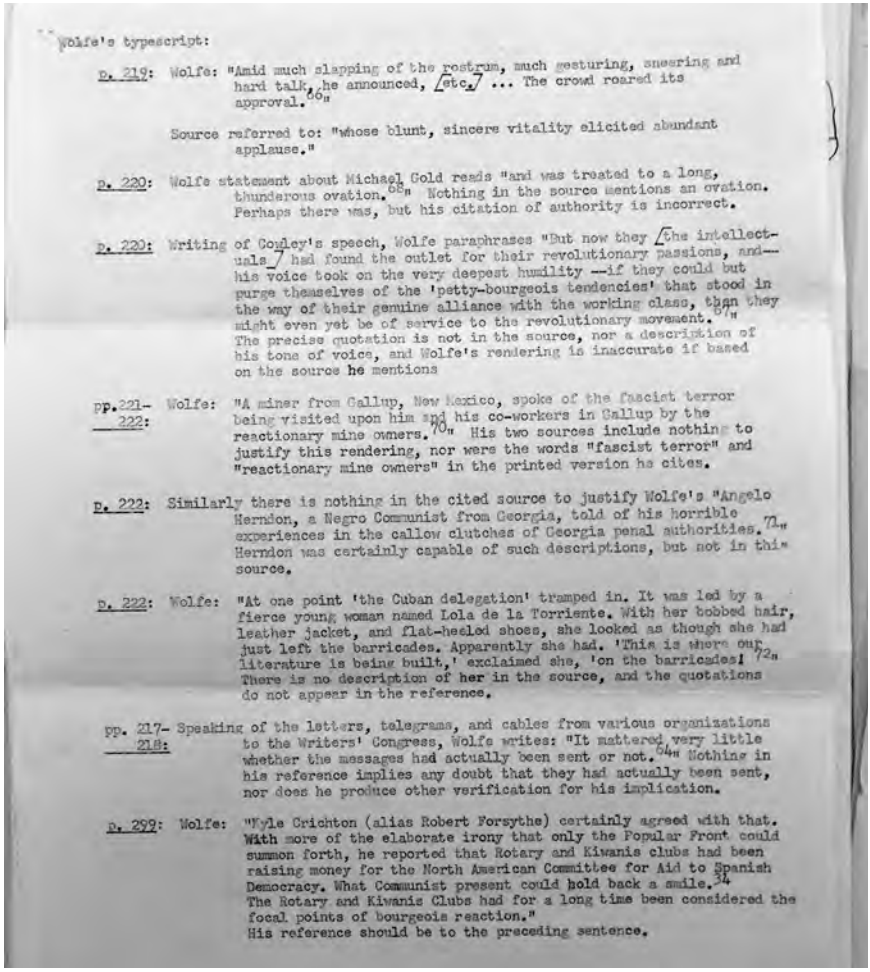
Photo by Matthew Ricketson. From the Wolfe Archives, New York Public Library.



Wolfe's typescript:

p. 219: Wolfe: "Amid much slapping of the rostrum, much gesturing, sneering and hard talk, he announced, [etc.] ... The crowd roared its approval.[66]"

Source referred to: "whose blunt, sincere vitality elicited abundant applause."

p. 220: Wolfe statement about Michael Gold reads "and was treated to a long, thunderous ovation.[68]" Nothing in the source mentions an ovation. Perhaps there was, but his citation of authority is incorrect.

p. 220: Writing of Cowley's speech, Wolfe paraphrases "But now they [the intellectuals] had found the outlet for their revolutionary passions, and—his voice took on the very deepest humility —if they could but purge themselves of the 'petty-bourgeois tendencies' that stood in the way of their genuine alliance with the working class, then they might even yet be of service to the revolutionary movement.[67]" The precise quotation is not in the source, nor a description of his tone of voice, and Wolfe's rendering is inaccurate if based on the source he mentions

pp. 221-222: Wolfe: "A miner from Gallup, New Mexico, spoke of the fascist terror being visited upon him and his co-workers in Gallup by the reactionary mine owners.[70]" His two sources include nothing to justify this rendering, nor were the words "fascist terror" and "reactionary mine owners" in the printed version he cites.

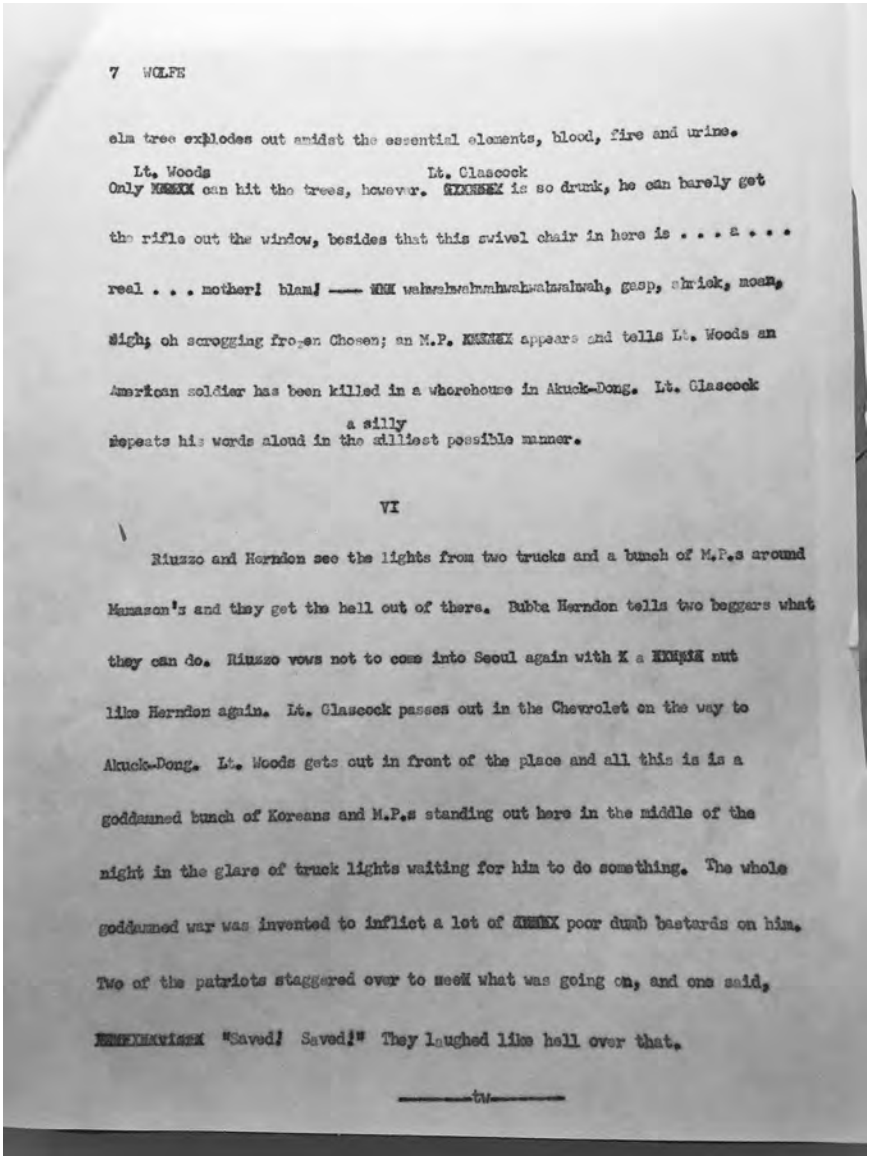
p. 222: Similarly there is nothing in the cited source to justify Wolfe's "Angelo Herndon, a Negro Communist from Georgia, told of his horrible experiences in the callow clutches of Georgia penal authorities.[71]" Herndon was certainly capable of such descriptions, but not in this source.

p. 222: Wolfe: "At one point 'the Cuban delegation' tramped in. It was led by a fierce young woman named Lola de la Torriente. With her bobbed hair, leather jacket, and flat-heeled shoes, she looked as though she had just left the barricades. Apparently she had. 'This is where our literature is being built,' exclaimed she, 'on the barricades!'[72]" There is no description of her in the source, and the quotations do not appear in the reference.

pp. 217-218: Speaking of the letters, telegrams, and cables from various organizations to the Writers' Congress, Wolfe writes: "It mattered very little whether the messages had actually been sent or not.[64]" Nothing in his reference implies any doubt that they had actually been sent, nor does he produce other verification for his implication.

p. 299: Wolfe: "Kyle Crichton (alias Robert Forsythe) certainly agreed with that. With more of the elaborate irony that only the Popular Front could summon forth, he reported that Rotary and Kiwanis clubs had been raising money for the North American Committee for Aid to Spanish Democracy. What Communist present could hold back a smile.[34] The Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs had for a long time been considered the focal points of bourgeois reaction."
His reference should be to the preceding sentence.

Photo by Matthew Ricketson. From the Wolfe Archives, New York Public Library.



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elm tree explodes out amidst the essential elements, blood, fire and urine. Lt. Woods Only XXXXX can hit the trees, however. Lt. Clascock XXXXXX is so drunk, he can barely get the rifle out the window, besides that this swivel chair in here is . . . a . . . reel . . . mother! blam! —— XXX wahwahwahwahwahwahwah, gasp, shriek, moan, sigh; oh scrogging frozen Chosen; an M.P. XXXXXX appears and tells Lt. Woods an American soldier has been killed in a whorehouse in Akuck-Dong. Lt. Glascock repeats his words aloud in the silliest possible manner. a silly

VI

Riuzzo and Herndon see the lights from two trucks and a bunch of M.P.s around Manason's and they get the hell out of there. Bubba Herndon tells two beggars what they can do. Riuzzo vows not to come into Seoul again with X a XXXXX nut like Herndon again. Lt. Glascock passes out in the Chevrolet on the way to Akuck-Dong. Lt. Woods gets out in front of the place and all this is is a goddamned bunch of Koreans and M.P.s standing out here in the middle of the night in the glare of truck lights waiting for him to do something. The whole goddamned war was invented to inflict a lot of XXXXX poor dumb bastards on him. Two of the patriots staggered over to seeX what was going on, and one said, XXXXXXXXXX "Saved! Saved!" They laughed like hell over that.

——tw——

Photo by Matthew Ricketson. From the Wolfe Archives, New York Public Library.

# "What inna namea christ is this?" The Origins of Tom Wolfe's Journalistic Voice

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**Abstract:** Tom Wolfe has one of the most distinctive journalistic voices in the history of the media, as several obituaries of him noted after his death in May 2018 at the age of eighty-eight. He is famous not only for his idiosyncratic, exuberant use of punctuation but for what one commentator has called his "wake-the-dead" prose style. The question of where this distinctive voice came from has received limited attention from scholars. Wolfe has provided his own "origin story" that locates it in 1963 when he was struggling to overcome writer's block on a piece about custom cars and, as this is an interesting story artfully told by a masterly self-promoter, it has been accepted by and large. The New York Public Library's acquisition of Wolfe's papers gives researchers the opportunity to examine the origins of Wolfe's journalistic voice—and much more besides—and this article traces the antecedents to compositions for high school and a sports column for a college newspaper. Equally important, Wolfe, for his doctoral dissertation, experimented with a voice and narrative approach that prefigured what became known as the New Journalism but met with his examiners' disapproval.

**Keywords:** Tom Wolfe – New Journalism – journalistic voice – literary journalism – origin stories

That's good thinking there, Cool Breeze."[1] I was hooked the moment I read these words way back in 1982. I was a cadet journalist on *The Age* in Melbourne, Australia, when a respected senior colleague said if you want to know about the LSD scene in the sixties, if you want to see what can be done with journalism, read Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

It's not journalism, it's a book, I thought, but I bought a copy and read that opening sentence. It just drops the reader right into the middle of the San Francisco heads scene, poking fun at Cool Breeze's paranoia about the law while he is garishly dressed and riding in the back of a pickup truck. "Don't rouse the bastids. Lie low."[2]

Closing the book 370 pages later, I had had a mind-expanding experience of my own. That journalism did not have to stop at hard news—"A family of four has been killed in a car collision. . . "—was the first revelation. Wolfe's book opened a door in my mind; I glimpsed a house at once larger and designed in ways I'd never imagined before. What I really loved, though, raised on a diet of newspaper columns, bland, formal, and *parental*, was how Wolfe, who died at age eighty-eight, in 2018, talked directly to me as a reader. And he wrote with a frankness unheard of in newspapers—"I pick it up and walk out of the office part, out onto the concrete apron, where the Credit Card elite are tanking up [their cars with petrol] and stretching their legs and tweezing their undershorts out of the aging waxy folds of their scrota."[3] Once seen, that's an image I've never quite been able to unsee.

Ask most readers their first impression of Wolfe's journalism and they will mention his highly individual voice, his "wake-the-dead prose style," as David Price put it in an aptly vivid phrase for a *Nieman Storyboard* piece.[4] Reading more of Wolfe's work over the years evidenced other things—his fascination with trends, his zest for ideas, his obsession with status, his eye for the satirical, his use of a range of narrative methods, his interest in journalism's history, and, finally, his politics, which I have to say I found unappealing. But what has stayed with me is the distinctiveness of his journalistic voice, and I have often wondered where it came from.

Unlike many journalists, Wolfe has always been happy to discuss his own work. In "Like a Novel," one section of the long essay, "The New Journalism," that introduces the landmark anthology he coedited with E. W. Johnson, that bears the same title, *The New Journalism*, Wolfe writes that he would try anything to capture the reader's attention when, early in his career, he began writing for a new Sunday supplement of the *New York Herald Tribune*. The status of this and other supplements was then "well below" that of newspapers: "Readers felt no guilt whatsoever about laying them aside, throwing them away or not looking at them at all. I never felt the slightest hesitation

about trying any device that might conceivably grab the reader a few seconds longer. I tried to yell right in his ear: *Stick around!*"[5]

It was hard not to stick around, given the audacity and inventiveness of devices Wolfe employed to keep readers' attention. He opened a piece about Las Vegas for *Esquire* magazine in February 1964 with the word "hernia" written fifty-seven times, mostly in lowercase but sometimes as "HERNia," before asking the question that must have been on every reader's mind: "What is all this *hernia hernia* stuff?"[6] The answer is that if you say the word hernia quickly, repeatedly, it sounds like the spruiking of craps table dealers in the casinos. Other journalists might have noted that the hubbub in a casino sounds like the word hernia, but few would make what is actually a slight observation the focus of their opening paragraph, and none other than Wolfe would have magnified it into the playfully intriguing, attention-seeking device it is. Nor is the wordplay gratuitous; the question "What is all this *hernia hernia* stuff?" is actually asked by a man named Raymond who exemplifies the impact Las Vegas' surreal, never-closed atmosphere has on the senses. Wolfe reports that Raymond has been awake for sixty hours, continually gambling, eating, drinking, and taking drugs: His senses were "at a high pitch of excitation, the only trouble being that he was going off his nut."[7]

As the repeated use of the word hernia was unmissable, so was Wolfe's idiosyncratic approach to punctuation, which included abundant use of exclamation points, ellipses, parentheses, and dashes, partly as a way of breaking up gray slabs of text on a magazine page and partly because, as he told George Plimpton, editor of the *Paris Review*, in a 1989 interview, he was emulating the novelist Eugene Zamiatin (whose name is sometimes spelled Zamyatin): "In *We*, Zamiatin constantly breaks off a thought in mid-sentence with a dash. He's trying to imitate the habits of actual thought, assuming, quite correctly, that we don't think in whole sentences."[8] Wolfe uses ellipses sometimes to leave an implication dangling and sometimes for emphasis. For instance, in "The New Journalism," he writes that those who don't believe journalism is important should take up other work, like becoming a "noise abatement surveyor. . . ." In the next paragraph, extolling the pleasures of saturation reporting, he writes " 'Come in, world,' since you only want . . . all of it. . . ."[9] Sometimes onomatopoeia is deployed, as in his description of Baby Jane Holzer in a 1965 article, "The Girl of the Year," whose brush-on eyelashes sit atop "huge black decal eyes" that "opened—swock!—like umbrellas."[10] At other times, flouting George Orwell's dictum, "Never use a long word when a short one will do,"[11] Wolfe chooses rarefied words, such as "gadrooned," as he did in his article "Radical Chic" to describe the decorative motif on the cheese platters being served the Black Panthers because, he says, it gave the

piece "bite" and because it was less important the reader might be unaware of the word, as they could be "flattered to have an unusual word thrust upon them."[12]

As the love of wordplay suggests, for Wolfe there is a strong performative element in his journalistic voice. In "The New Journalism," he derides the virtue of understatement in journalism as "that pale beige tone" which is accompanied by "a pedestrian mind, a phlegmatic spirit, [and] a faded personality."[13] He, of course, exhibits the polar opposite, for better and for worse. The essay overflows with the journalistic equivalent of soaring rock star lead guitar solos, everything from denunciations of newspaper columnists' "tubercular blue" prose to fond evocations of desperate competitiveness in the feature writers' "odd and tiny grotto," and from amazement at Gay Talese's storytelling feats ("I'm telling you, Ump, that's a *spitball* he's throwing. . .") to heralding the arrival of the "accursed Low Rent rabble" with their "damnable new form" that was set to dethrone the Novel as "literature's main event." Sometimes, Wolfe extends his performance by adopting what he calls a "downstage voice," mimicking the tone and vernacular of, say, Junior Johnson, the stock car racer from Ingle Hollow, North Carolina,[14] or, in *The Right Stuff*, of test pilot Chuck Yeager.[15]

What characterizes Wolfe's journalistic voice, then, are: exaggeration, energy, inventiveness, playfulness, a keen sense of performance, and a wickedly satiric eye. His voice has won glowing praise and sharp detractors. William McKeen, author of the one of only two book-length studies of Wolfe's work, calls him the Great Emancipator of Journalism for his contribution to expanding the possibilities of nonfiction writing.[16] Norman Sims, author of *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*, recalls how Wolfe's voice astonished and captured him as a student in the 1960s, not least because Wolfe appeared to have access to interior lives of the people he reported on.[17] John Hartsock, author of a respected history of literary journalism in the United States, notes that what "most attracted readers to Wolfe and created a critical furor around him were his linguistic pyrotechnics that seemed to pose a taunt to advocates of standard English usage."[18] On the other hand, James Wood, the literary critic, has frequently lambasted Wolfe's work, especially his fiction, but also mocked his "screeching italics and arrow-showers of exclamation points, and ellipses like hysterical Morse code."[19] Whatever Wolfe's critics might say, his journalistic voice is instantly recognizable, widely copied, and has been so influential over the past four decades that it is hard to recapture its sheer freshness when Wolfe burst onto the scene back in the mid-1960s.

## A Look at the Beginnings

Despite Wolfe's standing as a leading figure in the loose group known as the New Journalists and the attention from scholars his work has attracted, little work has been done on the origins of his journalistic voice. What attention there has been has accepted Wolfe's own version of how he discovered his journalistic voice, partly because Wolfe is as good at telling stories about himself as he is at telling others', partly because he has told it so often in interviews,[20] and partly because to date much of the primary source material has been unavailable.

Wolfe laid down what Tom Junod called "his own origin story, his own creation myth"[21] in the introduction to his first collection of journalistic pieces, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby.*[22] By the time the book was published in 1965, Wolfe was thirty-five years old and had been in journalism for nearly a decade. He described his growing frustration with the totem newspaper's way of reporting the lives of anyone outside officialdom, which is to say, "the totem story usually makes what is known as 'gentle fun' of this."[23] Wolfe was fascinated by the minutiae of people's lives and the meaning they invested in their interests, such as hot rod and custom cars. Taking an assignment from *Esquire* magazine, he trekked to California and collected a welter of material. After returning to New York, he found himself blocked for a week, whereupon his editor, Byron Dobell, with a photo of an exotic car already laid out and deadline looming, told him to type up his notes and Dobell would knock them into shape. Wolfe takes up the story:

> So about 8 o'clock that night I started typing the notes out in the form of a memorandum that began, "Dear Byron." I started typing away, starting right with the first time I saw any custom cars in California. I just started recording it all, and inside of a couple of hours, typing along like a madman, I could tell that something was beginning to happen. By midnight this memorandum to Byron was twenty pages long and I was still typing like a maniac. About 2 A.M. or something like that I turned on WABC, a radio station that plays rock and roll music all night long, and got a little more manic. I wrapped up the memorandum about 6:15 A.M, and by this time it was 49 pages long. I took it over to *Esquire* as soon as they opened up, about 9:30 A.M. About 4 P.M. I got a call from Byron Dobell. He told me they were striking out the "Dear Byron" at the top of the memorandum and running the rest of it in the magazine.[24]

It is a story that is at once neatly shaped—the only editorial change required was deleting "Dear Byron"—and evocative of Romantic-era myths surrounding writers with a capital W. Wolfe recycles it in his introductory essay in *The New Journalism*.[25] Other than noting Wolfe's penchant for self-

promotion, most of those who have written about Wolfe's work have repeated this story uncritically, including McKeen, Brian Ragen, author of *Tom Wolfe: A Critical Companion*, and Marc Weingarten, who, in *From Hipsters to Gonzo: How New Journalism Rewrote the World*, added little more than that Dobell had cut Wolfe's repeated use of the phrase "for Christ sakes" and written the "throat-clearing headline."[26]

New knowledge about the origins of Wolfe's voice became available in 2014 when a rich source of primary material, Wolfe's papers, was deposited in the New York Public Library. There are eight audio files and 219 boxes of documents. The bulk cover the period from 1960 to 1998, comprising, among other things: correspondence with family, friends, colleagues, and sources; drafts of stories, clippings, research files, reporter's notebooks, photographs, drawings, and miscellany, such as invitations to events, tickets, and invoices from tailors in Savile Row, London, for various bespoke items Wolfe had ordered.[27]

Initially, the archive was not digitized and put online, so the materials were available for use only in the library. Staff in the library's manuscripts and archives division are discreet about the identity of researchers, but at least one is known because he wrote about the papers in *Vanity Fair*. Michael Lewis, author of *Moneyball*, *The Blind Side*, and *The Big Short*,[28] is probably as big a name in journalism today as Wolfe was in earlier decades. In a lengthy piece headlined "The White Stuff" (or, in the online edition, "How Tom Wolfe became . . . Tom Wolfe"), published in November 2015, Lewis sieves the mass of material to find out how the man whose work first inspired him to write did what he did.[29] It is a fascinating piece, which would be expected from a journalist of Lewis's caliber, but equally intriguing was how Lewis has, by and large, reinforced Wolfe's "origin story" and how he underplayed the impact of an important event in Wolfe's life, namely that he initially failed his PhD thesis and has rarely, if ever, discussed that publicly. There is ample material in the archive that, first, suggests a longer, subtler, and, yes, less dramatic origin story for Wolfe's journalistic voice; and, second, a connection between the revised origin story and the gap in how Wolfe has represented his time as a postgraduate student at Yale University.

With only limited time to examine the Wolfe papers during a visit to New York in 2016, this research draws on nine of the 219 boxes, mostly those covering his childhood and early writings, but there is more material that shows just how early Wolfe was exhibiting signs that were to become his signature during the 1960s. His penchant for ten-dollar words surfaced early. In one story written during high school at St. Christopher's in Richmond, Virginia, when stock car racers came to town, he wrote about the "revered,

calorific drivers," later describing how one of them drove with "an even wilder, more sulphurous zeal than ever before." His teacher questioned the appropriateness of this usage but graded the story 83 percent.[30] Fellow students also noticed his vocabulary: In an issue of Washington and Lee University's monthly magazine, the *Southern Collegian*, an article by Wolfe carried the following precede: "Verboze T. K. Wolfe redeems himself with this sterling sports recapitulation of the Class of '51." It is verbose; Wolfe drops the words "nabobs" and "verdant" into the opening paragraph.[31]

Wolfe wrote a column called "In the Bullpen" for St. Christopher's school newspaper, the *Pine Needle*, in 1946–47, which is filled equally with original phrase-making and sporting clichés. More important, one column is cast in the form of a "scene" inside a gym where a football coach is talking to his players before the game. Headlined "Carnage, Inc.," the piece opens with "Scene: A quaint, docile gymnasium tucked in among the pines of a peaceful community."[32] It soon becomes apparent the scene is imaginary; the coach is trying to calm his bloodthirsty charges, one of whom has a giant plaster-cast on his arm that flattens a section of wall that he has inadvertently brushed. The interaction between coach and players is recorded as dialogue, complete with stage directions:

> Coach: Boys, boys, I'm beginning to doubt your intentions in Saturday's game.
>
> DeVanport (cleaning his fingernails with a three-foot ice pick): Now, now, Coach, don't worry—everything we do is for the honor of Alma Mater.
>
> Welterflood (sharpening his cleats): And besides, who knows, a few scalps might do wonders for the study hall.
>
> Coach (taking a bottle of aspirin tablets out of his pocket): This skull practice is getting me down. Come, little monsters, out we go to the playing field.[33]

Yes, the scene is imagined and adolescent, but what is striking in light of Wolfe's famous listing of narrative devices in "The New Journalism,"[34] is how he deployed two of them—scenes and dialogue—decades beforehand as a teenager for a school newspaper column. His response to the world around him, even in the narrow confines of student journalism, is to construct and dramatize what he sees.

At university and then at graduate school while studying for a doctorate, Wolfe tried his hand at fiction, poetry, and journalism. One short story entitled "Goddam Frozen Chosen" and written in 1955–56 has signs of Wolfe's hyperkinetic approach to sentence structure. Set in Seoul during the Korean

War, the story aims to capture the chaos and boredom of military life and portrays U.S. soldiers stumbling round naively in brothels or drunk while on duty:

> They are laughing so hard, so pointlessly, the words come out only between various wheezes, sighs, gasps, moans, shrieks, hiccoughs, all manner of inscrutable convulsions and suspirations: "My god"—gasp, wheeze, shriek, moan, sigh, whistle "another god—" —snuffle, wretch, pule, slobber, roar— "goddamn frozen Chosen [hotel]—DON'T LET HER GET AWAY!" —blam!— a plug of elm tree explodes out amidst the essential elements, blood, fire and urine. Only Lt. Woods can hit the trees, however. Lt. Glassock is so drunk, he can barely get the rifle out the window, besides that this swivel chair in here is . . . a . . . real . . . mother! Blam! —wahwhwahwahwahwahwahwah, gasp, shriek, moan, sigh, oh scrogging frozen Chosen.[35]

And so, it goes on. Wolfe, perhaps inspired by Zamiatin, whose work he read while at Yale,[36] aims to imbue his story with a linguistic style that mirrors the chaos of the soldiers' experience, but he does not yet have the control to make this passage seem much more than a word salad. Overall, the story is hard to follow and not especially engaging.

It was in his doctoral work in American studies at Yale University, though, that Wolfe made his first sustained attempt to marry fictional techniques with nonfiction material. For his dissertation topic, he investigated how the Communist Party of the United States during the 1930s and early 1940s set up, controlled, and manipulated the League of American Writers, an organization whose 14,000 members included some of the nation's most respected authors.[37] The topic, and Wolfe's argument that members of America's literary establishment were susceptible to communist control, prefigures Wolfe's continuing preoccupations—and his battles—with liberal establishment leaders in literature, art, and architecture, especially over his works "Radical Chic," *The Painted Word*, and *From Bauhaus to Our House*.[38]

Alongside conventional methods of academic research and writing, Wolfe presented his findings in what looks like an early version of the New Journalism. A draft chapter entitled "Beaux Arts on the Barricades" opens with a brief narrative reconstruction of a North American artist leading "a band of guerrillas in an unsuccessful machine-gun raid on the Cocoayan, Mexico, home of Leon Trotsky," before moving to what readers of Wolfe's later work would recognize as his popular sociological style: "Legions of less famous artists were clogging the stale corridors and second-story flats of lower Manhattan where, grimly, vicariously, with veins popping out on their necks, they spent the decade arguing those issues so intimate to them all."[39]

After the awkward use of an archaic word, "shatterpating" (meaning to shatter, or scatter your brain), Wolfe cranks up his rhetorical armory to dismiss the relevance or legacy of socially realistic art and writing of the 1930s: "What happened to all those starveling workers, lardiform politicians, billy-happy policemen, eroded landscapes, hookwormy sharecroppers, humble-shouldered mestizos, unbound proletarian Prometheuses, and poor old hemp-collared colored men which filled up such vast wall and canvas space barely fifteen years ago?"[40] In style and sentiment this passage would not look at all out of place in Wolfe's so-called breakthrough *Esquire* piece about custom cars.

In a draft of another section of the thesis, Wolfe reconstructs a session of the House Committee on Un-American Activities from 1947, complete with stage directions for an exchange met with "applause and boos" between the chair and a writer:

> The scene was actually a good deal more uproarious than the transcript of the hearing reveals. Thomas [the chair] was shouting at Lawson [the writer], hailing police officers, and battering his desk top. Lawson was holding the witness table in chancery before him, crouching like a Greco-Roman wrestler behind it, and shouting into his microphone. Press photographers were ricocheting off one another at close quarters and setting off flash bulb explosions. Three hundred public spectators there in the caucus room of the old House Office Building were whooping, hollering, hissing, whistling, laughing, stomping on the floor—like any Friday night boxing crowd at the Uline Arena eighteen blocks away.[41]

The examiners of the thesis did not exactly warm to Wolfe's approach. Michael Lewis thinks that is because they were a bunch of stuffed shirts.[42]

Maybe they were, but that may be only half the story. A fidelity to factual accuracy is a bedrock of both long-form journalism, or literary journalism, as it is also known, and scholarly research. As Norman Sims has noted, many literary journalists research their topics as intensively as a doctoral student.[43] University faculty who have both professional journalism and scholarly research experience are able to see many continuities as points of contrast between the two activities, especially in research and the practice of long-form journalism, or literary journalism as it is known in this journal. If that is the continuity, then yes, the contrast is in the prose. For anyone with literary aspirations, the form of the conventional PhD dissertation can be frustratingly rigid.

It is easy to see why Wolfe would have chafed against it. But if Wolfe had simply engaged in hijinks for his PhD dissertation, that is not what most concerned the examiners. They all actually believed that he wrote "very skil-

fully."[44] Further, they found his argument convincing: "The literati were indeed manipulated by the communists," wrote the American studies graduate supervisor, David Potter, on May 19, 1956, summarizing the three examiners' reports in a letter to Wolfe. What the examiners also found, though, and it is worth quoting at length, was that the thesis was:

> Not objective but was consistently slanted to disparage the writers under consideration and to present them in a bad light even when the evidence did not warrant this; second, that you had relied on a one-factor explanation, which, in the opinion of the readers, may be valid but has not been proved and probably cannot be proved as a single operative factor. There was a third criticism which I had not anticipated, and which seems to me more damaging than either of the other two: this was the criticism that you misused your sources, giving incorrect quotations, misstating evidence, etc. All three readers checked various sources (a routine duty of readers) and all three made this criticism.[45]

They had indeed; the three examiners' reports make scarifying reading. One examiner wrote that Wolfe's polemical rhetoric colors every page. "His use of pejorative and biased qualifiers and terminology seems at times to be little better than what he properly critiques on the part of others."[46] Another provided two pages of notes unfavorably comparing Wolfe's descriptions with the primary source material. For example, Wolfe wrote: "At one point 'the Cuban delegation' tramped in. It was led by a fierce young woman named Lola de la Torriente. With her bobbed hair, leather jacket, and flat-heeled shoes, she looked as though she had just left the barricades. Apparently she had. 'This is where our literature is being built,' exclaimed she, 'on the barricades!' "[47] There was no description of her in the sources and the quotations did not appear in the references, the examiner found.

The reports presciently lay out evidence of later criticism—and praise—of Wolfe's work. He does, of course, write "very skilfully." He had an uncanny ability to pluck out an essential kernel about an issue or trend: identifying the self-expressive impulse behind the creators of custom cars, or the quasi-religious nature of the Merry Pranksters' acid experiments, or the pretentiousness of many liberals' identification with the Black Panthers, or the special bonds forged among the early astronauts in *The Right Stuff*.

Wolfe does tend to try to stretch his brilliant insights into an entire argument, though. Throughout his work, status is portrayed as not only the most important, but almost as the only source of motivation in people's lives. That is, he relies too heavily on a "one factor explanation." James Wood has consistently criticized Wolfe's fiction, and one of his main points applies equally to Wolfe's journalism: "The kind of 'realism' called for by Wolfe, and by writers

like Wolfe, is always realism about society and never realism about human emotions, motives, and secrecies. To be realistic about feeling is to acknowledge that we may feel several things at once, that we massively waver."[48]

Finally, Wolfe has been criticized for his inaccuracies and for his misuse or misrepresenting of sources, notoriously over his two 1965 articles about the *New Yorker*,[49] but also by eminent early literary journalist John Hersey and by various scholars.[50] These criticisms were spurred in part at least by Wolfe's ringing assertion that the New Journalism sat atop a bedrock of accurate reporting—"*All this actually happened*," as he famously put it.[51]

The essential elements not only of Wolfe's journalistic voice, but of his overall journalistic and intellectual approach are already in place by the mid-1950s while he was still in graduate school. The importance of the PhD thesis episode, then, is, first, that it undercuts the tidiness of Wolfe's presentation of his own "origin story" and, second, that Wolfe's response to Yale prefigured a series of fights he has had with people in the worlds of journalism, literature, art, and architecture, which reaches its apotheosis in his unedifying brawl with those he dubbed "My three stooges"—John Irving, Norman Mailer, and John Updike.[52] On the first point, we can take Wolfe at his word that on the night he wrote the "Dear Byron" memo he experienced a sense of creative release when he broke through his writer's block, but a read of the custom car article again today shows it actually does read, in many ways, like a very long memo. It is certainly ambitious for a magazine piece of 1963 in outlining a historically informed argument about the culture of custom car enthusiasts, but most of the piece stays close to the conventions of magazine journalism at the time. There is surprisingly little evidence of the fictional techniques that had so electrified Wolfe the year before when he read Gay Talese's brilliantly evocative profile of former heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and exclaimed, "*What inna namea christ is this*."[53]

Wolfe's use of fictional techniques is actually more evident in "The Marvelous Mouth," a profile of Cassius Clay, as he was then known, that was published in *Esquire* in October 1963, a month before "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby." It is not clear, however, whether "The Marvelous Mouth," was written before or after the custom car piece. Certainly, "The Marvelous Mouth" lead has the kind of journalistic conceit that Wolfe made famous with his "Las Vegas!!!!" piece, mentioned earlier, and reprints dialogue between Clay and his entourage. It also has a scene, more vivid than any in the custom car article, in which the dazzling boxer who was to become heavyweight champion the following year is forcibly reminded of his roots in racist Louisville, Kentucky.

A middle-aged white southerner shoves a train ticket receipt in front of

Clay, saying, "In a voice you could mulch the hollyhocks with: 'Here you are, boy, put your name right there'." Asked if he has a pen for the autograph, the man says he doesn't but is sure some of Clay's people would. Clay has been staring at the piece of paper without looking up. After about ten seconds, his face still turned down, he says: "Man, there's one thing you gotta learn. You don't *ever* come around and ask a man for an autograph if you ain't got no pen."[54] Why would Wolfe not choose this piece for his "origin story," especially as by 1965 when he told the story in the introduction for his first collection of articles, Clay had become heavyweight champion, defeating the seemingly invincible Sonny Liston, and shedding his "slave name" to become known as Muhammad Ali? Perhaps that had something to do with it; Ali was an extraordinarily popular (and unpopular) figure whose fame would have overshadowed that of the just-emerging young journalist. Ali was also an extraordinary individual whose approach to everything from race to self-publicizing to boxing challenged conventions and U.S. society[55] and was less susceptible to Wolfe's sociological approach. Perhaps, too, Wolfe knew this. In a 1966 interview with *Vogue* on the back of his first collection of journalism, Wolfe told Elaine Dundy that he never felt he had connected with Ali and admits that "I missed the important story about him: that he was getting involved with the Black Muslims at the time I was seeing him."[56] That he was still insisting on calling Ali "Clay" in 1966, two years after the boxer had changed his name, may offer a clue as to why he missed that particular story.

To understand the second point of importance requires knowing Wolfe's response to the examiners' reports on his PhD thesis. And before that, requires knowing that Wolfe was brought up in a genteel, well-to-do family in Richmond, Virginia. Even well into his thirties he would address his letters home to "Dear Mother and Daddy" and sign them "Tommy." The tone and vocabulary of the letters, indeed, vary little from adolescence right through to when he was making his name as a journalist in New York. His letters home, many of which are in the archive, are unfailingly polite, solicitous, and bland. They carry so few traces of Wolfe's public voice that a reader begins to wonder what on earth his parents made of his journalism. Writing to them on November 4, 1963, that Las Vegas is "a monument to all that is grossest and flashiest in modern American taste," is just about the strongest opinion he expresses in letters to his parents.[57] It is a long way from "Hernia, hernia, hernia."

In the archive's holdings of letters to friends, Wolfe's language is more colloquial and forthright, as might be expected, but his letter to "Chaz," on June 9, 1956, almost three weeks after he received the letter from Yale, fairly jumps off the page:

> These stupid fucks have turned down namely my dissertation, meaning I will have to stay here about a month longer to delete all the offensive passages and retype the sumitch. They called my brilliant manuscript 'journalistic' and 'reactionary', which means that I must go through with a blue pencil and strike out all the laughs and anti-Red passages and slip in a little liberal merde, so to speak, just to sweeten it. I'll discuss with you how stupid all these stupid fucks are when I see you.[58]

Wolfe is enraged; he doesn't see, or want to see, what, if any, were the merits of the examiners' findings, but he did revise the thesis and it duly passed so that he was graduated in 1957. From that point on, there appears to be no time when Wolfe publicly discusses the humiliating experience of initially failing his dissertation submission. In "The New Journalism," he compares graduate school to being imprisoned. So "morbid" and "poisonous" was the atmosphere that it defied the many student inmates who promised to satirize it in a novel, Wolfe writes.[59] Similarly, in the many interviews Wolfe has given over the years, a generous selection of which have been gathered by Dorothy Scura in *Conversations with Tom Wolfe*, he has little positive to say about the Yale experience other than it was where he was introduced to the work of social theorist Max Weber. In one interview, with Toby Thompson for *Vanity Fair* in 1987, when Wolfe's first novel, *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, was published, Wolfe again recalled graduate school as "tedium of an exquisite sort," while a friend of his, the novelist Bill Hoffman, was quoted saying, "The professors didn't know what to make of him. . . . He was supposed to present scholarly papers, and he would write them in this fireworks style of his and just drive them crazy."[60]

It is true that some find graduate school a stultifying experience, just as it is true that others find it liberating or energizing. What is curious is that Wolfe has not publicly discussed the criticism made of his PhD dissertation even though he clearly disputed it. It is one of the few episodes in his life where he has refrained from a public fight; usually he relishes them. Wolfe's father held a PhD from Cornell University.[61] In his letters home that are held in the archive, Wolfe does not mention what happened at Yale other than to say the PhD was a "horrible experience."[62] When Michael Lewis asks Wolfe in 2015 what he thinks about initially failing the thesis he submitted for the PhD, Wolfe says he harbors no ill will towards his examiners and thinks, in retrospect, that "Yale was really important for me."[63] It was 60 years later but it appears to be at least a tacit acknowledgement that the Yale professors may have had a point.

## A Different Perspective on the Origins

The search for the origins of Wolfe's journalistic voice in his papers at the New York Public Library sheds light on both how it developed and how Wolfe chose to represent it, and himself, in later years. Wolfe was celebrated initially for the zest and flair with which he plunged into 1960s U.S. culture, but what the material in the archive makes clear is how developed his ideas and style were by the time he found a congenial medium—the *Herald Tribune*'s Sunday supplement and magazines—and creative editors such as Byron Dobell and Harold Hayes at *Esquire* and Clay Felker at *New York* (which originated as the *Herald Tribune*'s Sunday supplement). There is evidence to suggest Wolfe had long had a penchant for the ten-dollar word, which he deployed with an inventiveness that belies or at least qualifies Orwell's dictum; he loved to dramatize events he wrote about and impersonate voices in print; and, as a result, he would understandably feel constrained by the rigid conventions of academic writing and, later, news reporting. As one colleague said of Wolfe's time at the *Washington Post* between 1959 and 1962: "Every time he turned out something fresh and original, he found himself assigned to a story on sewerage in Prince Georges County."[64]

Nothing in the library's archives dims that memory of the first rush of excitement at reading Wolfe's work. His journalistic voice remains highly original even though a reading of George C. Foster's journalism via Thomas Connery's *Journalism and Realism* shows that other journalists experimented with capturing the rhythms of speech in newspapers as long ago as the mid-nineteenth century.[65] The archive does, though, diminish the sense that his voice was first and foremost a response to what he described as "the whole crazed obscene uproarious Mammon-faced drug-soaked mau-mau lust-oozing" scene in the 1960s United States.[66] Wolfe's journalistic voice is actually a good deal more constructed than was apparent to a young journalist, for better and for worse. That is clearer now, to someone who has since then read a lot more literary journalism and studied it closely.[67] As an older academic, too, I can appreciate the critique of Wolfe's work by those crusty old examiners at Yale, even if describing his writing as "very skilful" is correct but utterly juiceless. It would be as if Wolfe had simply written in that passage in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* that some drivers had got out of their cars and filled their petrol tanks. That's accurate but not exactly something you see in your mind's eye—let alone something you can't unsee.

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**Notes**

[1] Wolfe, *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, 1.

[2] Wolfe, 2.

[3] Wolfe, 16.

[4] Price, "Where Tom Wolfe Got His Status Obsession," para. 2.

[5] Wolfe, "Like a Novel," in "The New Journalism," 29–30.

[6] Wolfe, "Las Vegas (What?)!!!!" *Esquire,* 92.

[7] Wolfe, 96. See also, Wolfe, "Las Vegas (What?)!!!!" chap. 1 in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, 17–19.

[8] Plimpton, "Tom Wolfe," in *Writers at Work*, 238. See note 36 for Zamyatin references, Bellamy in Scura, 53.

[9] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism with an Anthology*, 68.

[10] Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, 158.

[11] Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," 169.

[12] Plimpton, *Writers at Work*, 240–41.

[13] Wolfe, "Like a Novel," in "The New Journalism," 31.

[14] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 15–68; 26, 19, 24, 38, 38, 32, and 22.

[15] Wolfe, *The Right Stuff*, 45–46.

[16] McKeen, *Tom Wolfe*, ix.

[17] Sims, *True Stories*, 219–20.

[18] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 195.

[19] Wood, "Tom Wolfe's Shallowness, and the Trouble with Information," 208.

[20] The "origin story" is mentioned in at least four of the interviews collected in Scura, *Conversations with Tom Wolfe*, 4, 25, 133, 208.

[21] Junod, "The Radical Power of Tom Wolfe," para. 3.

[22] Wolfe, "Introduction," in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, 9–15.

[23] Wolfe, 11.

[24] Wolfe, 11.

[25] Wolfe, "Like a Novel," in "The New Journalism," 28.

[26] McKeen, 25–26; Ragen, *Tom Wolfe*, 11–12; Weingarten, *From Hipsters to Gonzo*, 89.

[27] Wolfe, Papers.

[28] Lewis, *Moneyball*; Lewis, *The Blind Side*; and Lewis, *The Big Short*.

[29] Lewis, "The White Stuff," 177–78; see also, Lewis, "How Tom Wolfe became . . . Tom Wolfe."

[30] Wolfe Papers, Teacher (unidentified) comment (undated) on Wolfe assignment, box 67, folder 2.

[31] Wolfe, *The Southern Collegian*, magazine of Washington and Lee University, 1951 finals book, box 67, folder 4, Wolfe Papers.

[32] Wolfe, "Carnage, Inc.," In the Bullpen, *Pine Needle*, 1946–1947, box 67, folder 3, Wolfe Papers.

[33] Wolfe, "Carnage, Inc.," box 67, folder 3.

[34] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 46–48.

[35] Wolfe, "Goddam Frozen Chosen," 1955–1956, 6–7, box 76, folder 3, Wolfe Papers.

[36] Bellamy, "Sitting Up with Tom Wolfe," in Scura, *Conversations with Tom Wolfe*, 53.

[37] Wolfe, "The League of American Writers," i. The dissertation's title page shows as Modern Language and Literature. Wolfe's report of its being in American studies in "The New Journalism," 4, 16, is supported by Yale graduate studies' David Potter. See note 44, Wolfe Papers.

[38] Wolfe, "Radical Chic"; *The Painted Word*; *From Bauhaus to Our House*.

[39] Wolfe, "Beaux Arts on the Barricades," undated, 1–2 of 3, box 75, folder 1, Wolfe Papers.

[40] Wolfe, 3.

[41] Wolfe, untitled, undated draft of chapter of PhD dissertation, n.p., box 75, folder 1, Wolfe Papers.

[42] Lewis, "The White Stuff," 177–78.

[43] Sims, *True Stories*, 286–87. A personal observation, if my experience is anything to go by: My working life has been split 40/60 percent between journalism and academia. I started in newspapers, moved to teaching journalism in a university, went back to newspapers and then returned to the academy in 2009. Unlike most career academics, I did my PhD later in life, graduating in 2010. Thus, also unlike many who have spent their entire careers in either journalism or academia, my experience has enabled me to see these continuities as points of contrast between the two activities, especially in the main area I both research and practice—long-form journalism, or literary journalism.

[44] Wolfe Papers, David Potter letter to Wolfe, May 19, 1956, page 2 of 3, box 1, folder 3.

[45] Wolfe Papers, David Potter letter to Wolfe.

[46] Wolfe Papers, Examiner's report on Wolfe's PhD, May 14, 1956, box 1, folder 3.

[47] Wolfe Papers, Notes, two pages appended to the examiners' reports of Wolfe's PhD, box 1, folder 3.

[48] Wood, "Tom Wolfe's Shallowness," 206.

[49] Wolfe, "The *New Yorker* Affair," as reprinted in *Hooking Up*, 247–93.

[50] Hersey, "The Legend on the License," 247–67. For an account of the *New Yorker* controversy, see Yagoda, *About Town*, 334–41. For an example of scholars' criticism, see Lehman, *Matters of Fact*, 52–61.

[51] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 49.

[52] For an astute reading of Wolfe's stoushes, both in their substance and in their shortcomings, see Menand, "In a Strange Land," 94–97.

[53] Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 23–24.

[54] Wolfe, "The Marvelous Mouth," in *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*, 95–96; see also, *Esquire*, October 1963, 144–96.

[55] For a comprehensive overview of Ali's life and career, see Hauser, *Muhammad Ali*, and, especially, more recently, Eig, *Ali*.

[56] Dundy, "Tom Wolfe . . . But Exactly, Yes!" in Scura, *Conversations with Tom Wolfe*, 11.

[57] Wolfe Papers, Wolfe letter to his parents, November 4, 1963, box 1, folder 3.

[58] Wolfe Papers, Wolfe letter to a friend, "Chaz", June 9, 1956, box 1, folder 3.

[59] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 15–16.

[60] Thompson, "The Evolution of Dandy Tom," in Scura, *Conversations with Tom Wolfe*, 206–7; see also, Wolfe, *Bonfire of the Vanities*.

[61] Thompson, 201.

[62] Wolfe Papers, Wolfe letter to his parents, undated but between 1956 and 1959, box 1, folder 3.

[63] Lewis, "The White Stuff," 184.

[64] McKeen, *Tom Wolfe*, 20, quoting Kluger, *The Paper*, 672.

[65] Connery, *Journalism and Realism*, 59–60.

[66] Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 45.

[67] Ricketson, *Telling True Stories*.

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Photo of Ted Conover by Tobias Eberwein.

# *IALJS–13 Keynote Address . . .*

## Immersion and the Subjective: Intentional Experience as Research

Ted Conover
New York University, United States

**Introduction:** It is not a frequent occurrence to be given the opportunity of introducing someone the stature of Ted Conover. The task is at once a daunting endeavor and a humbling privilege, particularly if you consider yourself a student of literary journalism. Ted's books and his body of work are the stuff that bring us to conferences. He is, let's say, a subject of our study and an object of our interest as a prominent fully fledged literary journalist. Curiosity begged me to ask him what he felt when, in 1995, Norman Sims and Mark Kramer chose his work for their anthology, *Literary Journalism: A New Collection of the Best American Nonfiction*.[1] "I was thrilled, of course," he said. But at the same time, Conover says it's not a label he uses to describe himself to others. "I'm just a journalist with truths to tell." Ted's stellar credentials precede him. As a journalist he has written for a smorgasbord of periodicals, ranging from the *New York Times* to *Vanity Fair* to *National Geographic*, not to mention the *New Yorker*. For sociologists, he might be described as the epitome of the participant-observer. For us, enthusiasts of journalism with a literary flair, he is the renowned author of books such as *Rolling Nowhere: Riding the Rails with American Hoboes* (1984), *Coyotes: A Journey Across Borders with America's Illegal Migrants* (1987), and *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* (2000), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award in General Nonfiction. His most recent work, *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep* (2016), explores the very essence of literary journalism. — Isabel Soares, President, IALJS

**Keywords**: immersion – first person – undercover – empathy – ethnography

First, thank you to Isabel Soares for the kind introduction, and thanks to David Abrahamson and the board for the invitation to speak to you today. And thanks to Tobias Eberwein for organizing everything.

As I don't need to tell this audience, Tom Wolfe died the day before yesterday. Would any of us be here if Wolfe had not been? It's hard to know. He was not only a founding practitioner of this literary craft, he was its chronicler and analyst. His analysis of what he said were its constituent parts—scene, dialogue, point of view, and status detail—strikes me as accepted orthodoxy now. I'd read most of Wolfe's books over the years—my favorite is *The Right Stuff*—but until I was writing up the bibliography for my book *Immersion* three years ago, I had never read *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test.* My friend Jay told me I had better, and so I did. What a joy to read.

Wolfe was doing what is now often called "immersion writing"—identifying a fascinating group of people, getting to know them, and then setting off with the group as, to some degree, one of them. He called it "saturation reporting"—another water metaphor, but it's the same thing. (*Harper's Magazine* titled its collection of first-person immersive pieces *Submersion Journalism*).[2]

I had not known that I was an "immersion journalist" until maybe ten years ago, when my colleague Robert Boynton of New York University suggested it. It's a label I accepted, though it doesn't apply to much of my work. Nor had I considered my background in ethnography to be a constituent element of this tendency until Boynton suggested that this was a way I might engage in a conversation with the academy. I am glad that the study of literary journalism includes both practitioners and theorists. My mind works basically on the level of experience and narrative, but I appreciate it when others take a step back and think about the underlying issues of experientiality and narrativity. I will leave it to experts who are here to decide if my remarks today do anything to advance the academic discussion.

Typically, when I'm at a podium, telling stories is what I've been asked to do. So let me start out with some early stories, and then share some thoughts on how I've come to value and pursue experience as the basis of my writing.

In junior high school and high school in Denver, Colorado, I wrote for the school newspapers. And I took long-distance bicycle rides with friends. We started out mainly riding into the Rocky Mountains and back, sometimes for several days at a time. At age fifteen, my friend Lane and I took a three-week trip by ourselves through New England. At age eighteen, my friend Ross and I rode from Seattle to the east coast, to begin college in Massachusetts. Riding across North America, we liked to say, was our way of getting to college.

The coast-to-coast journey was somewhat grueling, but at the same time it was exhilarating. My freshman year of college was harder. High school in Denver had been an easy place to earn an "A," but writing essays for my courses at Amherst College was demanding, perplexing, even excruciating. In my "spare time" I wrote an account of the bicycle ride that had brought me there. My goal was to publish it in the school paper, which I did. To write about that experience was easier and more enjoyable for me than to write the papers my professors wanted. For one thing, I could write in the first person, which has always felt most natural to me. For another, I could write about something I had felt or seen myself rather than just read in a book. Experience was a topic that was genuine, and writing about my own experience put me in a position of absolute authority.

(Just as an aside: Journalism, at this point, was something I practiced and valued, but it was separate from writing about my experience.)

A year or two after I published about my bicycle journey in the weekly student newspaper, I wrote about it again in a class on personal essay (back then called "autobiography"). The assignment was to describe an occasion of celebration. What had I celebrated? How had I celebrated?

I had recently read *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.* It's a travel book and a book of ideas, many of which perplexed college-age me, but one of which stuck in my head. A college instructor is trying to help a student who is having trouble writing. Narrow it down, he tells her: Instead of writing about the whole town, write about one building. Instead of writing about the whole building, write about the front of the building. "Start with the upper left-hand brick."[3]

I decided to write about not the general experience of celebrating crossing the country on my bicycle, but about *the final hour* of my bicycle odyssey. The professor really liked it, and so I tweaked it and sent it to one of the handful of publications I subscribed to at the time, *Bicycling!* magazine (with an exclamation point!).[4] They bought it, to use in the column that comprised the final page of each month's issue. And they paid me $100! Now we were getting somewhere.

A year later, I left college to spend a year as a VISTA Volunteer in Dallas. I worked as a community organizer for a poor people's group that published its own bilingual newspaper, *People's Voice/La Voz del Pueblo.* While I was there, the Hare Krishnas bought and moved into a former motel complex nearby; the decrepit units filled an entire block. I decided to write an article about the community for *People's Voice*. So I made an appointment to stop by. I was ushered into the office of a young man whose head was shaved except for a ponytail in the back and who was barefoot and dressed in a saffron-

colored robe. As I entered the room, this man stood up from his desk, took the long, heavy carnation garland from around his neck, and placed it upon mine. *Whoa!* What's the journalistic rule about *that*? I tried to refuse the gift and so I lifted it back over my head, but he looked shocked and upset when I did, so I put it back on. Later I marveled over it: They were proselytizing a community newspaper reporter!

I ended up spending three days in the community, during which I got up before dawn, chanted, helped to prepare vegetarian food, etc. The piece I ended up writing was a regular feature story, only lightly first person, but in retrospect I think the material I'd gained would have justified a deeply first-person piece about recruiting by cults, with my experience in this community an example.[5]

Not long after, I returned to Pamplona, Spain, where I'd spent five weeks as an exchange student in high school. You see, there was a girl there. And the local coordinator of the program said he thought he could get me a job in a big sausage factory, translating technical manuals. He helped get me the job, but I never did translate technical manuals—I simply worked on the different assembly lines, packaging aged chorizo, putting cans of meat products into cardboard boxes for shipping, etc. During the Festival of San Fermín, I got up at dawn, joined a group of my co workers who all were wearing the same blue and white checkered shirts, and ran with the bulls.

For years, I didn't write about it . . . until one Norman Sims, a professor of journalism at University of Massachusetts Amherst, whom I think some of you know, asked, along with his editor David Abrahamson, if I'd like to write a foreword for *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*.[6] Then finally, I got to write about that.

The most important watershed for me was the experience that began as ethnographic field work for my undergraduate anthropology thesis. It differed from my earlier experiences in important ways:

• It was a lengthy and difficult and unusual thing for a person my age to do;

• It was done explicitly for schoolwork (though my college wouldn't give me credit), so I had to pay really close attention and carefully document everything that happened;

• It was a*bout something other than myself*—real people, living in a way freighted with historic, mythic meaning. I wanted to understand how they looked at the world;

• And while it had an adventuresome aspect, like the bike rides or the summer in Spain, much of it felt more like a trial.

My advisors insisted that the first-person voice remain segregated from the rest of my thesis, in a final chapter that I titled, "A Field Experience in

Retrospect."[7] Writing that final chapter felt a bit like writing about my long bicycle journey had during the first semester of my freshman year. I wanted to do more of it and, as some of you know, I soon did, in what became my first book, *Rolling Nowhere*.[8]

My next books followed that pattern: imagine an unusual social world that I could take part in, insinuate myself in, find a place for myself in it. The goal, as in the projects I've just described, was to have an experience. Approached in a self-aware fashion, an experience produces scenes, characters, dialogue, point of view, and even, as Wolfe put it, status detail. If the people whose lives I visited were connected in some way to important issues (homelessness, immigration), then the experience could be topical, the book (or the writing) might be considered journalistic. My next projects, mostly books, were about a year of travel with undocumented migrants from Mexico; wealthy people in Aspen, Colorado; East African truck drivers and AIDS; prisoners and guards in New York's Sing Sing prison; and the way people interacted with a variety of roads around the world, from woodcutters along a mud track in Peru's Amazon rainforest to Israeli soldiers and Palestinian students in the West Bank, to freshly minted middle-class drivers in China to an ambulance crew parked inside a highway cloverleaf in Lagos, Nigeria.

**First Person an Earned Perspective**

Wolfe is present as a first-person narrator in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*[9] but just barely. It's now a frequent strategy in narrative nonfiction: The writer uses "I" not because she's important to the story as a character, but rather to help set a scene, to give the subject somebody to talk to. Over time Wolfe moved away from that—there is no first-person narration in *The Right Stuff*,[10] for example.

But I don't think this prefigured the current trend. My observation is that journalism, and our written culture generally, has been moving in the direction of more first person over the past thirty or forty years. Increasingly, journalism is making room for personal accounts. Memoir and personal essay began their boom in the 1980s and 1990s, and from there the rise of the internet lifted and carried first-person writing to new heights—or lows, according to your point of view. Among the reasons I see are:

- The move away from a presumption that journalists can be objective, and toward a journalism that is subjective but aims to be fair;

- The proliferation of first-person voices on the web, the lowered bar to publishing, alongside the decline of the primacy of a few main news companies or providers.

Finally, society's evolution away from a positivist model of knowledge—where to be worth mentioning, propositions must be provable—also seems relevant. In my mind, the traditional, 5Ws style of journalism reflects the positivist tradition, and literary journalism the humanist. So you have the "just the facts" tradition engaging in a conversation with a room full of poets; and literary journalism, at least sometimes, is the result.

The first person is something I'm open to, and even encourage in my teaching. But I tell students that in journalism the first person must be *earned*. It must be justified by the value it adds, generally in terms of interest. I explain to them that, while they should include details of their life experience that are relevant to their journalism, they should be careful about using too much because *we are not memoirists.* Writers of memoir have for raw material their remembered stories of *life-as-it-happened-to-me.* Writers of literary journalism have as their raw material their reported stories of *life-as-I-sought-it-out.* Our raw material is *reported.* We may borrow the memoir's "I," which, as Vivian Gornick observed years ago in her seminal book, *The Situation and the Story,* is different from an "I" in fiction. She wrote:

> A novel or poem provides invented characters or speaking voices that act as surrogates for the writer. Into those surrogates will be poured all that the writer cannot address directly—inappropriate longings, defensive embarrassments, anti-social desires—but must address to achieve felt reality. The persona in a nonfiction narrative is an unsurrogated one. . . . The unsurrogated narrator has the monumental task of transforming low-level self-interest into the kind of detached empathy required of a piece of writing that is to be of value to the disinterested reader.[11]

In memoir or literary nonfiction, the "I" must be sincerely inhabited, believed in, and ring honest and natural.

Over the past couple of weeks, I've been reading the manuscript of a new book by Shane Bauer, the writer for *Mother Jones* who got a job as a private prison guard in Louisiana in order to write about the experience. His 35,000-word piece[12] was something of a sensation—it won the National Magazine Award for reporting, the Goldsmith Prize for investigative reporting, the Hillman Prize for magazine journalism, and many others. In the new book, to be titled *American Prison: A Reporter's Undercover Journey into the Business of Punishment*,[13] Bauer essentially adds to his long article by interleaving a historical story of U.S. prisons, particularly plantation prisons in the South. These historical chapters alternate with the present-tense, first-person story of Bauer's four months as a corrections officer for a private prison company. He makes a persuasive argument that the prison farms, an outgrowth of slavery, led organically to the growth of corporate prisons, whose use is growing

in the United States under President Trump after shrinking under President Obama. He tells the story, for example, of T. Don Hutto, who was warden at plantation prisons in Texas and Arkansas before becoming a cofounder of the Corrections Corporation of America. It's a very good book.

I found *American Prison* particularly interesting not just because I worked undercover as a guard for my book *Newjack*,[14] but because I'd read Bauer's first book, a memoir entitled *A Sliver of Light: Three Americans Imprisoned in Iran*.[15] Bauer was one of three hikers who, in 2009, with his wife and a friend, inadvertently crossed the border from Iraqi Kurdistan into Iran and got arrested. Bauer, in other words, is one of the few people on earth who has been a prison guard, and a prisoner, and can write.

There was little mention of Iran in his story for *Mother Jones* about working as a CO in Louisiana, and I wondered if there would be more in the book. The answer is yes, but not a lot—I would have welcomed more. What there is, though, is very effective. As he nears four months on the job, he finishes a twelve-hour shift during which he has found a prisoner carrying a packet of marijuana and sent him to solitary confinement for it. According to the terms of the job, of course, it's the right thing to do. But Bauer is conflicted about, as he puts it, "sending someone off to the dungeon for *drugs*."[16]

> The inmate's face is full of guilt. He says nothing. I put it in my pocket, walk out of the tier, and feel something heavy and dark pour over me. *What am I doing?*
>
> When I get home, I draw a bath. I pour a glass of wine, then another, and another. I try to empty my mind. Inside me there is a prison guard and a former prisoner and they are fighting with each other, and I want them to stop.
>
> I decide I need to end this. Four months is enough. I'm going to quit.[17]

The research strategy called immersion writing can be wonderful for producing literary journalism. It turns experience into research. It can turn an interview into an encounter. It suggests there's a place in journalism for a *journal*, a diary.

But let me suggest some contraindications. Immersion is not sufficient in and of itself, because not all experience is interesting. I'm a lifeguard at a swimming pool—so what? I'm driving a taxi—big deal! A writer who would attempt this approach needs to appreciate that sometimes experience is a story, while other times it is merely boring. That can be true even if a subject is in the news. Working in a prison? Thousands and thousands of people can tell you it's one of the most mind-numbing, uneventful jobs there is. You can grow old and unhealthy working in a prison. The would-be immersion

writer needs to consider whether her presence in that world, or her focus on it, might be inherently interesting.

Bauer's stories and mine both benefitted from the tension of secretive reporting. Would someone suspect our true identity? Might we inadvertently give ourselves away? Could liberal, college-educated us make it in that milieu? Also, notably, both of us sought out difficulty. I found work in a famous old prison known for its present-day chaos. Bauer found work in a newish private prison that few outside of Louisiana had ever heard of, a place where conditions were so bad (and wages so low) that they had trouble finding enough employees to keep it running. This is where a background in journalism helps one to judge the potential in a story. The journalist asks: Is there conflict, is there challenge? Is there urgency, are there links to larger issues? Is there a way for me to meaningfully participate in that world?

What a good immersion journalist appreciates, I think, is that unpleasantness and adventure can go together. Difficulty is often interesting. Of course, it doesn't need to be unremitting difficulty: Readers need a break now and then, and so do we.

A good immersion journalist, also, is not passive. Yes, you need to look and listen and be patient. Sometimes you need to be a fly on the wall. But if you are that fly, and nothing is happening in that room, then sometimes you need to relocate. You need to buzz over to a room that is more interesting.

Finally, like all journalists, in my opinion, a good immersion journalist should not think too highly of him- or herself, particularly when writing in the first person; which is to say, his or her narrative persona should not. He is not the subject. Rather, the subject is the subject, and the first person a way of writing about it, a way of telling a story. The writer might be crossing the border, he might be working undercover, but he is not the hero.

This is where empathy comes in. For if we are visiting the worlds of our subjects, and trying to understand them, we need empathy. Bauer and I direct ours in different directions. In both our books, the first-person writer is interested in the prison (as an institution), in the prisoners, and in the guards. But Bauer, I think it's fair to say, is a bit more interested in the prisoners, and I am a bit more interested in the guards. The why is an intriguing question. Part of it may be that Bauer himself was a prisoner for over two years in Iran. He has feelings about guards and prisons that are different from my own. Another part of it is probably that the guard cohort I was part of has a real culture, reinforced by a union and a long history of families and communities doing the same line of work. In Louisiana at the Winn Correctional Center, the guards may very well have been working at a Home Depot last month. And if prison doesn't work out for them, they might be at Walmart next month.

Also, I think we're different because of anthropology, which helped to form my journalism. While Bauer works firmly in the tradition of the undercover exposé, I'm more interested in an inside look at secret worlds, at interior understandings—by rituals, by relationships of dominance and submission, by the division of space, by the shared lingo of the keepers and the kept.

And not just an inside look, perhaps, but an inside *feel*—I want readers to know the dread I had most days when dressing for work, to understand the fear I repressed when I walked inside. And I want to share the aftermath of that repression, the dreams of being a prisoner that I had months later.

Anthropology also taught me reflexivity, pausing to consider the ways I was and was not "like them." The ways that I could and could not understand their lives. Bauer expends his energy in other directions. He wants to show the dangerous negligence of the Corrections Corporation of America, the moral bankruptcy of the profit motive.

And we differ in our information gathering. Bauer writes about his use of a ballpoint pen that is also a voice recorder, and a watch that is a camera. The voice recordings let him produce substantial conversations—dialogue that is not merely recreated, as in most nonfiction, but actually transcribed. I spurned this kind of surreptitious note taking—to me it felt too invasive, the kind of thing a federal agent would do when trying to bust up the Mob. It would have made officers into my quarry, rather than my teachers, as in the ethnographic model. But wow, some of what Bauer captured is just stunning.

Both of us aim to show the impossible nature of the job: how hard it is to preserve one's humanity, one's better self, the corrosive effect of weeks and months of locking men in little boxes, of spending all day saying "no." Bauer does this in his own way: He has passages on the discomfort of being gay-baited, of being treated like a sex object, that I would be proud to have written.

All of which is to say: There is no single way to do immersion reporting. How you do it will depend on your own predilections, and on the situation. Bauer and I both resolved not to lie when taking on our prison jobs. We had no problem with letting people draw a wrong impression, but we would not invent backstories or otherwise actively deceive. And we both shied from reporting on our subjects' personal lives outside of work, as that seemed beyond the pale, and extremely hard to justify. Both of us, while being willing to write a fair amount about ourselves, included in those disclosures stories of how we messed up. For me, at least, the goal is to connect with readers via transparency and, again, to not puff myself up as the hyper-competent, and confident, hero of my own tale.

But I hesitate to offer this approach as a universal prescription. There

is no single way to report literary journalism. I think we agree that the one indispensable ingredient is journalism, some kind of fact-based writing about events of the day. But that superstructure of the 5Ws can be adorned with all manner of humane sensibility, stories told in all kinds of ways—many of them, I'm quite sure, yet to be revealed.

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**Notes**

[1] Conover, "The Road Is Very Unfair," 301–42.

[2] Wasik, *Submersion Journalism*.

[3] Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, 191.

[4] Conover, "Finishing."

[5] Conover, "God and Man in East Dallas." *People's Voice/La Voz del Pueblo* was *a* free monthly newspaper of Community People for Self-Determination, a grassroots organization in Dallas, Texas, in the 1970s and early 1980s.

[6] Conover, foreword to *True Stories*, ix–xv.

[7] Conover, "A Field Experience in Retrospect," 190–213.

[8] Conover, *Rolling Nowhere*.

[9] Wolfe, *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*.

[10] Wolfe, *The Right Stuff*.

[11] Gornick, *The Situation and the Story*, 7.

[12] Bauer, "My Four Months as a Private Prison Guard."

[13] Bauer, *American Prison*.

[14] Conover, *Newjack*.

[15] Bauer, Fattal, and Shourd, *A Sliver of Light*.

[16] Bauer, *American Prison*, 264.

[17] Bauer, 266.

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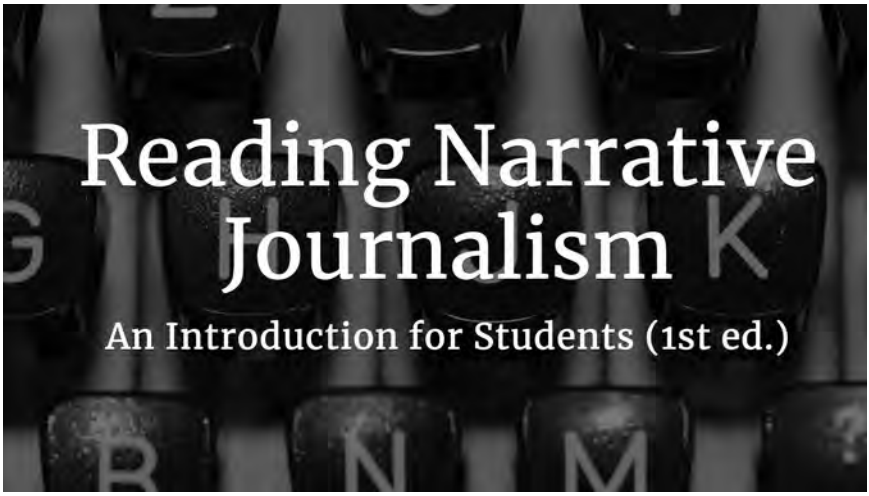


Home Page, Reading Narrative Journalism: An Introduction for Students. https://mediakron.bc.edu/readingnarrativejournalism. Background image of typewriter keys from Pixabay, https://pixabay.com/p-1227357/?no_redirect.

*Digital LJ . . .*

# Reading in 4-D: Designing a Digital Multimedia Platform for Teaching Literary Journalism

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**Abstract:** This essay reflects on the goals and challenges of having designed an online, digital-multimedia platform that introduces undergraduate and beginning graduate students to interpreting literary and narrative journalism. This platform—titled Reading Narrative Journalism and designed with the user-friendly application known as MediaKron—aims to teach students how to become active, critical readers of four dimensions of reportage: the news content of a given journalistic text; the literary strategies shaping its story; the legwork and research behind the story; and the experiences of the "subjects" (persons) portrayed in it. Along with reviewing MediaKron's emphasis on multimedia storytelling and collaborative student engagement, the essay assesses the potential advantages of a multimedia textbook for teaching literary journalism. The pedagogical limitations and initially unforeseen effects of the platform are also considered. The essay explores, in particular, trade-offs in multimedia approaches generally. In all, a multimedia platform can create new opportunities for the classroom while still challenging scholars and students alike to consider what certain bywords of the digital age—"engagement," "interactivity," "multimodal" reading—will mean for the study of literary journalism.

**Keywords:** teaching literary journalism – multimedia platforms – journalistic authority – realism – reading pleasure

These days, the increasingly prohibitive cost of instructional materials in colleges and universities is probably reason enough for scholars and teachers of literary journalism to experiment with developing online multimedia platforms and digital resources for classroom use.[1] Reason enough, too, can be found in the oft-remarked-upon convergence of media forms: the inter- or multimodality that has come to characterize important elements of the contemporary reading experience itself, in short- and long-form news features, slow and fast journalism, digital and graphic *reportage*, and more.[2] Technologically sharper, more versatile, and younger scholars have had much to say about digital formats,[3] and how such platforms may already be extending the invaluable field-building work done, in recent decades, by organizations like the IALJS. This is evidenced in identifying and defining the objects of study in the field (still a contested matter); pushing back against marginalization within received disciplines (still an ongoing problem); and in building bridges both across international borders and (still challenging) the oftenmore closed boundaries of disciplines themselves. Commentaries on the value of including literary journalism in the training of professional journalists and nonfiction writers are now rightly part of this journal's own critical archive, as the articles cited above have amply demonstrated.

That said, questions about how to teach the *reading* of literary journalism—as opposed to teaching how to *write* it—still constitute relatively undeveloped territory. Indeed, as William Dow observed in his IALJS keynote in 2016, the subject of *reading* literary journalism "remains an undertreated and underexplored element in literary journalism studies" more generally.[4] Dow's observation, in fact, resonates with the goals behind the recent creation of an online, multimedia instructional tool called Reading Narrative Journalism (hereafter, RNJ).[5] Designed over the past four years, the result is a digital student guide to the unique challenges of reading long-form, "slow," or literary journalism. The project resulted not in an anthology, nor a collection of critical essays, nor another monograph for fellow scholars, but a practical attempt to offer what the site terms "active, critical reading" skills to advanced undergraduates and beginning graduate students. Even if the option of teaching the reading of literary journalism is relatively rare these days—a privilege, even in a liberal arts curriculum—the questions posed by such an experiment may only become more germane to this field in coming decades. This report offers some reflections on what might be learned from this project.

First, some background. The multimedia platform used for this project is called MediaKron, "an online toolkit for digital curation and storytelling," with the platform created by Tim Lindgren and Brad Mering of Boston College.[6] The platform provides faculty and students a user-friendly way to

author, edit, and display their scholarly research or reflections in interactive multimedia formats. At its core, MediaKron allows designers/authors (working individually or collaboratively) to construct an archive of materials and then organize them in a variety of multimedia content in different formats (as video illustrations to text, in slide shows, as markers of timelines or maps, and more). Because materials can be "curated" (organized, annotated, contextualized, and so on) so that they can appear simultaneously in more than one location within a given project site, MediaKron enables the telling of multimodal stories with that content, and thus the drawing upon different learning modes students use (written, visual, auditory, temporal) to comprehend the ideas within such stories.

For instance, content can be organized around historical events (the bombing of Hiroshima, the Vietnam War) or topics (Disney and gender), and then displayed as slide shows, juxtaposed in visual "comparisons," or even located in positions on timelines that layer in political events, changes in media, and so on. MediaKron also facilitates collaboration by allowing *student* authoring and design, as well as the creation of group projects that, within certain copyright limits, can be posted online. To date, MediaKron has been used, among many other efforts, for collaborative, student-authored museum exhibitions, guides to Medieval alliterative poetry, a place-based travel course on London theater, as well as hands-on portable handbooks for professional training in nursing and education. In all these ways, MediaKron is designed especially to facilitate and stimulate thinking about the *connections* between collected materials, so that different juxtapositions can elicit different ways of interpreting given documents. In the case of RNJ, for instance, selections from YouTube interviews with journalists are used as stand-alone texts, and as "annotations" that parallel the explication of journalistic concepts. Similarly, an array of Jacob Riis photographs—which can be expanded to full-screen viewing—is placed next to a discussion of the rhetorical style of Riis's autobiography. Or, MediaKron makes it possible to isolate visual images and pinpoint effects of style or representation though mobile annotation boxes that allow the designer to insert comments on particular effects.

Relative late comers to digital design, may on balance, find taking a stylistically "conservative to moderate" approach on the digital-multimedia scale a good way to begin. That has been true for the present RNJ effort. For instance, rather than aiming for an immersive or nonlinear reading experience, the site was organized much like a book, with five chapters that guide student readers from introductory issues of definition and terminology, through different ways that journalists use the idea of "story," and then through some dominant styles (realist, multigenre, and testimonial; the New

Journalism and postmodern experimentation), within mostly contemporary, U.S.-based narrative journalism. A design premium was placed, that is, on a more familiar, text-heavy, and continuous experience of reading and learning, and on helping students understand the constructed nature of journalistic, print narrative.[7] The site now includes a glossary of critical terms, embedded links to scholarship, and expanded discussions of theoretical keywords. It encourages alternative itineraries that allow students to read selectively or in non-linear ways (if they choose to); and provides students and teachers with resources—classroom exercises, folders of video interviews, bibliographies of recommended scholarship, downloadable study sheets—and more.

The advantages to a digital platform are perhaps obvious. It is virtually free, after all; unlike a print text, it can be easily updated, corrected, and improved; the in-house version can create opportunities for student research, collaboration, and authoring. An instructor can "flip the classroom" by having students view a lecture, asking them fill out one of the worksheets on the site before coming to class for a discussion. The course instructor can also encourage students to design alternative pathways by tracing the site's discussions of different concepts in the glossary or main text. But what exactly were the objectives and goals for using such strategies, and what specifically did this platform aim to teach about literary journalism?

Well, perhaps most centrally, the platform's multimedia presentation tools are designed to help students understand certain *stylistic* conventions by suggesting analogies between graphic, visual, temporal (timeline) forms of representation and effects of print. So, for example, when IALJS scholars use the word "profile," RNJ can—as Ben Yagoda's history of the *New Yorker* documents—illustrate how the term was originally conceived in relation to a visual "side view" in a sketch. (Thus, a student is asked to consider matters of selection or depth in relation to written profiles and to infer their topical or satirical intent.)[8] In fact, over time, the visual register, in particular, gradually moved to the center of the plan for RNJ as a whole. For the most part, the goal

"A Study of F. Scott Fitzgerald," by Gordon Bryant. Published in *Shadowland* magazine in 1921, Wikimedia Commons. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/24/F._Scott_Fitzgerald%2C_1921.png.

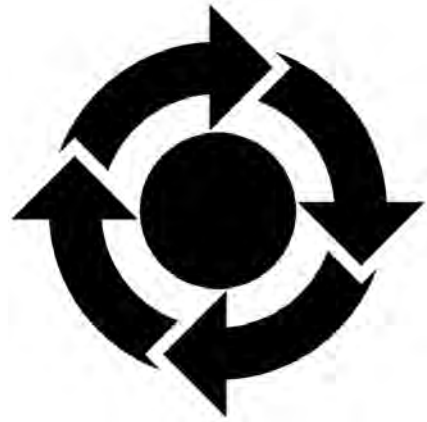
"My Point of View" (2014) by Francesco Petrungaro.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0), from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:My_point_of_view.jpg.

was not to create what is sometimes called *ekphrasis*, the sense of the synergy or mimicry between visual or print forms; rather, it was simply to ask students to compare aesthetic strategies across media forms. (RNJ's final chapter, however, explores the synergistic sense[9] via its discussion of Joan Didion's *Salvador*.) In particular, by using the visual analogy of a text to a lens (see above), it was possible to establish a core principle for the site: inviting students to think about how matters of a journalist's selection, focus, and framing typically have interpretive force on whatever substantive social issue a given journalist is addressing.

The next steps followed from that analogy: How would it be possible, then, to reconstruct the essential elements or dimensions of such a lens—what went into *building* any given text the student is being asked to read, and how might that student reader be led to examine those dimensions critically? As one student had put it, long ago, so directly and so succinctly to me: What was I asking my classes to "read *for*"?

Trying to answer that question, in turn, came to be the way that RNJ grapples with what is so often unique and challenging about reading a fact-based, literary narrative that entails engagement with flesh and blood persons and, as it does so, draws upon institutional norms about verification and truth telling. RNJ calls this the challenge of Reading in 4-D—what students needed to look for as they read:

1. *Reading for news content*: what the journalist suggests is or was the crux social or political issues within a set of story-givens—what *matters* about poverty or crime or war, for instance;
2. *Reading for literary effects of story form*: narrative elements (point of view, voice, plot design, and so on), including the styles adapted from famous works of fiction or the conventions of well-known genres;
3. *Reading for legwork and research*: descriptions of the on-the-ground conditions the journalist faced; and
4. *Reading for subject's story*: the real or imagined tales that particular news sources or subjects do (or might) tell, sometimes in contradiction or tension with the journalist's own tale. These subjects' stories, of course, are where ethical issues about journalistic responsibility often come into view.



Simpleicions Business Pie Chart with a Circle of Arrows, by Simpleicon. http.simpleicon.com/(http://www.flaticon.com/packs/simpleicon-business [CC BY 3.0] https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Simpleicons_Business_pie-chart-with-a-circle-of-arrows.svg.

Armed with these four dimensions of reading—what, in effect, to "look for" when they read—students are encouraged to bring such dimensions into conversation with each other. That is, they are asked to think about where the objectives of one dimension might overlap, be in tension with, or contradict one or more of the others. The goal here was not simply to create a grab bag of methods, nor to exhaust the different ways one might read works of literary journalism.[10] Rather, the intent was to use multimedia crosscutting to better reflect in the classroom the broad *interdisciplinary* discussion that has emerged around the reading of literary and narrative journalism. Indeed, the hope was that building in these four different ways of reading might help keep the *instructor* honest, too: If one's approach was, for example, that of a cultural-studies-oriented, liberal arts teacher—or, alternatively, that of a journalist or journalism educator—the hope was to avoid restricting the meaning of "reading" to, say, the imperatives of one discipline or another.[11]

Perhaps these objectives can be best illustrated by turning to the third chapter of RNJ, which discusses the aesthetics of realism, which are still at a premium in so much of narrative journalism, especially among writers and scholars who remain skeptical of postmodern or even New Journalism-style experimentation. But even more to the point, this chapter focuses on realism, because students commonly describe a text as "realistic," colloquially, to refer to the feeling of authenticity—and two consequences often result. First, by implicitly capitulating to empiricist thinking, students can approach a work of journalism as simply a transparent window rather than a lens—and, in turn, often uncritically accept the *authority* of a given piece. (If it feels real, in other words, it must be true.) But rather than simply debunk that assumption, RNJ asks students to recognize the reasons why they *do* invest authority in, say, direct witnessing, even though they may also recognize the limits of subjectivity and partial viewing.[12] And so—prompting the third dimension of reading described above—the site encourages students to tease out descriptions, explicit and otherwise, of the journalist's legwork and research, or perhaps watch a YouTube interview linked by the site. (Students expressed appreciation for hearing the journalist's backstories about a given project.) RNJ's third dimension can then be juxtaposed with its fourth—say, for example, by having students read testimonials from news subjects themselves. (For instance, students might compare Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed* with a recent documentary featuring the testimonies of service workers.)[13] For many students, this kind of juxtaposition both clarifies the journalist's interpretive focus (the first dimension) and raises questions about what might have fallen *outside* his or her lens.

Simultaneously, RNJ encourages students to decipher the realism created by aesthetic effects of storytelling (the second dimension)—for example, by using visual analogies about so-called site lines and vanishing points in a line drawing or a realistic painting. On the RNJ website students can view materials from art history and literary studies that illustrate the conventions of realistic representation—for instance, how visual effects of perspective typically produce the illusion of depth as well as establish a "horizon," a textual parameter crucial for a critical reading as well. By using MediaKron's mobile-box annotation feature, for instance, students can explore other effects of positioning, backgrounding, and shading in creating the feeling of realism in works of art. RNJ also experiments with a few real-time feedback exercises wherein, for example, students are asked to imagine the conventions of a particular genre (such as a Western), and then click to see possible ways of answering the questions posed to them about conventions in journalism.

The goal of RNJ, again, is not merely to debunk the authority students

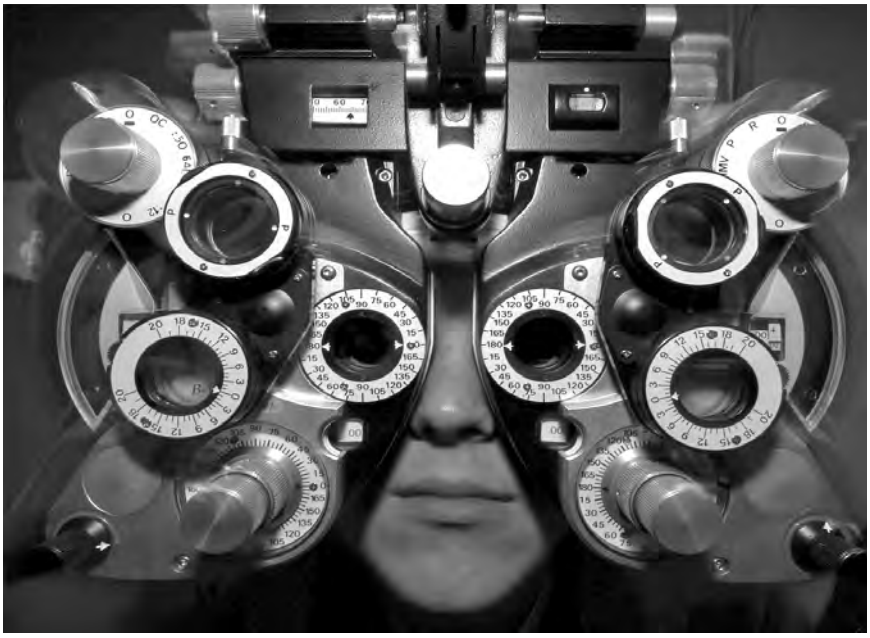
may invest in realism. Rather, as with its analogy of the lens, it is meant to remind them that even if readers assume they can only access a given news story, usually, through the text they may be reading, that is not the same thing as saying the event is not there, nor that one textual lens is simply as good as another. Again, the idea is to encourage students to read in 4-D. That is, to understand that the claim to realism in many works of literary journalism is a claim coming at them in many different dimensions: through the urgency of a given news frame, through the text's orchestration of literary "reality effects," through the journalist's direct witnessing and testimony and legwork, and from certain explicit or implied relationships with subjects (persons) represented in what they read. Furthermore, understanding the conventionality of realism can help students understand what takes place when more experimental forms *depart* from those conventions—as RNJ's final chapters explore.

## A Few Personal Reflections

And what of my own learning curve? What were the limits I discovered in the multimedia approach, beyond the merely technical hassles and glitches one always encounters in digital design; and the endless layers of ignorance I discovered in myself, about responsible digital citizenship, the capacities and limits of VPN networks, learning a new narrative voice more suitable for student reading, and so on? What were the new or renewed questions my first attempt at the digital-multimedia format has led me to face?

Well, for one, it became obvious, over time, that the medium had begun to blur with the message. And I don't mean simply that I have started to incorporate graphic and digital journalism, for instance, into my classes more than in the past. Rather, it was that working in multimedia formats clearly began to influence the way I began to see even traditional print forms of journalistic authority as always already multimodal. Jacob Riis's crosscutting between everyday crime stories, documentary photography, health department statistics, and more, were evidence enough—repackaged, after all, into Riis's slide-lantern shows that eerily anticipated today's virtual reality technology.[14] But even more fundamentally, multimedia design caused me to think about how journalistic narrative was, so often, a mosaic of citations and reenvisioning of others' witnessing, and that reading it was often a matter of sifting through, as it were, "rotating" or alternate grounds of authority (and, in turn, style). You might say that the conventional, more static "picturing" of narrative had begun, in my eyes, to pixilate.

Or, if you prefer an analogy to literary categories, I came in thinking in terms of genres and static conventions; I have come out of the project thinking in modes, mainframes, and even narrative subroutines.



Hospital Corpsman Brian Long, of Sellersville, Pennsylvania, attempts to read a standard eye chart from twenty feet with the help of an Optical Refractor aboard the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy (CV-67). "Geraet beim Optiker," Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Geraet_beim_Optiker.jpg.

I also began to recognize that resorting to multimedia formats had exposed a long-standing limit or contradiction in my own teaching of literary journalism. For instance, I began to wonder *why* I had felt the need to supplement my students' reading of print with mobile, digital stimuli and cognitive remapping: Was not the print text, I now wondered, pleasurable enough on its own? This wasn't simply the customary worry about introducing yet more distracting stimuli into my students' reading lives. Rather, creating RNJ made me realize how much I had myself characteristically defined my pedagogical objectives as unmasking—and thus implicitly discounting—my students' initial pleasures in reading. That is, I had privileged *moving past their pleasure* into seeing the construction of a text, and thus arriving at "critique."[15] As a result of working on RNJ, however, I recognized that I didn't seem to have an adequate *understanding of that pleasure in the first place,* or whether or how I meant to cultivate *appreciation* of the print texts I had always assumed they liked for reasons I (in my arrogance) already thought I knew. Likewise, these contradictions made me realize that I didn't always have a reasonable account of where pleasure sits, as it were, in relation to our/my relentless investigations

of journalistic authority. If I weren't careful, I could subvert my own goals by implying that print journalism was not sufficiently pleasurable on its own. (Or, indeed, by reinforcing the testimony of some millennials who, while reading online, say that "giant blocks of text" are greeted with dread.)[16]

Meanwhile, I also learned that, however reliant RNJ was on the pedagogical strategy of working from print text to the visual mode, I just couldn't really make *everything* visible, at least at this stage. I now began to wonder exactly why, for instance, I had wanted the platform to present videos of journalists being interviewed. At times this tactic suggested to me that I was admitting to my students that sometimes a journalistic intention, or an account of legwork, is in fact *not* always visible within the printed narrative—any more than, say, subjects' experiences always were. (How variously we—and our students—use "subjectivity" is a topic also worthy of much deeper pedagogical thinking than I have space for here.) But perhaps most importantly of all, the rituals of verification behind some texts were also not always as visible as I had been assuming. These habitually and legitimately "slow" processes (to use Susan Greenberg's formulation)[17] are often enacted within a structure of production, yet not always discernable when a text is written up. My students were often simply forced to take my word for it—that such a structure was behind a given work. Institutional norms about truth verification matter to the field, in other words, however much an English professor like me might blather on about "reality effects." However, Kovach and Rosensteil in their *Elements of Journalism* account for objectivity as a process.[18] The often implicit presence of professional standards of verification made me recognize that I needed to think harder about why journalists do so often *cover* their tracks, and in turn, what we do as teachers to *un*cover them. (Journalists often cover up or discount their "literary" strategies as well.)[19] We do a lot of talking about what we say, as teachers, *about* the texts we read; we don't talk so much about what pedagogical strategies we design *around* those texts. Moreover, it has unsurprisingly proven easier to identify the four dimensions RNJ does than to actually get them to interact in a well-coordinated student reading. (Even scrolling on a screen may create an implicit "momentum" of working in one mode of reading rather than another.) And finally, more than anything else, this continuing challenge gets back to keeping me (relatively!) honest, as a teacher—multimedia cross-referencing was one of the ways that I had to work harder to avoid one of the pitfalls of interdisciplinary reading and teaching (and, I think, scholarly debate): using the norms or standards of one discipline to veto or cancel out the readings of another.

**One Final Note**

Which returns me to perhaps the most obvious point—one that I should not have needed multimedia formats or digital dazzle to teach me (again). Of all of the formulations I've come across in learning about digital design, perhaps none is as discomfiting as the habitual definition of "interactivity" as merely a matter of which "view" a given text allows a reader to choose—in this case, a student reader.[20] On the contrary: By far the most effective elements in the site were the classroom exercises and guides I designed (at the urging of anonymous peer review). And they were effective simply because they created more space for the reading practices my students *already* possessed and about which I find I *still* have much more to learn each time I enter a classroom. And so, whatever ways we hope to "wire" our students into the writing that gives us pleasure, pictures our world, testifies to its problems and its people—whatever kind of lens we hope to design—I am myself still grappling with my student's refrain: "What should we read *for*?"

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## Notes

[1] The U.S. Government Accountability Office has reported that, "between 2002 and 2013," the cost of textbooks rose at "nearly three times the inflation rate"; meanwhile, up to two-thirds of students decided against buying a textbook because of cost. Weisbaum, "College Textbooks Costs More Outrageous than Ever," para. 3. See also Redden, "7 in 10 Students Have Skipped Buying a Textbook"; and Perez-Hernandez, "Open Textbooks Could Help Students." These generalizations are restricted to the United States and also to Canada, where these matters have been partly addressed by so-called "Affordable" or "Open" materials initiatives. See, for instance, "Funding boosts the B.C. Open Texbook Project."

[2] For a very thoughtful reflection on the potential role of multimedia in the current digital-news climate, see Ball, "Multimedia, Slow Journalism as Process," 432–44.

[3] See, for instance, Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism," 527–46; Dowling, "Toward a New Aesthetic," 101–16; and Giles and Hitch, "Multimedia Features," 75–91.

[4] Dow, "Reading Otherwise," 119. See also Roberts and Giles, "Mapping Nonfiction Narrative," 100–117.

[5] Wilson, Reading Narrative Journalism. The site is now "publically facing"—online, at no cost.

[6] MediaKron, "An Online Toolkit for Digital Curation and Storytelling," homepage. The platform was created by Tim Lindgren and Brad Mering of Boston College.

[7] To be specific: In RNJ, for example, so-called parallax scrolling is restricted to pop-up marginal annotation, and no hyperlink or video or illustrative exercise automatically interrupts the instructive text. Instead, such elements are merely supplements, and often "hidden" unless the user "hovers over" and clicks on the element with the cursor. The design principle reflects the awareness that interactive media can actually disrupt the immersive experience—and perhaps thwart simple intellectual engagement—an argument that has been cited in studies of digital reading; see, for instance, Dowling, "Toward a New Aesthetic," 106, 108; Giles and Hitch, "Multimedia Features," 76, 86.

[8] Yagoda, *About Town,* 133.

[9] cf. Dowling, "Toward a New Aesthetic," 109.

[10] "Reading" is used here in what may seem a traditional sense—not, for instance, as following eye-movements, or thinking about reading situations, or contrasting reading between and across print forms. My usage is closer to that described by Rita Felski: "In the act of reading, we encounter fresh ways of organizing perception, different patterns and models, rhythms of rapprochement and distancing, relaxation and suspense, movement and hesitation. We give form to our existence . . . ," *The Limits of Critique,* 176. Contrast Marino, "Reading Screens." The emphasis on form and perception is not intended to exclude other reading practices—e.g., contextualization or "resisting" readings (e.g., feminist readings).

[11] By "reading," similarly, Dow seems to suggest that his meaning is, in part,

how scholars typically apply received literary categories and approaches to a text to which they have also granted journalistic status and authority, 119–20. My taxonomy of four different reading modes is therefore meant, in part, to supplement Dow's principal focus by including the field's interests in audience demographics, the production of texts (including reporting and editorial practices), and ethics regarding human subjects.

[12] On this byplay between witnessing and retrospect, see Zelizer, "On 'Having Been There'," 408–28.

[13] Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*. The documentary I typically use is Legere's "Immigrant Reflections: Three Boston College Service Workers Share Their Stories," housed at Boston College. A brief synopsis of a related exercise is posted on the IALJS site, Wilson, "What Do We Mean by 'The Story'? A Workshop."

[14] See Stange, "Jacob Riis and Urban Visual Culture," 274–303, for an exemplary account of Riis's practices.

[15] The place of "critique" in the humanities is, generally, under reexamination of late; see, for instance, the nine-article, special theory and methodology section, in response to Felski's book. *PMLA*, On Rita Felski's *The Limits of Critique*, 331–91.

[16] Marino, "Reading Screens," 147. Here, I am referring to the testimonies gathered in Marino's "Reading Screens." See also, Felski's exploration of equating absorption with naiveté, and emphasizing cognition over pleasure, 176. John Hartsock also writes extensively on the subject of imaginative engagement in reading in *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*.

[17] Greenberg, "Slow Journalism"; and Greenberg, "Slow Journalism in the Digital Fast Lane," 381–93.

[18] Kovach and Rosensteil, *Elements of Journalism*, 72ff.

[19] Paradoxically—and this again was an informing idea in RNJ—"realism" is often a mode defined by this very covering over of work processes and subject relations. For a discussion of how trade reviewing customarily obscures the importance of aesthetics *in* interpretation, see, Wilson, "The Chronicler."

[20] See, for instance, Giles and Hitch, "Multimedia Features," 78.

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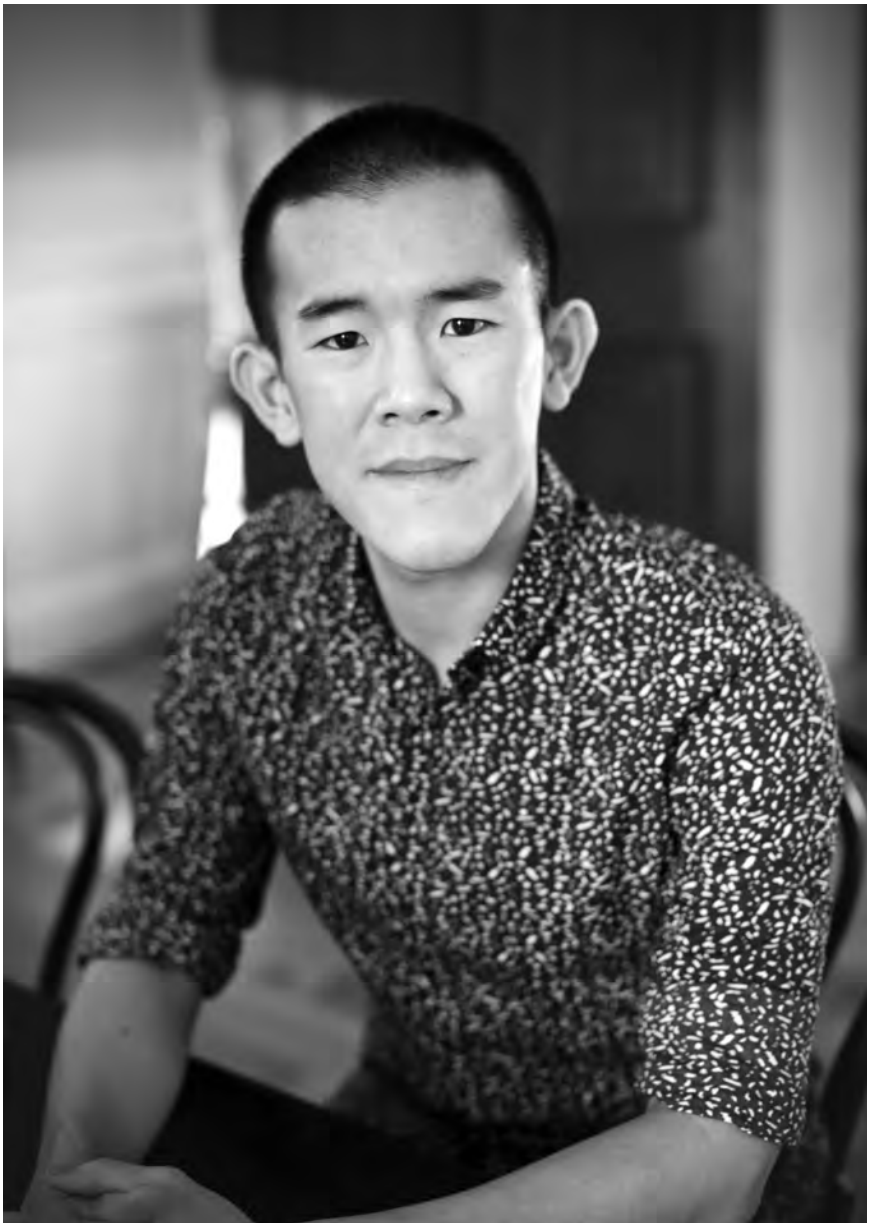

Photo by Kate McQueen

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

## An Interview with Ed Yong

Kate McQueen
Menlo College, United States

**Keywords**: communication – science writing – storytelling – on writing – *Not Exactly Rocket Science*

In the foreword to the inaugural volume of The Best American Science and Nature Writing series, published in 2000,[1] series editor Burkhard Bilger describes in detail the struggle of locating "great" stories for the collection.[2]

"Science writing, in the main," Bilger states, "is still a didactic genre" that "starts with a few mildly diverting sentences and then gets down to business. . . . Most of the time that's all for the best—who wants storytelling when you're trying to understand particle physics?—but it leaves slim pickings for anthologists. Even science bestsellers like *A Brief History of Time* tend to be admired more for their lucidity than for their literary daring."[3]

One of the science-writing subgenres most in need of daring is what Quammen labels "straightforward science reporting"[4]—coverage that aims to deepen public understanding of scientific discovery and research but regularly falls into a superficial cycle of "press release-driven pack journalism," as John Rennie, former editor-in-chief of *Scientific American*, has observed.[5] That progress has been made in the last eighteen years is owed in part to British science journalist Ed Yong, staff writer at the *Atlantic* and author of the 2016 book, *I Contain Multitudes: The Microbes within Us and a Grander View of Life*.[6]

Born in Malaysia in 1981, Yong was raised in London and educated at the University of Cambridge, where he earned a master's degree in zoology. He jumped into science writing in 2006 by way of a blog called *Not Exactly Rocket Science*, which Yong started on a whim, to fulfill an urge to write that

his day job didn't meet. As the title suggests, Yong's blogging style was conversational, humorous, and occasionally irreverent—a delight, in other words, for the curious lay reader. It also found favor with close observers of the field, like Rennie, by treating scientific publications less as isolated news events and more as what Yong has called a "stream of discovery," a narrative-friendly process that emphasizes the accrual of ideas, research trends, and people.[7]

*Not Exactly Rocket Science* was acquired by *Discover* and later *National Geographic* (where Yong shared space with the luminary Carl Zimmer) and accumulated 1,800 posts before Yong retired the site in January 2017, to concentrate on longer articles. These have appeared in *Nature*, *Scientific American*, *New Scientist,* the *Guardian*, the *Times*, the *New York Times*, the *New Yorker*, and last but not least, the *Atlantic*, where Yong became the first staff writer to specialize in science coverage, in 2015.

Yong's approach to science journalism, in particular his use of multimedia storytelling, has garnered science writing awards from the U.S. National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine; the Association of British Science Writers; and the Euroscience Stiftung's European Science Writers Awards, among many others.[8] Story was also a factor in acclaim for Yong's book, a wide-ranging and deeply researched natural history of the microbiome. In addition to synthesizing hundreds of scientific papers, offering on-scene reporting, and contemplating mysteries of the self, "*I Contain Multitudes* has a terrific story to tell," Jonathan Weiner wrote in his *New York Times* review, one that "sweeps from the personal to the planetary; it changes the way you look at human bodies, birds in the air and leaves of grass."[9]

I called Ed Yong in Washington, D.C., on November 29, 2017, and we talked about the challenges of integrating storytelling strategies and other literary craft into science journalism. The conversation was edited for length.

**Kate McQueen:** You've got a science degree under your belt. How did you get interested in writing? Did you start with an interest in doing research and then shift, or were you always interested in pursuing a career in science communication?

**Ed Yong:** I originally had no ambitions to do this at all. I wasn't really a writer of any kind. I didn't do writing at university. I had no journalism training. I did have a science degree, and from there I decided I wanted to go into research. So, I spent a couple of abortive years as a PhD student in a molecular biology lab before realizing that I was catastrophically unsuited to it, in both skills and temperament. And then figured out simultaneously that I really liked the process of explaining science to other people, and that I was much better talking and writing about it than I was actually doing it.

And so, from there I joined a cancer charity as an information officer. I was a spokesperson for news interviews, I worked on public health campaigns, I wrote stuff for our website, and it became clear quite early on that what I really wanted to do was write. I really enjoyed it, I wanted to do more of it, and so I started a blog called *Not Exactly Rocket Science*, which I used as a way of practicing those skills, of proving to myself that this was something that I care about and wanted to do. And as a way of building up a portfolio of work that I could then show to editors, to pitch for freelance stories.

**McQueen:** Can you talk me through the transition from writing for your blog to writing long-form articles and, recently, your book on microbes?

**Yong:** It was a slow process. It didn't happen overnight. At first, I wrote for the blog at about 600–800 words in length for a year and a bit. I slowly made the move to feature articles. I wrote for places like *New Scientist* and *Wired*, and I've written several dozen features now. I don't know the exact number, maybe fifty. After a few years of doing that, I started working on the book, which is by far the longest project I've done. Currently at my work at the *Atlantic*, I specialize in long news pieces, so pieces that have a news peg but tend to weigh in at a 1,200- to 1,400-word count. So definitely not a feature but much longer than a typical news story.

It is challenging to scale up in length. A 2,000-word feature is not just three 800-word blog posts stuck together. And a 100,000-word book is not thirty-three 3,000-word features stuck together. I'm always mindful about structure. I think about it a lot; I make a lot of active decisions about structure as I'm writing. It becomes almost exponentially more complicated the longer the piece of work you're crafting is. It has to be structured well on so many scales. Every sentence needs to flow into the next sentence, the paragraphs need to be cohesive blocks of ideas, each paragraph needs to flow into the next, and so on. You can't just repeat that process if you triple the length and go to a feature. Now you need to think about this new macroscale and how the different sections are flowing into each other. How do you create breaks in the momentum when necessary; how do you create a sense of dynamism?

If we think about a piece of music, if it were just the same note played at the same rhythm all the time, it would just be really boring. Which is why music has phrasing, it has key changes, changes in pace and volume. Really good writing has all of those elements too. You can jump around in time, you can introduce new characters, you can cut away from scenes, you can go from super detailed accounts of a particular experiment to massive, sweeping sections that detail centuries of work in a few short paragraphs. And the juxtapositions of these things—the change in detail, abstraction, time, place—all

of these things over the length of a piece make it come alive. So, that element of it becomes more necessary the longer you get.

**McQueen:** It's interesting that you mentioned music when you think about structure. Even on the sentence level, your writing is anything but dull. Your book, in particular, is full of beautiful word sounds and exciting, sometimes unexpected word choice. I wanted to ask you about other literary craft, such as your approach to using metaphor. Perhaps even more than other genres of journalism, science writing relies heavily on exposition as narration. Science writers spend a huge amount of effort *explaining* things. And beloved science writers are often masters of metaphor and other forms of analogy. How do you approach using metaphor in your work?

**Yong:** Okay, so a few things on all of that. First, language. It means a lot that you said that, because I do think a lot about this too. I care about science and I like it, but I also love language. I love words, and I love playing around with them. I don't think I would still be writing, and I don't think I would be as passionate about what I do if I didn't love the artistic and literary side of it. I love playing around with words. Finding interesting, unusual ways of describing things that go beyond the standard exposition that dominates science news is important to me. The book that I wrote draws on the humanities, from . . . everything from the title to references throughout it. And I care a lot about that. I feel that it doesn't happen enough in science writing. Science communicators spend a lot of time doing the science of pop culture. You get a lot of the science of *Game of Thrones*, or Harry Potter, or Spider-Man. There's less integration of general literature into the mix, and I think that's unfortunate.

Then you asked about metaphor. That's actually something that I've been very heavily, . . . I wouldn't say trained, but that's where my background lies. I've had this conversation with science writers who come from a more traditional journalistic background. We've had conversations where I've said, I find it really fascinating the way you get rich character detail into your stories, how you get these wonderful observational riches about the people you meet, and you're describing these scenes in this really rich way. I was never trained to do that, and it's something I try to work on. But one thing I get from people who have that journalistic training is that they are really fascinated by how science writers use metaphors, the quality of the metaphors they use. And that comes from where our "training" lies. I grew up reading popular science books that were written by people who had science as a background first, rather than literature or journalism. And finding rich, complex metaphors for conveying ideas is just part of the game. It's what people do. And it's that skill that I absorbed just by reading.

**McQueen:** So interesting that you say that. So, you think that your comfort and ability with metaphors has more to do with your exposure to popular science writing done by scientists, and that people with a journalism-first background excel at description at an observational level but are maybe less comfortable with metaphorical thinking?

**Yong:** Yes, maybe. Certainly, it's not an all or nothing. Those two circles have a hefty overlap in the Venn diagram. I think it's a reasonable hypothesis. I'm totally happy putting that out in the world and seeing what people make of it.

I also wanted to say something about the storytelling you mentioned. I agree that a lot of science reporting is quite expository. And not all of it by any means. There are great journalists out there writing about the culture of science and the process of it. Conveying science as a process, as a human endeavor that involves struggles, and successes and failures, and quests, and passion and ego and jealousy, and all of those things—that's really important.

The format that forms the bulk of science coverage is the write-up of a new paper that has just come out, which lends itself more easily towards that expository style. Your standard is going to be: Here is what someone found, description, description, some context, fancy quote, some caveats maybe, the end. There is a lot of that going around, and I don't think there's a problem with that. It's just not really the type of writing that I enjoy reading or the type of writing that I like to write. So, I have gradually over the last several years moved toward using more feature sensibilities and techniques in stories. Often what I will do with a news story is almost write it as if it were a short feature, with a narrative lead and a more feature-like structure instead of the traditional inverted pyramid. I might still use [the latter] if the subject is, for instance, very complicated, where it might affect people's health decisions or their reactions to health-related stories, and you want to get the top line up front so it's very clear what you're talking about.

But for the vast majority of stories, I want to get in the heads of people who do the work. Often, they have amazing stories to tell, and this is a really good way of getting people who are not interested in science to read a piece about something they would otherwise never have touched. I just published a piece, literally two hours ago, on hummingbirds. It was really fun. If it had just been a piece that said, here is how hummingbird tongues work and had straight exposition about these [scientific] papers, I don't think it would have done that well. And as it is, while we were speaking, that piece is the seventh most popular thing on the *Atlantic*'s website.[10] And I think it's because it's as much about the people as it is about the birds. It's about [University of Connecticut Professor Margaret Rubega], who said, "Huh, I don't think this

makes any sense, how can I work out what's going on." And it's about this student who fell in love with hummingbirds and found a way to film them. It's about the process of discovery.

**McQueen:** How about the balance of putting story and research into a piece?

**Yong:** You can do entire pieces about scientists and only vaguely hint at what work they do. I don't think a piece is harmed by not including a ton of expository stuff. It depends on your goals for the piece. I wrote a piece last week about the mental health of researchers who study coral reefs and how they're faring in an age when coral reefs are in jeopardy.[11] You have to explain some of the science of coral reefs for people who don't understand why they are dying out, but that's maybe two or three paragraphs, and that's fine. That was the goal and intention of the piece. But these things can work really well together, and they are not an either/or. My partner, Liz Neeley, who runs the Story Collider, says that these things are often synergistic.[12] And if you're to persuade people, if you're trying to convince them, then a combination of emotions and facts, of stories and information, is incredibly powerful. I don't think you sacrifice one for the other. The hummingbird piece goes deep into the weeds about how the tongue works, but it doesn't lead with that. If you're going for super details, kind of wonky things, you need to earn the right to tell people that. You need to work for their attention, and you need to get them to a point where they're like, okay, I'm sold, I trust you to keep telling me interesting things even if it is the mechanics of a hummingbird tongue, which before I would have thought, meh, I'm not really sure I want to read about that.

**McQueen:** I'm wondering about your experience writing for publications on both sides of the Atlantic [Ocean]. Do you have to adjust your style of writing depending on your audience? Or take cultural framework into consideration for the content you want to address?

**Yong:** Not really, because I've always written for the internet. It's dominated by America no matter where you are. There [are] probably going to be some good data out there about cultural difference perceptions of science. But I don't know enough about it off the top of my head.

**McQueen:** And in terms of how you frame your stories, the use of storytelling strategies in science, for example, do you feel like those are pretty much universally embraced and enjoyed by readers no matter where they're from?

**Yong:** Certainly Western readers, I am pretty comfortable saying that. And just more broadly, different cultures may have different attitudes toward structure, but stories feel like a universal thing. They tap into aspects of the human condition and experience that are broadly felt: Our struggle to do

better. Our desire to learn more. How we cope with failure, how we push ourselves. All of these things are a part of science and a part of science stories.

**McQueen:** Have you experienced pushback from the scientific community for taking a more literary or creative approach to science writing?

**Yong:** Yes, for sure. I do a pretty good job of ensuring that work is accurate. I haven't had any complaints about that. In terms of the storytelling approach, you see it all the time. There is definitely a significant portion of scientists who just want the science and think that the human-interest story somehow distracts from it. In my talks recently, I've started showing people one of my one-star Amazon reviews from my book, where someone goes into this at great length and bemoans the lack of seriousness in the book, and how there need to be more charts and tables and lists and figures. And that all these feelings and emotions are distracting from the science. I think that's just a very sad and perverse way of looking at the world. The idea that science is equated with complexity, and lists and tables and charts, and seriousness, and that feelings and emotions are somehow antithetical to it, is just so deeply and sadly wrong. Science is done by people. There are feelings and emotions that drive the scientific endeavor in the first place. To think of science as just a set of results, or just a set of papers, is laughable. It's like saying all there is to know about food is contained in recipes.

I also think that there is this common trope in science communication that you use the human element to sneak the science in. You hook people on the feelings and emotions and then you use that to get them interested in science. Well sort of, but not really. It's not a trick—I'm not hoodwinking people by trying to lure them under false pretenses and then hitting them with the science. To me, the human feelings and emotions are the science. They are an inextricable part of the science story. They are a part that is left out of most publications, but they are so, so important. This goes back to what I said earlier about literary and narrative storytelling and expository writing about science: They don't have to be in counterpoint. They are in fact happy bedfellows. It's not that you have to use one to get people interested in the other. You put them together because collectively they give you a version of science as a total human experience.

**McQueen:** I feel like your work falls comfortably into that "Third Culture" space between scientific and literary culture. If I could single in on just one quick example: The title of your book borrows from Walt Whitman's poem "Song of Myself": "I am large, I contain multitudes." How did you come to choose it?

**Yong:** I wish I had a better story for this, but that was always just the title. It kind of sprang fully formed from my head, partly because it so beautifully

conveys the central concept of the book, and it's from a reasonably well-known Whitman poem. And I did specifically want to do that to signpost to people that this is not going to be a typical, stiff, science-y read. I am aiming for a lyricism in the prose, and yanking the title off Whitman feels like it hints toward this.

And the subtitle: We actually had a hell of a time trying to figure out what the subtitle was. The basic brief was that I really wanted to convey the sense of changing people's views of the world around them. And since the title didn't do this job, the subtitle had to mention microbes somewhere. I think it was my U.S. editor, Hillary Rudman, who wrote the subtitle. We were batting some ideas back and forth and I was getting jaded and frustrated, and she said, well what about the microbes within us and a grander view of life. And I said that's perfect. Let's go with that.

That [last] bit actually is a Darwin reference. In the end of *Origin of the Species* he imagines a tangled bank and he talked about all the organism's living within a riverbank, evolving and living with each other, and he has this wonderful quote that "there is grandeur in this view of life."[13] The subtitle is not a direct quote of that but it plays off it, and people who know Darwin and know that quote will appreciate that. If the title is a subtle wink at poetry nerds, the subtitle is a subtle wink at evolutionary biology nerds.

**McQueen:** Stephan Jay Gould's *Natural History* column This View of Life also popped into my head. I always like Gould's column title because of the way it seems to make room for viewpoint, or a subjectivity even, which neither science nor journalism always readily wants to do.

**Yong:** Yes, maybe. Certainly as journalists we are trained to be objective and keep ourselves out of it. That doesn't mean that you can't use your own expertise or speak from a position of authority. But there is a difference between doing that and laying out your own opinion on matters. That being said, you don't have to do that to change people's views. You can just offer them a new view, and that's what my book does. It says, here is a different way of looking at the world around you. Readers can take the lead from there.

**McQueen:** How do you feel about the creation of personality or subjectivity in science writing? Do you often take a first-person approach in your writing?

**Yong:** Sometimes. It's there in the book. I'm present in several scenes, usually as a foil. I'm usually being dumb or dorky for failing to spot something. I'm like the hapless novice who is leading readers who also feel that way into this field. I try to keep myself out of pieces unless I feel there is real value in me being there. If I'm part of a scene, or there is part of a dialogue between me and an interviewee, or something like that, then sure. But, you

know, the world is already full of self-aggrandizing journalists, and I don't feel like I need to add to that population.

**McQueen:** You gave a really moving talk about the risk of personality in science communication for Story Collider, the storytelling platform that bills itself as "true, personal stories about science." It was called "Questioning a Hero," about Sir David Attenborough.[14] Could you tell us a little bit about this piece and why you came to write it?

**Yong:** The science communication field, and maybe the science community generally, has an unhealthy tendency to deify and overly adulate particular people. And I don't want to name any names but all the obvious ones, all the big names in science communication. And I just don't think that kind of hero worship is healthy or helpful. I certainly don't want it for myself. I think it leads to bad work. You want people to judge you based on the quality of your work, and once you start playing the fame game, people start judging your work based on who they think you are, or what they've heard about you, or whether they like you. And that's just bad. It breaks the feedback cycle. In general, the science community has a bad track record in idolizing people who are arrogant or smug or make some of the mistakes I've talked about, like not understanding the social context of science.

Attenborough, I am not necessarily lumping him in that category. I'm mainly wanting to say that here is someone whose work I loved, and who I deemed infallible for a long time, and clearly he's not, because no one is, but even the fact that I had to have that realization is an issue and one that we need to talk about.

**McQueen:** Apropos of fame, you've been praised as "the future of science news." I'm wondering what you think the future of science communication holds? And what tools and techniques do you find will be particularly effective for reaching emerging general audiences?

**Yong:** Much is said about this. People are always looking for the big new thing. A new social network comes out, and people jump on that. Is Quora the way to get people excited about science? Or is Twitter, or maybe it's Facebook, or maybe we need to pivot to video. People are always looking for something new—a new platform, a new publication, a new way of doing things. There is a lot of reinvention of the wheel. Fundamentally the future of science writing and communication will be exactly how it's been for the last several decades and even centuries. You just need to be very good at what you do. Learning the art of telling stories, of crafting narrative, of using metaphors and harnessing language, all of these things are the same, whether you're using short form or long form, whether you're writing a tweet or a feature, or you're doing a radio interview or appearing on TV, or any

of that. You need to know the basics and you need to know the craft. And that's what people often forget. How to explain something well, how to tell a good science story, hasn't changed in the last hundred years. Technology and platforms warp around us, but those fundamentals stay the same. And that's what people need to focus on.

**McQueen:** If I could end with one last question: What authors do you look to for inspiration?

**Yong:** I listed four of them in the book. And they're not the only ones, by any means, but they are four whose work meant a lot to me. Kathryn Schulz, a Pulitzer-prize winner at the *New Yorker*, wrote a book called *Being Wrong*, which was incredible. David Quammen wrote *Song of the Dodo*, which I read early on in my writing. Helen Macdonald's *H Is for Hawk*, I also read pretty early. And David George Haskell's *The Forest Unseen*, which was massively influential, and his latest book, *The Songs of Trees*, is also a superb piece of work.[15] All these people have very different writing styles, and they're all incredibly strong in different ways. I could go on and on; there are so many great writers out there.

**McQueen:** Thank you so much for your time.

**Yong:** Thank you for your interest. It's been great.

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## Notes

[1] Quammen, ed., *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*, series edited by Bilger.

[2] Bilger, foreword to *Best American Science and Nature Writing 2000*, ix.

[3] Bilger, x; see Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*.

[4] Quammen, "Introduction: The Vine-Tree," xvii.

[5] Rennie, "Why Ed Yong Is the Future of Science News," para. 1; see also Rennie, "Time for a Change in Science Journalism?"

[6] Yong, *I Contain Multitudes.*

[7] Sample, quoting Yong, in "Stem Cells Research Highs and Lows," para. 8.

[8] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, "Communication Awards"; Euroscience Stiftung: European Science Writers Award 2016. Yong also won the best newcomer award from the Association of British Science Writers in 2010.

[9] Weiner, "Human Cells," para. 4.

[10] Yong, "Hummingbirds Are Where Intuition Goes to Die."

[11] Yong, "How Coral Researchers Are Coping."

[12] The Story Collider is a storytelling project organized around "true, personal stories about science." Stories are told live in onstage events and in podcast form, available on the project's website.

[13] Darwin, *On the Origin of the Species*, 490.

[14] Yong, "Questioning a Hero."

[15] Schulz, *Being Wrong*; Quammen, *The Song of the Dodo*; Macdonald, *H Is for Hawk*; Haskell, *The Forest Unseen*; Haskell, *The Songs of Trees*.

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— Compiled by Kate McQueen

# *Book Reviews . . .*

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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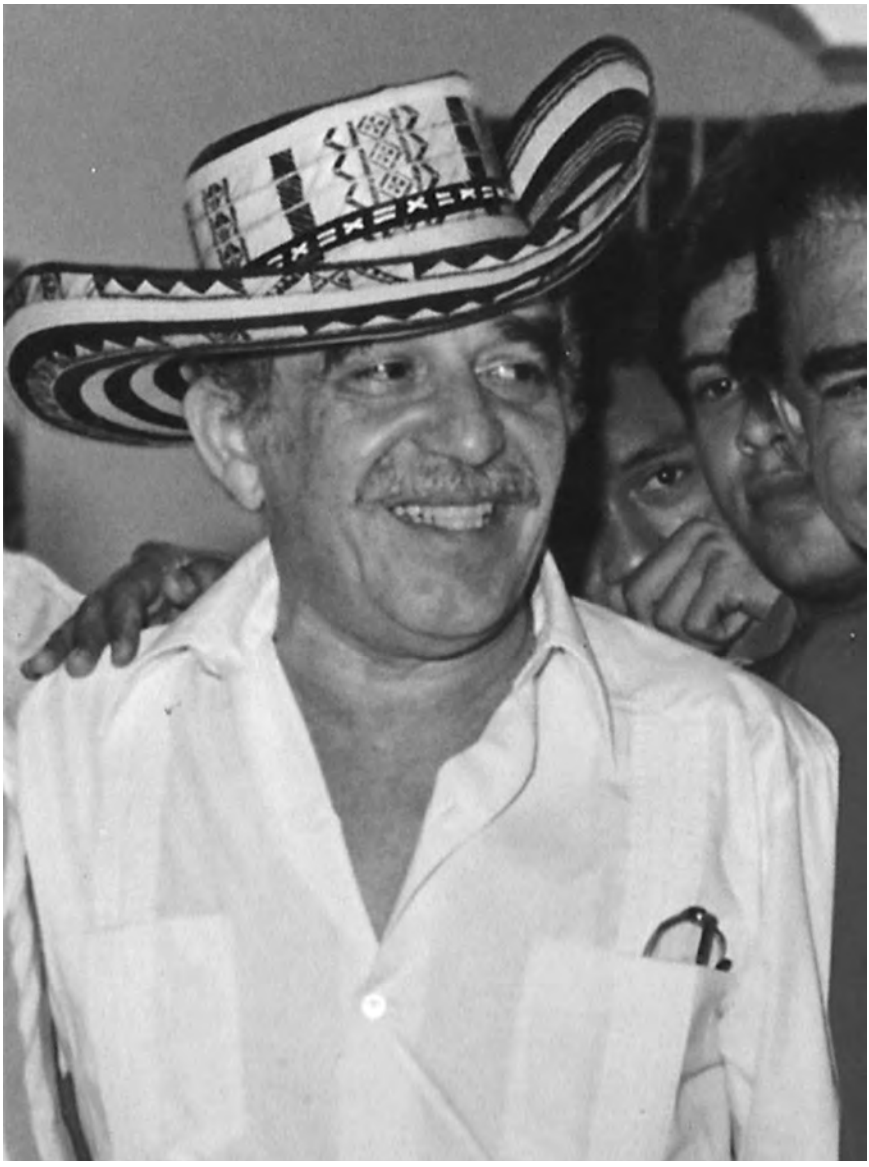


Gabriel Gárcia Márquez, 1984. Courtesy Wikimedia Creative Commons, F3rn4nd0, edited by Mangostar.

# Gabriel García Márquez's Three Nonfiction Books: A Trilogy on Fear and Resilience

Roberto Herrscher
Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Chile

Works Discussed:

*The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*. New York: Vintage, 1989. Paperback, 128 pp., USD$13.95

*Clandestine in Chile: The Adventures of Miguel Littín.* New York: NYRB Classics, 2010. Paperback, 160 pp., USD$14

*News of a Kidnapping*. New York: Vintage, 2008. Paperback, 304 pp., USD$15.95

The novelist and Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) is one of the most widely read and admired authors of the twentieth century. His novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, written in 1967 when he was thirty-nine years old, is the most translated work of fiction in the Spanish language. What few people outside of Latin America know is how much his style, his stories, and even his invention of his "magical realism" are based on his career and perennial vocation as a journalist.

Unlike other world-famous fiction writers, such as Ernest Hemingway, Orhan Pamuk, or García Márquez's old friend and colleague Mario Vargas Llosa, who considered their reporter days as a step in their development as novelists, García Márquez never abandoned reportage as a form nor nonfiction as a fertile ground for his ambitious creations. He never ceased to create and dream of new magazines; and the foundation that carries his message and bears his name, the Gabriel García Márquez New Ibero-American Journalism Foundation (FNPI),[1] which he founded in 1994 and led until his death, is a child of love and labor dedicated to the development of journalism in his language.

In 2012, two years before his death, when the FNPI published an important anthology of his literary journalism, the first words, taken from a radio interview, are the master storyteller's self-definition: "First and foremost, I am a journalist. I have been a journalist throughout my life. My books are books by a journalist, even if not many realize this. But these books have a mass of investigation, fact-checking and historic rigor, of faithfulness to the facts, which make them fictionalized or fantasized reportage. The method of research and management of data are those of a journalist."[2]

The vast body of García Márquez's journalism is collected in four chronologically organized volumes—*Textos costeños* (*Caribbean Texts*); *Entre cachacos* (*In Bogotá*); *De Europa y América* (*Between Europe and the Americas*); and *Por la libre* (*Free Roads*) or *Caribbean Texts* (*Textos costeños*); *In Bogotá* (*Entre cachacos*); *Between Europe and the Americas* (*De Europa y América*); and *Free Roads* (*Por la libre*)[3]—that follow his life and career moves. However, he published only three narrative nonfiction books in his lifetime: *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (*Relato de un náufrago*), a series originally published in the daily *El Espectador* in 1955 and collected as a book in Barcelona in 1970[4]; *Clandestine in Chile* (*La Aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile*), published in 1986[5]; and *News of a Kidnapping* (*Noticia de un secuestro*), published in 1996,[6] fourteen years after García Márquez had been awarded the Nobel Prize.

To return to reporting, interviewing, and writing nonfiction was a strange choice for the famous novelist. By the 1990s, García Márquez was so famous and so sought after that he could no longer walk freely the streets of Bogotá or Medellín, watch people go their own way without being noticed, or enter any building without becoming the center of attention. These were the conditions under which he wrote *News of a Kidnapping*, which he considered a debt he owed to the reporter he had been when he didn't have enough time to think, read, interview, write, and rewrite.

All three books deal with one character or a handful of characters who, almost from start to finish, are on the brink of being killed and need to gather courage, energy, attention, and resourcefulness they did not know they had. Each of these books is a focused exercise in exploring the immersion of a victim in the stages of danger, desperation, and release. And all are told from the exclusive viewpoint of that character "on the run."

In the late eighties, I had the experience of interviewing a "character" from one of these books: Grazia Francescato was an Italian filmmaker who posed as the director of a fake documentary in *Clandestine in Chile*. She later became an environmental activist. When I interviewed her, Francescato gave me a glimpse of what it meant and how it felt to be interviewed by García Márquez for one of his nonfiction books: The experience was grueling. He wanted to know absolutely every detail she could remember, every garment Miguel Littín, the main character, and everybody else was wearing, every word that was spoken, and what she felt at every moment.

With the mountain of details, forms, colors, words, and tiny anecdotes, he wrote a kind of nonfiction book that was very unusual at that time in Latin America. The method, the style, and the narrative voice of *Clandestine in Chile* would end up being the same as those he had employed in the surprising success of his first journalistic book.

## The Voice of a Novelist for the Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor

In 1955, as García Márquez tells in his memoir, he was commissioned by his editor at *El Espectador* to comply with an almost impossible task: to tell the story of a young Navy officer who had fallen from the brand new frigate his crew was bringing from Mobile, Alabama, to the Caribbean coast of Colombia. The other sailors who had fallen overboard drowned quickly but Lt. Luis Alejandro Velasco managed

to survive alone on a raft with no food and almost no water for ten days, until he reached a beach and was rescued. He had already given dozens of interviews for newspapers, radio, and the new medium of television. His story was, as *El Espectador* owner and editor Guillermo Cano said, "rotten meat."[7] But García Márquez saw Velasco's story as the material for a series, with a new chapter published every day in the morning paper. The story of the sailor would be told in the first-person voice, as in an adventure novel.

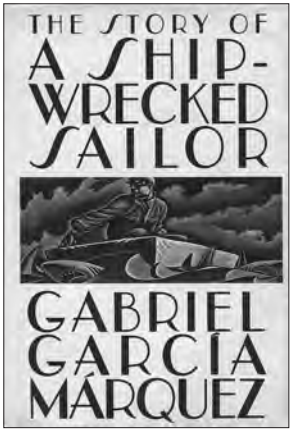
And Velasco became the interviewee that every narrative journalist dreams of finding: "He turned out to reveal himself as an intelligent man, with an unforgettable sensitivity, politeness and sense of humor." The author then adds: "It was like strolling along a garden full of flowers with the supreme freedom to pick the ones I preferred."[8]

The two men met every afternoon: Velasco told his story and García Márquez taught him how to do it. "The first days were difficult because he wanted to tell everything at the same time. But he soon learned through the order and scope of my questions and due to his own natural instinct as a storyteller and his congenial ease to understand the craft."[9]

It seems as if García Márquez transformed the shipwrecked sailor into a journalist of his own story, a partner and ally in the joint task. They had agreed to work on fourteen chapters but due to the series' success (*El Espectador* sold more copies the days the serial was included), Cano told his reporter to extend it to fifty. Finally, they settled for twenty.

There is much to praise in the lean masterpiece: the way in which the secondary characters are presented (García Márquez wanted his narrator to focus his Mobile recollections on the sailors who later died in the sea), the trauma of suffering from acute thirst while surrounded by water, the drop of blood that falls in the sea and brings a school of sharks, the lonely starry nights. There are traces of the avid reader who had marked his copies of *Moby-Dick* or *Robinson Crusoe*. One of my favorite moments is the night in which he spotted the horizon with "a hard, rebellious patience" dreaming of approaching airplanes.[10]

> Suddenly the sky became red and I continued to scrutinize the horizon. It later became dark violet and I kept on looking. At one side of the raft, like a yellow diamond, the sky turned the color of wine and the first star appeared. It was like a signal. Soon after that, the night, tense and tight, fell over the sea.[11]




The *Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* definitely reads much more like the language and metaphors of one of García Márquez's novels than anything the lieutenant could have said. It is an interpretation of what the man saw and felt, but in a language completely alien to what he would have actually said. The book's publication destroyed Velasco's career and sent García Márquez into an exile that turned out to be permanent. Aiming to write what happened with grit and

precision, García Márquez's series had revealed the real cause of the crisis. There was no terrible storm the day the men fell overboard; rather, the Navy destroyer *Caldas* carried so much contraband from the United States that a simple wind caused the tragedy. This story of the shipwrecked sailor closes what García Márquez had originally planned as the first volume of his memoirs but turned out to be the only one he wrote.

Fifteen years after the original series was published, a Barcelona editor[12] convinced García Márquez to turn the series into a book. It is still one of his most widely read volumes. Long after the corruption and contraband case became an issue only for historians, and in the face of other more recent shipwrecks with many more victims and survivors who spent much more time lost at sea, García Márquez's reportage is still widely read at schools all over Latin America and admired by the public at large for its literary merits. It is still one of the best books dealing with the human theme of one man's combat with the elements, comparable for Spanish language readers to Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*.

**From Sharks to Pinochet's Police**

Among the group of left-wing intellectuals from all over Latin America that García Márquez found in Mexico City after he returned from Europe in the 1980s, the Chilean filmmaker Miguel Littín had a mad, almost suicidal plan: Ten years after the beginning of General Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, Littín wanted to return to his native land to film the dire conditions of the poor, the oppressed, and the revolutionary activists surviving in the shadows of a bloody regime. When Littín came back, García Márquez interviewed him almost nonstop for a week, amassing eighteen hours of tape (unlike in 1955, this time García Márquez recorded his "victim's" story).


With a pointed context for the human rights and social situation in Chile, and interviews with other members of the team—such as Grazia Francescato—the author published *Clandestine in Chile*, a first-person narrative that reads much like the story of the shipwrecked sailor: The voice of Miguel Littín tells his adventure from start to finish. From the moment he enters his home country, from which he had been banned since he left after the coup and where he would probably be tortured and "disappeared" were he discovered, every page is full of fear, nervousness, resilience, and the will to accomplish his mission and survive.

Like Velasco, Littín's senses are constantly alert lest he miss the sign that can save his life. The details are a vital narrative tool: They lead the reader to feel the constant tension and danger the character is in. And as was true of his sailor, García Márquez found in Littín a genial and memorable interviewee.

But it is a flawed book, because it tries to copy the success of another one. Even the ever-admiring biographer Gerald Martin finds *Clandestine in Chile* hastily written and showing signs of authorial exhaustion.[13]

García Márquez had been looking for some time for an interviewee with a story as gripping as that of the shipwrecked sailor, who could tell it as vividly and with as many details. And a couple of ideas almost became such a book: In his memoir *Vivir para contarla* (*Living to Tell the Tale*), the writer says that he and his editor had considered the first-person narrative of the most famous cyclist of his time, Ramón Hoyos; and the story of an engineer and treasure hunter who was sure he could find the gold hidden by the liberator of half of South America, Simón Bolívar, under the city of Bogotá.[14]

Bolívar, who haunted the author for decades, finally became the subject of his historic novel, *The General in His Labyrinth*. But the novel did not include the story of his mad treasure hunter, who could only work as nonfiction, or so says García Márquez in his recollection of events. At that time, even if they tried, "it was not possible to find a story such as [the sailor's], because it was not one that can be invented on paper. Life invents them, usually the hard way."[15] But in 1985, thirty years later, he finally found his man.

*Clandestine in Chile* reads like a political thriller, not as a classic tale of human resilience like the story of the shipwrecked sailor but rather as a battle of wits with the forces of dictatorship, as in a John le Carré novel. García Márquez felt vindicated and proud when Pinochet's dictatorship ordered a heap of his books burned at the port of Valparaíso when they arrived in the country. He had composed a dangerous book.

Littín was a fine character for such a thriller. Since he was banned from Chile and faced prison (at least) if he returned, Littín had to invent a name, another nationality, a disguise, an accent, a beard, and a rich businessman's gait to enter his country. So he posed as a Uruguayan producer of a documentary on Chilean classical architecture and went undetected by the secret police. He traveled along the long, narrow territory and on various occasions he faced imminent danger: He entered the presidential palace and met with incognito guerilla leaders. At an especially dramatic moment, in a street full of policemen, he spotted his mother-in-law: She did not recognize him.

In the introduction to the book, García Márquez explains that he preferred to "tell the story in the first person, just like Littín told it to me, trying to preserve the personal, sometimes confidential, tone, without easy dramatizations or historical pretentiousness. The style of the final text is mine, of course, because the voice of a writer is not interchangeable . . . . However, I have tried to keep the Chilean way of speaking and respect at all times the ideas of the narrator, which are not always the same as my own."[16]

But, unlike the sailor, Littín is in his own merit a storyteller. He produced fiction films, such as the acclaimed social neorealist movie, *El chacal de Nahueltoro*, about a brutalized laborer condemned and executed for a murder, and *Alsino y el cóndor*, during his stay in Nicaragua after he fled Chile. He is also the author of two novels. I read one of them, *El viajero de las cuatro estaciones* (*The Traveler of Four Seasons*). It is verbose and prolific in adjective, and the voice sounds nothing like that of the char-

acter that bears his name in García Márquez's book. In fact, the Littín of *Clandestine in Chile* speaks with the typical combination of poetic prose and economy of means that one recognizes immediately as that of García Márquez.

## In the Grip of Pablo Escobar

In 1996, a decade after *Clandestine in Chile*, García Márquez decided there was something else he needed to write as nonfiction: the true story of the kidnappings by the notorious Pablo Escobar.

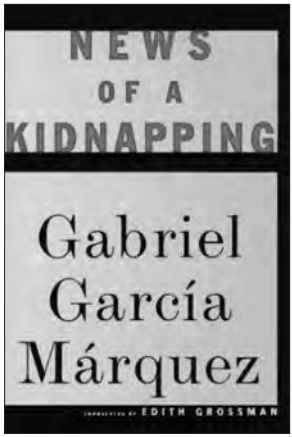
David Brindlay summarized the plot in a review published shortly after the book's release in English: "On a secluded ranch dotted with African wildlife, a Colombian drug lord orchestrates the abduction of 10 leading journalists and political figures. The drug lord, Pablo Escobar, declares that he will release these hostages only if he is tried for narcotics crimes in his native land and not extradited to the United States for trial. 'Better a grave in Colombia,' he avows, 'than a jail in the United States.' The Colombian government at first refuses to bend. After two of the prisoners are murdered, though, the government bars Escobar's extradition, and the remaining hostages are released."[17]

This time it was not one but a handful of desperate characters in the hands of drug cartel hit men. The kidnapped ones who survived told the story to the most famous novelist of his time turned into a reporter once again. They had spent months looking, listening, smelling, intensely, remembering all they could in order to be able to react to the constant and imminent danger they to which they were subjected. Instead of the sharks of the Caribbean or Pinochet's secret police, it was Escobar's henchmen.

Ten citizens, several of them prominent journalists, politicians, and intellectuals, were kidnapped in 1990. Two were killed, and most of the others, especially Maruja Pachón, Beatriz Villamizar, and Francisco Santos, told García Márquez their experiences, together with those of their relatives and the television journalist Diana Turbay, who was killed. In his use of the third-person voice to tell the story from the viewpoint of these characters, García Márquez uses a style akin to what John Hersey accomplished in *Hiroshima*.

Ángel Díaz Arenas argues that, since the characters are many and the place and time of the events keep changing (they were kidnapped separately and were moved from one safe house to another during their captivity), the structure of this book is far more complex than the previous ones.[18] But I believe it is the same style of approach to a story of historical importance: through the experience and the memory of one or a few endangered victims. There is no debate as to which is the viewpoint the readers are invited to identify with. None of the hostages is the main leader or antagonist of the big historic battle, and all go through serious physical and psychological stress.

This nonfiction story starts with the kidnapping of Maruja Pachón and Beatriz Villamizar. They are the main voices in the narrative, and the reader follows their road of despair and hope and the formidable fight of Maruja's husband and Beatriz's brother Alberto Villamizar to secure their release, which led Villamizar to confront both Pablo Escobar and the president.




But even if the precision and poetic metaphors in García Márquez's prose show the parallels between these, his three nonfiction books, and his revered novels, as the veteran reporter he always described himself to be, he refrained from including scenes and dialogue for which he had no evidence. There is a precise moment in *News of a Kidnapping* that shows this to great dramatic effect.

At the end of chapter five, Beatriz and Maruja are told that their companion in captivity, Marina Montoya, would be released. They suspected the outcome could be tragically different. Escobar needed a strong punch on the table because his negotiations with the state not to be extradited to the United States were leading nowhere and Marina had little negotiation value. She was desperate, and she had been in captivity for more than a year. When she tried to take a pill her friends offered, she could not find her own mouth. From Maruja and Beatriz's testimony, García Márquez tells the last moments they saw her:

> Marina turned to the guards without a tear. They turned the hood around, with the openings for the eyes and mouth at the back of her head so she could not see anything. The Monk [one of the guards] took both her hands and led her out of the house, walking backward. Marina followed with unfaltering steps. The other guard locked the door from the outside.
>
> Maruja and Beatriz stood motionless in front of the closed door, not knowing how to take up their lives again, until they heard the engines in the garage and then the sound fading away in the distance. Only then did they realize the television and radio had been taken away to keep them from knowing how the night would end.[19]

These are the last words of chapter five. And these are the first of chapter six: "At dawn the next day, Thursday, January 24, the body of Marina Montoya was found in an empty lot north of Bogotá. Almost sitting upright in grass still damp from an early rain, she was leaning against the barbed-wire fence with her arms extended."[20]

If this were fiction, in between these scenes, of course, García Márquez the novelist would have told his readers the dramatic moment of her murder: how they chose the place, what she said, what they did. But there are no witnesses to tell the reporter, no evidence. Thus, in these choices, García Márquez sticks to his commitment to tell what he knows and nothing more, and readers are reminded they are in front of true events, and the hole in the story between the last moment the victim was seen by her friends and the moment her body was found is like a shouting silence.

Why did García Márquez choose these subjects and people for his journalistic books? He knew and befriended many powerful men. He was close to both Fidel Castro and Bill Clinton, and he was a witness and protagonist of many key events in history. Unlike the New Journalism masters of his own generation (Truman Capote,

Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, Gay Talese, Tom Wolfe), he did not write his most ambitious nonfiction books about the powerful and the famous he so well knew.

Instead, García Márquez decided that the only three nonfiction books he approved to be published as such, are those which span four decades, the entire length of his literary career, and would follow, respectively, a few days or months in the lives of the sailor Alejandro Velasco; the filmmaker Miguel Littín; and a group of Colombian politicians, journalists, and their aides, in their fight for survival.

I believe these people were all, in their own ways, his eyes and ears and beating heart in the scenes they lived. They were excellent memoirists and narrators of their own adventures, but it was their special circumstances (the fear, trembling, and almost supernatural will to survive) that expanded their powers of observation and allowed the creator of magic realism to craft memorable true stories based on their experiences.

The study of these not widely known aspects of García Márquez's work opens various roads to scholarly enquiry. One is the comparison and cross-pollination of the fiction and nonfiction works of writers who published in both genres, in Spanish, English, and other languages. An excellent example of this is Pablo Calvi's PhD dissertation on Latin American *crónica* and American New Journalism.[21]

Another topic of inquiry could be the roots, styles, and legacy of *testimonio*, a fertile genre used in Latin American literary journalism in the 1960s and 1970s by authors such as Elena Poniatowska,[22] Miguel Barnet,[23] and Roque Dalton.[24] The first two books by García Márquez analyzed here certainly adhere to this genre, which closely resembles the theater monologue. They use the first-person narrative of their main character, or a succession of first-person anecdotes or recollections similar to the uses of oral history, in a vein and style similar similar to the now recognized style of Nobel Prize winner Svetlana Alexievich, none of whose works these Latin American authors had read.

A third field of interest could be linked to the journalistic production of García Márquez himself: Why did he refrain from writing nonfiction about the most obvious characters—the real-life dictators and revolutionary leaders of his day that he knew better than any other reporter—choosing instead an indirect approach to political tragedies through secondary characters. A comparative study could place this strategy next to that of Polish literary journalist Ryszard Kapuściński, with whose books García Márquez once said his own had much in common.[25] Kapuściński also wrote about great leaders through the eyes and stories of their servants, followers, or victims, and also uses their first-person narratives in books such as *The Emperor* and *Shah of Shahs*.[26]

## Notes

[1] FNPI. Gabriel García Márquez New Ibero-American Journalism Foundation (FNPI). Accessed November 8, 2018. http://fnpi.org/es/node/4459.

[2] García Márquez, as quoted in FNPI, *Gabo Periodista*, vi. These words are the book's first, and are the master storyteller's self-definition, taken from an interview by Daríó Arizmendi on Caracol Radio, Bogotá, broadcast on May 30–31, 1991 (translation mine).

[3] Title translations mine.

[4] García Márquez, *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (*Relato de un náufrago*).

[5] García Márquez, *Clandestine in Chile* (*La aventura de Miguel Littín, clandestine en Chile*).

[6] García Márquez, *News of a Kidnapping* (*Noticia de un secuestro*).

[7] García Márquez, *Vivir para contarla* (*Living to Tell the Tale*), 651–75 (translation mine).

[8] García Márquez.

[9] García Márquez.

[10] García Márquez.

[11] García Márquez.

[12] Beatriz de Moura (editor and co-owner of the Tusquets publishing house), in discussion with author, 2006. She said (as she had written before) that at the beginning García Márquez was reluctant to publish his series as a book. He thought the proposal was due to the fact that he was a famous novelist as well. *Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* later sold more than ten million copies.

[13] Martin, *Gabriel García Márquez: A Life*, 526.

[14] García Márquez, *Vivir para contarla*.

[15] García Márquez.

16 García Márquez, *La Aventura de Miguel Littín clandestino en Chile* [*Clandestine in Chile*], 9 (translation mine).

[17] Brindley, Review of *News of a Kidnapping*, 104.

[18] Díaz Arenas: *Reflexiones en torno a Noticia de un secuestro* (Reflections on *News of a Kidnapping*).

[19] García Márquez, 125.

[20] García Márquez, 126.

[21] Calvi, "The Parrot and the Cannon."

[22] Elena Poniatowska, *La noche de Tlatelolco*.

[23] Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón*.

[24] Dalton, *Miguel Mármol*.

[25] García Márquez said this when he presented Kapuściński at a FNPI workshop in Mexico City in March 2001. I tell this story in my book *Periodismo narrativo*.

[26] Kapuściński, *The Emperor*; Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs*.

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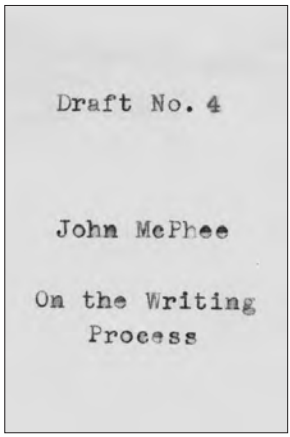
# A Master Class in Nonfiction Writing

*Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process*
by John McPhee. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017. Graphics. Hardcover, 192 pp., USD$25.

Reviewed by Peggy Dillon, Salem State University, United States




Nonfiction writer John McPhee has authored thirty-two published books and won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for General Nonfiction for *Annals of the Former World*. He started his journalism career in 1957 at *Time* magazine, has been a staff writer at the *New Yorker* since 1965, and has taught his creative nonfiction course to some 500 Princeton University students since 1975. *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process* distills the essence of his writer's craft into a pithy 192 pages.

The book contains a wellspring of advice on how to be a better reporter, writer, and note-taker. It also intersperses excerpts from McPhee's six-decade-long body of work on subjects as disparate as oranges, geology, tennis, and canoes. Adding color are anecdotes about his reporting process that range from the prosaic (scribbling notes in the passenger seat of a pickup truck) to the prominent (interviewing the actor Richard Burton on a British movie set).

The book's title is based on one of eight *New Yorker* essays on the writing process that comprise the book, together with "Progression," "Structure," "Editor & Publisher," "Elicitation," "Frame of Reference," "Checkpoints," and "Omission." *Draft No. 4* refers to his favorite stage in the writing process: when he makes small but satisfying final adjustments to pieces.

Among the book's many strengths is its encouraging tone. For aspiring writers, McPhee says, early interests and experiences will help inform their decisions later as writers. He realized at one point that the majority of the subjects he had written about were those he'd been interested in prior to college. His growing up, summertime canoe trips and ecology classes at summer camp provided scaffolding for his later books about Alaska's Brooks Range and running the rapids through the Grand Canyon. During his early years, he admits, he had "no idea that I was building the shells of future pieces of writing" (7).

McPhee is refreshingly self-effacing. He admits to being "shy to the point of dread" (12), wrestling with writer's block, and being fretful, neurotic, and unconfident when working with *New Yorker* editor William Shawn on the 1965 article "A Sense of Where You Are," a profile of Princeton basketball player Bill Bradley that later became McPhee's first book. Even now, he's a little wobbly when starting a new

project. "It doesn't matter that something you've done before worked out well," he writes. "Your last piece is never going to write your next one for you" (19).

*Draft No. 4* offers many useful nuggets of advice: Write a lead first, "before you go at the big pile of raw material and sort it into a structure" (49). Create a story structure that is "simple, straightforward, invisible" (58). Take care in crafting a title, "an integral part of a piece of writing" (73). Young writers should experiment to find out what kind of writers they are: "It is so easy to misjudge yourself and get stuck in the wrong genre. You avoid that, early on, by writing in every genre" (79). When selecting what to include or exclude in an article, "If something interests you, it goes in—if not, it stays out" (180). He has found a consistent ratio of four to one in the time it takes to write a first draft compared to combined subsequent drafts, noting that "the essence of the [writing] process is revision" (160). Take notes constantly—he has done so while hiking up and down trails—and obviously: "From the start, make clear what you are doing and who will publish what you write. Display your notebook as if it were a fishing license" (92). About interviewing and getting information: "I have no technique for asking questions. I just stay there and fade away as I watch people do what they do" (99). Most importantly, *never* make things up: "Is it wrong to alter a fact in order to improve the rhythm of your prose? I know so, and so do you. If you do that, you are by definition not writing nonfiction" (104).

McPhee embraces an organic approach to coming up with topics. "Ideas are where you find them," he writes, and "new pieces can shoot up from other pieces, pursuing connections that run through the ground like rhizomes" (11). Once a writer has an idea for a project: "You begin with a subject, gather material, and work your way to structure from there. You pile up volumes of notes and then figure out what you are going to do with them, not the other way around" (4). When selecting information for his articles, he decides which details are collectively essential: "I include what interests me and exclude what doesn't interest me. That may be a crude tool but it's the only one I have" (56–57).

To say that McPhee takes full-immersion reporting seriously is an understatement. For his book *The Pine Barrens*, he spent eight months interviewing forest rangers, botanists, and other subjects, reading books and scientific papers, and camping on site. To organize the prodigious information he amasses, he painstakingly structures his work. While a chronological format usually prevails, sometimes a thematic approach wins out. His basic rule for structures is that "they should not be imposed upon the material. They should arise from within it" (34).

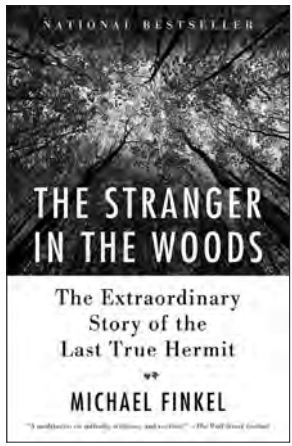
The section on structure—which at forty-five pages forms almost a quarter of the book—is informative but also gets bogged down in detail. He describes his early methods of using three-by-five-inch cards containing key words, typing out handwritten notes, transcribing interviews from microcassettes, and cutting a typed copy of his draft into slivers that he organized and worked on one at a time. Since 1984, he has used custom-written computer programs that help sort and text-edit his work. But the section's charts depicting organizational structures, ranging from strings of numerals to arrows on circles, sometimes read like graphic organizers run amok.

Overall, though, *Draft No. 4* is an excellent guide for writers at all levels of their career, from tentative college students to seasoned journalists.

# A Life of Not Being Noticed

*The Stranger in the Woods: The Extraordinary Story of the Last True Hermit*
by Michael Finkel. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. Paperback/Hardcover, 203 pp., USD$25.95.

Reviewed by Mark Marchand, State University of New York, Albany, United States




The concept of being alone, intentionally separated from the rest of the noisy, distracting world to either find one's self or to simply experience solitude, has for centuries captured the imagination of poets, writers, and the general public. How wonderful it might be, some say, to sever our connections to our crazy world and reflect upon our lives—in silence.

It's not a desire forced upon us by our overly connected digital world. Thoreau wrote of his mid-1800s experience at Walden Pond, "I feel it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (1939, 141).

Some of our most noted explorers in the early twentieth century weren't content to rest on the adoration of a world dazzled by their discoveries. Famed North Pole and Antarctic explorer Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd, for example, returned to Antarctica in 1936 to spend four harrowing months living by himself in a tiny shack. In his popular 1938 book, *Alone*, he recounted, "Here were the imponderable processes and forces of the cosmos, harmonious and soundless. Harmony, that was it! That was what came out of the silence—a gentle rhythm, the strain of a perfect chord, the music of the spheres, perhaps" (85).

These and other situations described in literature have dealt mostly with temporary expeditions into seclusion. What if someone in our modern times chose to live *all* or most of life in isolation, and told us the story so creatively that we wanted to meet that person and ask "Why?" Author Michael Finkel—who has previously given us *Alpine Circus* and *True Story, Murder Memoir and Mea Culpa* (made into a movie in 2015, and drawing in part on his own dismissal in 2002 from the *New York Times* for submitting a composite character and telling his editors it was a real individual)—has provided a detailed look at such a person, his experience, and a glimpse into why he did it.

In the *Stranger in the Woods: The Extraordinary Story of the Last True Hermit*, Finkel blends the journalist's eye with the storyteller's craft to bring us inside the true story of Christopher Knight. This quiet young adult abandoned a life with his family at age twenty to live by himself in the woods of Maine for twenty-seven years.

It's a tale that would challenge even the most inventive of fiction writers, but Finkel manages to immerse himself into Knight's mind and the world around him to meticulously gather the elements of an almost unbelievable story. This is no time-worn account of the soldier who emerges from the woods after months of hiding, blinking in bright sunlight only to discover his country has already lost the war. Indeed, Knight's story—largely due to the way Finkel tells it—leaves the reader wondering why many have never heard about Knight's feat at a time in history when almost nothing and no one escapes notice.

As a veteran journalist, Finkel might have been tempted to build a more traditional chronological narrative. He might have focused on Knight's early life, building up to his shocking decision to flee into the woods near Albion, Maine, and then telling the hermit's story of life in isolation. Finkel does give us a brief glimpse of Knight's routine in the first chapter, taking us along on one of his secretive, regular treks from his hidden camp—"He bounds from rock to rock without a bootprint left behind"—to nearby homes to forage for food (3).

"It [the area where Knight's camp sits] has a name, Little Pond, often called Little North Pond, though the hermit doesn't know it," Finkel writes. "He's stripped the world to his essentials, and proper names are not essential. He knows the season, intimately, its every gradation" (4).

"He knows the moon, a sliver less than half tonight, waning. Typically, he'd await the new moon—darker is better—but his hunger had become critical. He knows the hour and minute. He's wearing an old windup watch to ensure that he budgets enough time to return before daybreak. He doesn't know, at least not without calculating, the year or the decade" (4).

After telling us about the discovery of a "smorgasbord" (6) at a summer camp closed for the season, Finkel diverts from the journalist's narrative to take us into the decades-long law enforcement search for what many assumed to be some sort of loner repeatedly breaking and entering for food and supplies. It's spring 2013 as the story accelerates, and Sergeant Terry Hughes is finally successful, snaring Knight in the middle of the night after sensors planted in a camp reveal that the burglar is active. It is here that the complex, serpentine life of the forty-seven-year-old hermit slowly reveals itself during interviews with police and, eventually, Finkel. After a pre-dawn interrogation during which officers conclude Knight is who he says is he is, courtesy of a 1984 high school yearbook, Knight slowly begins to divulge more of his story. "It's not long before dawn now; the darkness has crested," Finkel writes. Another officer, Diane Vance, knows Knight "will soon be swallowed by the legal system, and perhaps never speak freely again. She'd like an explanation—why leave the rest of the world behind?—but Knight says he can't give her a definitive reason" (21).

The officers learn that Knight feels he never got sick because he didn't have any contact with other humans, and he only encountered one person, a hiker strolling through the woods. Knight had said "Hi" (22).

"Other than that single syllable, he insists, he had not spoken with or touched another human being, until this evening, for twenty-seven years," Finkel concludes (22).

Months after the modern hermit's arrest and incarceration, Finkel sets out to find the hermit's camp. It's a struggle, due to Knight's painstaking efforts to conceal his home from nearby waterways, paths . . . and civilization. After finally locating the well-lived-in camp on the forest floor, Finkel explores the site and learns how Knight handled daily chores, such as going to the bathroom, washing clothes, and collecting drinking water from rain. Finkel sets up his own tent and spends the night, seeking to experience what his subject felt as the only real clock slid beneath the horizon.

"Night fell fast," Finkel writes. "Frogs cleared their throats; cicadas whirred like table saws. A woodpecker hammered for grubs. At last came the call of the loons, the theme song of the North Woods, pealing like a laugh or cry, depending on your mood. A car crunched over a dirt road, a dog barked. For a while people could be heard talking, though their words were too muffled to make out" (65).

It is in describing this nightfall in Knight's former home that Finkel begins to excel in drawing his reader into the hermit's world. He finally falls asleep that first night. When he awakens, he discovers one of the reasons Knight lived in the woods. "A volley of birdcalls greeted the morning," he reports. "I unzipped my tent. There was mist in the treetops; spider webs shone cat's cradle in the dew. Leaves dropped lazily. Autumn was coming, and the air smelled like sap. I turned on my phone and realized I'd rested for twelve hours, my longest sleep in years" (66).

Throughout the rest of the book, Finkel employs a similarly keen observer's eye, melded with expressive prose to tell Knight's story. As the tale draws to a close and as Knight battles to adapt to a world with cell phones and the internet, Finkel struggles to understand why someone might decide to abandon society and live alone. In addition to interviewing Knight, he talks with a number of academic and medical experts on the topic. They help shed some light, but in the end Knight's reasoning remains mostly elusive.

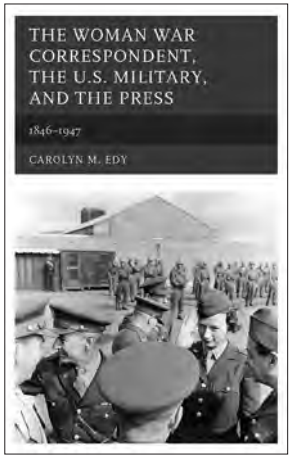
Finkel muses over what would have happened if Officer Hughes hadn't been so dedicated, and Knight had never been caught and lived his entire life in the woods, eventually dying and allowing the forest to reclaim him and his campsite. "It's the ending, I believe, that Knight planned. He wasn't going to leave behind a single recorded thought, not a photo, not an idea. No person would know of his experience. Nothing would ever be written about him. He would simply vanish, and no one on this teeming planet would notice. His end wouldn't create so much as a ripple on North Pond. It would have been an existence, a life, of utter perfection" (190–91).

Thanks to Finkel's book, we do know something about Knight's life.

# Stripping Away the Women's Angle

*The Woman War Correspondent, the U.S. Military, and the Press 1846–1947*
by Carolyn M. Edy. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. Hardcover, 175 pages, USD$80.

Reviewed by Brian Gabrial, Concordia University, Canada




Carolyn Edy's thoroughly researched press history, *The Woman War Correspondent, The U.S. Military, and the Press*, reminds readers that covering America's wars was never just a man's game. Tracing the work female journalists did in the nineteenth century through World War II, Edy shows how they fought gender battles on three major fronts: the military who didn't want them there, a profession that demanded they act like men, and the wartime United States that expected them to act like women. Still, these journalists persevered, overcoming military resistance while balancing social norms expected of them and their professional ambitions.

Edy spells out the book's objective: "to provide a history of the women whom the U.S. government accredited as war correspondents, while exploring the construction, by the press, the public, and the military, of the category of 'woman war correspondent' and the concept of a woman's angle of war . . ." (2). On the whole, she succeeds, while making an important distinction between "the war correspondent" and "the woman war correspondent," noting that the former wrote "primarily for and about men" and the latter "primarily for and about women" (119). Yet, these two were hardly comrades in arms. The war correspondent "resented 'women war correspondents' not only because these women competed for facilities, stories, and access, but because the attention they drew was capable of influencing the public's perception of 'war correspondent'—as not necessarily a man's job" (121).

The nine chapters cover much ground, highlighting the names of journalists such as Jane Cazneau, who wrote about the Mexican-American War for the *New York Sun*, and Susette LaFlesche, an Omaha Indian who reported on the tragic outcomes of America's war against the Upper Plains Indians. However, its major thrust focuses on World War II and the women who tried to report it by begging and cajoling military officials to let them do their jobs. Even with permission, the work came with strict instructions to stick to the "woman's angle," which meant filing stories about "sanitation, medical care, rations, clothing, and supplies, as well as conditions for civilians" (27).

Early on, the fact that a newspaper would send a woman to report on war often

made news itself, causing consternation among male reporters. One Canadian journalist, quoting himself and his colleagues, exclaimed, about Kit Watkins who was in Cuba covering the Spanish-American War for the *Toronto Mail*: "A lady war correspondent! We looked at one another in doubt and indignation. After all, we said, there were limits to the sphere of woman's usefulness" (27). By World War II, as Edy notes, the novelty of the woman war correspondent was wearing off, and the military came to see the value of good reporting whether it was done by a man or a woman.

While all war reporters dealt with heavy government censorship and restrictions, especially on the front lines, women faced almost impossible odds of getting necessary credentials. The excuses from the military often rested on sexist rationales such as women needing special "facilities" because of their menstrual cycles, for example. As AP reporter Ruth Cowan aptly noted, the military always "trotted out" this excuse "when they wanted to discourage women war correspondents" (89).

As for Cowan, her story stands out in the book. She received the plum, top-secret assignment to report on the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) during "Operation Torch" (70), the Allied plan to invade North Africa. She could not tell her editor, who thought she was heading to England:

> "But Mr. Evans, suppose, just suppose, the ship doesn't go to England.'
>
> Mr. Evans smiled reassuringly.
>
> "Of course, you are going to England. You don't think the war department is sending WAACs to to North Africa, do you? They're fighting down there." (69)

She revealed nothing, recalling, "My first allegiance, my first loyalty, to whom did it belong? The AP or my country" (70).

In North Africa, she encountered another enemy, a hostile fellow reporter named Wes Gallagher, who, according to Cowan, constantly undermined her. Even her own boss at AP dismissed Cowan's complaints as coming from a "high-strung woman correspondent" (72). Yet, Cowan would be praised for her tireless reporting on the "woman's angle" from North Africa with one commander noting, "She wrote a flock of home town stories, just the right tales for mothers and relatives who want to know about those important facts of living, which most male reporters never see" (76).

As the book illustrates, not every woman war correspondent shared similar experiences. These were often determined by nationality (the French did not restrict their female journalists) or the military commander in charge. (General Dwight Eisenhower seemed sympathetic to these professionals.) Serious practical matters, such as potential sexual assault, also impeded them. Reporter Helen Kirkpatrick recalled, "If you have a whole bunch of men who have been in the army cut off from women and you put some young girl in their midst, this can cause certain problems" (110). About the restrictions placed on her, Kirkpatrick said they often had more to do with unhappy military officials who didn't like what she reported and less about her gender. She received the Medal of Freedom for her journalism.

Despite these women's bravery and diligence, they failed to pave the way for future women in journalism, according to Edy. In fact, it was expected that they give up reporting and return to their homes and families at war's end. This makes the book

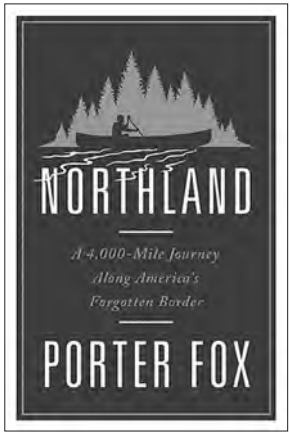
a valuable addition to press history, and, as Edy notes, it should "help future scholars consider the impact that these correspondents' milestones, setbacks, and writings might have had on the profession of journalism as a whole or on women's perceptions of themselves, or even how these women might have influenced how men perceived themselves, their work, and the women around them" (10).

For the literary journalism scholar, the book contributes in another way, by containing superb appendices that are troves, full of new names to know and citations pointing to new writings that might warrant further consideration as part of literary journalism's expanding canon. One citation, for example, may lead a literary journalism scholar to mine war reporter Iris Carpenter's "Four Red Cross Girls Thumb Way into Paris" for its literary qualities (113n2). Elsewhere, the scholar might look at Appendix 1 and find that Cora Howorth Taylor Crane managed to be both a war reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and a brothel owner (137.13). What might have been her "woman's angle" covering the Greco-Turkish War? Another reporter, Teresa Pattern Howard Dean, went from covering Wounded Knee's aftermath to China to cover the Boxer Rebellion (136.8). What would have been her "women's angle"? With this book as a resource, the scholar might find that once the gendered label "women's angle" is stripped away, what remains is literary journalism.

# Vignettes from Traveling the Northern Boundary

*Northland: A 4,000-Mile Journey along America's Forgotten Border*
by Porter Fox. New York: W. W. Norton, 2018. Maps. Hardcover, 272 pp., USD$26.95.

Reviewed by Mark Neuzil, University of St. Thomas, United States




In his new travel memoir, author Peter Fox turns the current political narrative about U.S. borders on its head. Instead of mucking around the U.S.-Mexico line with the many other ambitious journalists out there, he journeys north.

Fox moves by canoe, car, lake freighter, and shoe leather over the course of a three-year period that more or less covers the 4,000 miles between Maine and Washington state. Like the fine writer he is, Fox mixes modern characters and events with historical persons and details about the territory.

This is not one of those travel books, such as Robert Byron's excellent *The Road to Oxiana* (1937), in which the author covers the entire ground in one long, arduous journey, battling dangers seen and unseen through virgin territory, deserts, mountains, bandits, floods, etc.

Rather, Fox's book is divided into five parts, which play out east to west, and he does not attempt to traverse the entire distance all at once, or in total, nor does he even stick exactly to the border if events do not warrant it. He starts in his native Maine, which provides a setting for some of the book's most evocative details as he covers the Maine-New Brunswick edge via the St. Croix River. Characters such as Patrick, a former DJ and now lodge owner, wear a "northland business suit—duck pants, suspenders, flannel, wraparound sunglasses" (48).

Fox then skips west a bit and hops on a freighter called the *Algoma Equinox* in Montreal for Part 2, sailing through the Great Lakes to Minnesota via Lake Superior. He continues his fascination with what folks wear. "It was interesting to watch people gazing at the ship. I wasn't sure what solace it would give onlookers to know that the three men driving it were wearing Crocs and sweatshirts and laughing hysterically about their in-laws. That is not to say the *Equinox* crew is not highly professional. They are. It's just that enough time on the water makes people a little kooky" (77).

Part 3 covers the Minnesota-Ontario border, the region with which I am most familiar. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Canada's Quetico Provincial Park make up some of the wildest places left in and near the lower forty-eight

states. Here is where Fox joins with the veteran Arctic explorer Paul Schurke and his wife, Susan, and tries to keep up on a canoe outing. (Full disclosure: Schurke is a friend.) Next covered is the geographers' mistake known as the Northwest Angle—Angle Inlet, pop. 119—"a 120-square-mile chunk of America floating in southwestern Ontario" (138).

Part 4 examines the Dakota Access Pipeline conflict and the Standing Rock protest camp (the camp itself being a few hundred miles south of the border). This section is where Fox's journalistic chops come into play. The pipeline protests have been in the news, off and on, for some time, so his difficulty is telling the audience something they do not already know. Scene-setting and character development accomplish that goal. "There was a feeling in the air that the protest had morphed into something larger. Things were not good on American reservations. Of the 4.5 million people from 565 federally recognized tribes in the US, 30 percent lived in poverty. Alcoholism and mortality rates were 500 percent higher than for the rest of America" (155). On his way out, Fox passed through the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument: "There were no gravestones for Indians. A single monument to them had been installed 120 years after the battle" (177).

Fox is at his best when he meets the locals and gets a bit of understanding from them. The final section of the book is the "medicine line" of the forty-ninth parallel that cuts from North Dakota to Washington state. The Standing Rock theme continues, as Fox runs into a Blackfoot man at a campground desk who worked on siting the pipeline. "I couldn't tell people what I did," the man said (199). Across Idaho, the reader is almost expecting the appearance of a white supremacist, a survivalist, a militia man, or some combination of the three. Sure enough, a militia man shows up in Coeur d'Alene. The detail the man shares with Fox is illuminating.

Fox's book is in the mode of a classic travel piece—it would not be considered literary journalism under most definitions because it lacks the style and structure of most fiction. And perhaps there are no larger lessons passed on in *Northland*, and maybe that is the point. Is it proper to think of a 4,000-mile-long border—or any border—as a single unit? So, as Fox has done, it is seen as a series of smaller stories set within a historical context, each with its own characters, experts, and narratives. As a result, the reader is rewarded with vignettes of the whole and left to think about the rest, including other borders where the societal conversation has turned much more intense, partisan, and divisive.

# 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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