

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? [*Uh-hh . . .*] 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 [SBP]or) 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 States⁵; Edvaldo Pereira Lima and Monica Martinez in Brazil⁶; Sonja Merljak Zdovc in Slovenia⁷; Myriam Boucharenc and Marie-Ève Thérénty in France⁸; Isabelle Meuret and Paul Aron in Belgium⁹; Lluís Albert Chillón in Spain¹⁰; Charles A. Laughlin in China¹¹; Isabel Soares and Manuel João de Carvalho Coutinho in Portugal¹²; 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 benefited 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 non-fiction, 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.