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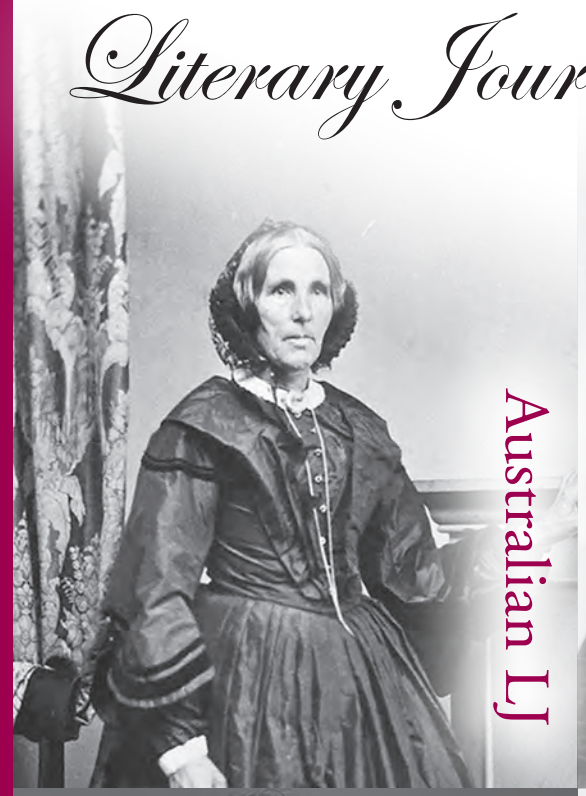

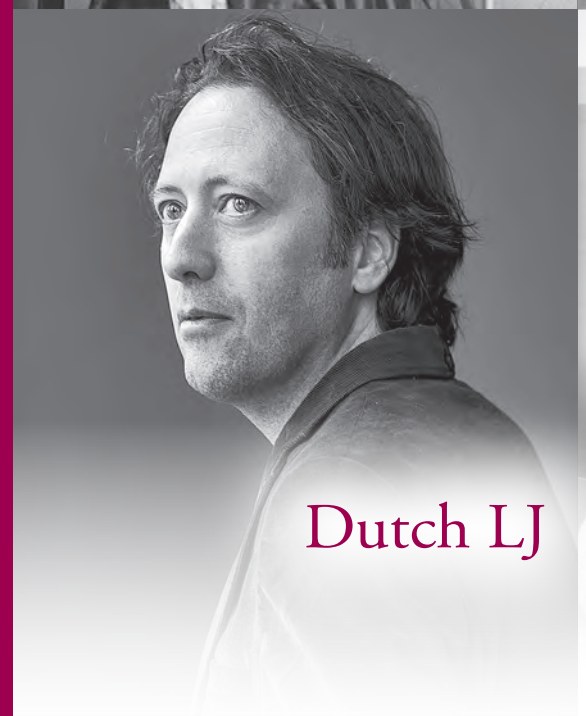

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Literary Journalism Studies

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SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

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

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BOOK REVIEWS are invited. They should be 1,000–2,000 words and focus on the scholarship of literary journalism and recent original works of literary journalism that deserve greater recognition among scholars. Book reviews are not blind reviewed but selected by the book review editor based on merit. Reviewers may suggest book review prospects or write the book review editor for suggestions. Usually reviewers will be responsible for obtaining their respective books. Book reviews and/or related queries should be sent to Nancy L. Roberts at <nroberts@albany.edu>

Note from the Editor . . .

For some time now (alas), I have been tinkering with a hybrid theory. It is one that would combine elements of phenomenology, as laid out by Husserl originally and then modified by Sartre and others, with the methods we might normally associate with practitioners of literary journalism. By methods I am not necessarily referring to the literary elements frequently used, elements which tend to differentiate the reporting involved in building long narratives—scene building, capturing dialogue, switching points of views, and recording significant details that relay character—from news reporting.

No, I am referring more to the way in which the material is gathered, to the particular ways literary journalists go about their business. There is the extended time involved in the creation of a work of literary journalism. There is the doubling back and pursuance of deeper meanings. There are the successive, wave-like passes at building the story, swooping from bird's eye view to street level, and back. And there is the open admission at the beginning that the literary journalist does not know much about the subject—yet—and might do well to keep those eyes wide open.

As well, the path of the story might be usefully obscured if the literary journalist decided in advance not to know what the story is, to remain in the dark for as long as possible while in the field gathering information, to better weigh the various realities on offer. Husserl's *epoché*, or reduction, had more to do with suspending judgments of the kind we make without reflection, which at that point in time, in the early twentieth century, I think meant trying to bracket the scientific discoveries we tend to accept without question. Instead, the task was to look at the world as it is and describe it that way. I'm not sure how successful anyone could make the *epoché*. Sartre pointed out that you cannot keep peeling away layers of reality in the search for the "real" reality because, if you achieved success, you would end up with nothing. Your consciousness would be empty, a null. Sartre thought this was impossible because all we have is our consciousness. No consciousness, no us.

What I liked about this idea is how it could play out for the literary journalist. If the theory of withholding judgment could only go so far before it collapsed, this actually works to the advantage of the literary journalist. However much we admire how literary journalists work—the deep research, the evaluation of possible realities, the search for a true answer—eventually

we want them to take a stand. They are the ones on the frontlines, they are the ones who have done the hanging-out time, and they are the ones we want to read. Reality is something we want filtered through their consciousness, knowing full well that this "lifeworld," in Husserl's formulation, is not a static place. Things change. But the reality the literary journalist presents is reality as she sees it at this point in the continuum. Think about reading Didion, for instance, and how reality is necessarily and overtly processed through and by her own consciousness as expressed via her honed style. This is exactly why we read her work when it was published, and why we continue to read it even though the lifeworld has moved on.

Australia, Byelorussia, Netherlands, United Kingdom

This issue, we offer four excellent research essays. James Rodgers discusses two of Svetlana Alexievich's works, *Boys in Zinc* and *Chernobyl Prayer*, with a view to studying not only how her methods differ from everyday journalistic practice, but also how through textual analysis of her work we can better understand the disconcerting post-Soviet era.

Willa McDonald and Bunty Avieson inform us of an impressive project that they, along with Kerrie Davies, have undertaken, the Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism Database. This low-overhead repository of early Australian literary journalism is meant to be memory-based and informative, removing the dominant political spine that informs so many archive projects.

Hilde Van Belle brings to wider attention the strange rise and fall—and rise again—of Joris van Casteren, one of the highest ranked literary journalists in the Netherlands. Van Casteren became a sensation in 2008 when his memoir of growing up in a planned/invented city, *Lelystad*, was published. His reputation grew quickly until, poof, three years later he was pilloried for his memoir of a girlfriend and their love affair gone wrong. He has since achieved, and in 2019 now enjoys, "well-respected author" status. Van Belle teases out the implications for literary journalism of van Casteren's roller-coaster ride.

And David Dowling elucidates the frustrating and sorry tale of Marilynne Robinson's *Mother Country*, a nonfiction book that, when published in 1989, seemed destined to become the *Silent Spring* of Great Britain's nuclear industry. Instead of naturally increasing in influence and notoriety over the decades, Robinson's tour de force was attacked and successfully sued by Greenpeace, of all organizations.

In addition to these fine essays we present Matthew Ricketson's keynote address to IALJS-14 at Stony Brook, New York, last May, which focuses on the ethical issues that crop up in doing book-length literary journalism.

— Bill Reynolds

Svetlana Alexievich during her lecture "Writing as a Monument to Suffering and Courage," in Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University, Kyiv, April 6, 2016. Sergento, Wikimedia Commons.

Making Space for a New Picture of the World: *Boys in Zinc* and *Chernobyl Prayer* by Svetlana Alexievich

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Abstract: Based on a study of *Boys in Zinc* and *Chernobyl Prayer*, two books by the Nobel Laureate Svetlana Alexievich, the core argument for this analysis is that Alexievich's writing represents an approach designed to capture that which eludes more conventional journalism. The study seeks first to situate the subjects of Alexievich's work in the wider historical context of the media at the end of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and also to argue that her writing is part of a uniquely Russian concept of journalism as literature—a concept that has its historical roots in the autocratic Russia of the nineteenth century. The examination further proposes that conflicts between the preternatural and the material, and between elite and nonelite voices—key themes of the works studied—are vital to understanding the age of change that Alexievich, through her use of extensive interviews, was seeking to record. The analysis emphasizes the importance of the Soviet experience in World War II as an influence on the Soviet Union for the remainder of its existence. While acknowledging certain criticisms and questions about her presentation of the material, the study posits that Alexievich's work casts valuable light on the nature of journalism in the last years of the Soviet era and concludes by arguing that her work represents a way to understand new and bewildering times.

Keywords: Alexievich – Soviet Union – journalism – Chernobyl – Afghanistan

"They've confiscated the past. I don't have any past. Or any belief . . . How can I live?" the former civilian employee of the Soviet armed forces in Afghanistan asks in Svetlana Alexievich's *Boys in Zinc*.[1] The shattering Soviet experience of the campaign of "international duty"[2] in Afghanistan coincided with a time when the mighty monolith of Marxism-Leninism was itself creaking under the pressures of change. The Soviet Union would last only two years after the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan. Upon their return, the troops found themselves misunderstood and occasionally even mocked. One artilleryman complains of a young cousin who "sneers" at his medals, and remembers that "at his age, my heart used to skip a beat when my granddad put on his red-letter-day jacket with his ribbons and medals. While we were fighting out there the world changed."[3]

The world that Alexievich describes is one in which everything was changing. That which was valued before, that which was trusted, was disappearing. A sense of insecurity, of having been deceived, runs through the stories of all those she interviews. Alexievich's contributors (the literary nature of her work might make the case for the word "characters" here, but Alexievich's literary approach has its roots in reporting) witness the end of a country, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which they had always been told—and, in many cases, believed—was the greatest on earth. In the case of the nuclear disaster, the subject of *Chernobyl Prayer*, the second of Alexievich's works studied, the Soviet Union not only ceases to exist politically, but part of it ceases physically, too: the nuclear power station itself, and the villages in the area closest to it.

First published in Russian, the book's title, *Чернобыльская молитва*, translates as *Chernobyl Prayer*. However, the book has also been translated and published in English with the title, *Voices from Chernobyl*.[4] Alexievich took on the task of telling these stories and those of the military and other personnel who joined, or were forced into, the Soviet Union's military adventure in Afghanistan and the Chernobyl debacle, all at a time when the Soviet/Russian media environment was changing with bewildering speed, too.

The core argument of this analysis is that Alexievich's work represents an approach designed to capture that which may elude more conventional journalism. It seeks first is to situate the subjects of Alexievich's work in the wider historical context of the media at the end of the Soviet Union. The analysis argues that her writing is part of a particularly Russian concept of journalism as literature—a concept that has its historical roots in the autocratic Russia of the nineteenth century. While acknowledging certain criticisms and questioning of Alexievich's presentation of her material, this analysis also argues that Alexievich is establishing new foundations for public

debate in order to make sense, it must be emphasized, of a new and strange world in Russia at the time. The approach she takes includes writing about and acknowledging the growing influence of renascent religion, and even the outright embracing of dubious superstition in the attempt to understand the troubling changes underway. It draws on the Soviet mythology of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) as a means of describing and understanding the disasters of the age. The technique is to employ old, familiar stories and journalistic methods in new ways. "Content ruptures form,"[5] as the author herself put it. The purpose is to understand new and bewildering times.

Russian Media Systems in Transition

After becoming general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev embarked on his program of *perestroika* (reconstruction). A central plank of this was *glasnost* (openness), in effect, unprecedented license to speak frankly in public about failings of the Soviet system. Yet the next few years led not to the reinvigoration of the Marxist-Leninist system—as Gorbachev had intended—but to its demise. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. At the outset, though, *perestroika* was intended as "a return to a modernised version of several major strands in the Soviet past," as R. W. Davies has described it. "On this basis, Gorbachev argued, the 'socialist choice' made in 1917 would be reaffirmed and renewed."[6] To help him get his message across, Gorbachev enlisted the help of the news media. In one sense, this was also a Leninist approach. The first Soviet leader had himself identified "propaganda, agitation, and organization"[7] as the key functions of political media. Here, Gorbachev adapted Leninist use of the media not to dissuade people from questioning the system, but instead to allow journalists to criticize. This led to a curious age in which, "with the sanction of the general secretary, journalists also attacked the party establishment."[8] As the reform period progressed, and "the well-being of Soviet citizens continued to deteriorate,"[9] the relationship began to sour.

At the same time—and this is key for an understanding of the environment of change that Alexievich's sources experienced and in which she was talking to them—the power of print was declining. Television had since its inception been an important medium in a country the size of the Soviet Union, but the citizens of the country had also been great consumers of newspapers. This began to change as the transformation from the strict, planned economy gave way to cautious liberalization and eventually to the chaotic and brutal capitalism of the 1990s. As Terhi Rantanen put it, "In the Soviet period, the joint circulation of the central newspapers amounted to one hundred million copies daily, but in 1991–1992, the circulation of the

most popular dailies reached only twenty to twenty-four million copies."[10] Elena Vartanova has pointed out that "the ruination of the postal distribution system"[11] was a critical factor in this drastic decline. Anyone who stood in the queue in a Russian post office in the early 1990s, on the day when newspaper subscriptions could be taken out or renewed, would easily recognize that a system that was inefficient at the best of times could hardly work at all without the postal system functioning properly. In fact, the lines themselves were telling about the way the system had ceased to function. Time-rich, and cash-poor, pensioners might find their own subscriptions paid for by people who could afford the rubles, but who were in too much of a rush to wait in the queue (a few extra rubles to smooth over any unforeseen minor difficulties in the process would not hurt, either—bribes could sometimes buy a way through the chaos).

While the print media and the postal system struggled with inefficiency, television was growing ever more important—and was, from the mid-1990s, "the leading mass medium."[12] This age of the end of a superpower was a fascinating time for journalists, whether those let off the Leninist leash to look at the seamier side of Soviet society, or the foreign correspondents given greater permission than ever before to see the Soviet Union. For those living through that period—Alexievich's sources—the appeal was less clear cut, not least in the sphere of their own media consumption. The previously forbidden fruit of foreign soap operas—*The Rich Also Cry* from Mexico was a particular favorite[13]—proved an irresistible draw. Add to that the new distractions of advertising based on techniques developed in the capitalist world—and, most importantly, the challenge of putting food on the table in times of massive inflation—and it is less surprising that the circulation figures of the exciting early years of reform fell away.

As will be discussed later, during the times of the crises recorded in the books studied in this analysis there were also failures of Soviet/Russian journalism itself. Brian McNair, in the Soviet Union researching his own book, Glasnost*,* Perestroika *and the Soviet Media*, found himself experiencing the sensation of being kept in the dark in a way that only a totalitarian regime might accomplish. "Like the great majority of people living in the USSR, I first heard the name 'Chernobyl' on the night of Monday April 28th, nearly three full days after the explosion occurred."[14] In any disaster, not making public what has happened may prevent mass panic, initially at least. The longer-term effects of the disaster are no less deadly, of course. In consequence of that explosion, not only was the nuclear power plant destroyed, but the whole of the surrounding area became the "Prohibited Zone,"[15] where villages were evacuated, and farms left without laborers or

livestock. In *Chernobyl Prayer*, the absences in these dead villages and fields are the most chilling. Faced with this post-apocalyptic scene, Alexievich employs her particular technique—carefully selecting extracts from an interview—to have the interviewee describe what the reader has almost certainly never seen and will struggle to imagine. For example, one member of a military unit sent to help with the clean-up operation after the disaster described a day in the evacuation zone. "The village street, not a soul . . . At first, there were lights still on in the houses, but then they switched off the electricity." Even here, the symbols of the Soviet system, abandoned, endure. The soldier saw "red flags in the collective-farm offices, all these brand-new pennants, piles of certificates embossed with the profiles of Marx, Engels and Lenin." The overall impression left by the abandoned village is, "Like some warrior tribe had moved on from its makeshift camp." This is what struck him hardest of all. "Chernobyl blew my mind. I began thinking."[16]

The Russian Journalist as Writer and Thinker

Getting people to think and see the world in a new light is indeed what Alexievich's work is designed to do, and in this can be detected the literary intentions of her journalism. In Russia, the link between literature and journalism is especially strong, and Alexievich's writing is part of a much longer literary and journalistic tradition. As John Hartsock has persuasively put it, "Alexievich firmly plants herself in the tradition of Russian literature."[17] While this is a move that might seem unusual, even presumptuous, in the English-speaking world, Russia has tended to see its writers differently. "In a country lacking free institutions, literature—hampered though it was by censorship—yet offered some scope for airing political and social opinions. Hence the Russian tradition of looking on the writer as a sage who might perhaps solve the riddle of existence," as Ronald Hingley has observed.[18] Moreover, Russia has tended often to identify its journalists as literary writers. As Vartanova has argued of Russia in the nineteenth century, "The Russian vision of literature presupposed a much broader social and cultural role for it than in other countries, thus often merging it with journalistic activity."[19] For the military failure and nuclear disaster of the late twentieth century, Alexievich has reversed the process, but retained the wider social meaning. Her journalism merges into literature, and, in book form rather than in newspapers, redevelops for new times the role of her nineteenth-century Russian counterparts, laying "down foundations for public debates."[20] So even if her method is to draw on the "hundreds of voices"[21] that she described in her Nobel lecture as having surrounded her since childhood, her own is still heard—even if rarely directly.

To read her work is to wonder sometimes where the reporter is in this journalistic work. For long periods, it feels like one of the many absences felt so keenly in *Chernobyl Prayer.* Yet occasionally Alexievich appears, offering words of reflection on journalistic practice and insight into the way her own voice frames those who, while talking for themselves, speak at great length about her own purpose as an author and journalist. "I didn't want to write about war any more. But here I am in a genuine war,"[22] she wearily tells her reader after she has arrived in Kabul. Alexievich seems to know, though, that her role as a journalist/author demands that she take on the writer's task all the same. In the pages that follow, as she reflects on the task that lies before her on her assignment in Afghanistan, she makes multiple references to the writers who have given Russian literature its worldwide reputation. "To write (to tell) the whole truth about yourself is, as Pushkin remarked, a physical impossibility."[23] Many reporters, even when writing longform journalism, resist such reflexive references. For Alexievich's kind of journalism, for the journalistic culture to which she belongs, this is not an option. Her voice must be heard. Her audience expects her to "lay down foundations for public debates,"[24] as Vartanova described it.

Alexievich draws richly from Russian literature in this reflective section to evoke history: not only literary history, but military and cultural history. Discussing "the cruelty with which the mujahedeen treat Russian prisoners," Alexievich refers to "the actions of the mountain tribesmen"[25] in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time.* The reference cannot be chosen only for its literary quality. Citing a work set during Russian wars of conquest in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century also has the effect of commenting on the campaign in Afghanistan. The implication is surely that here, too, as in the Caucasus in the previous century, Russian troops are facing an enemy whose culture they do not understand in a hostile mountain environment to which they are not accustomed. Nor does Alexievich confine herself to drawing on Russian literature, even if those references dominate. In this same section, which follows her arrival in Kabul, as she tries to convey "the prosy mundaneness of war" she cites Apollinaire, " '*Que la guerre est jolie*!' 'Oh what a lovely war!' "[26] The whole effect is to emphasize Russian culture's great attachment to literature, especially its own. It comes almost to be something expected of journalists. In *Chernobyl Prayer*, even a cameraman, Sergey Gurin, working in a purely visual medium, talks of his literary influences. "I went out there, my head filled with what they'd taught us: you only become a real author in war, and all that. My favourite writer was Hemingway, my favourite book *A Farewell to Arms*."[27]

In *Chernobyl Prayer*, as in *Boys in Zinc*, the author's voice is largely absent—

save for a section toward the beginning where she sets out the challenges she feels she faces, and how she will meet them. In *Boys in Zinc*, it is the discussion of her feelings on arrival in Kabul. In *Chernobyl Prayer*, it is the chapter by the same title, in which "The author interviews herself on missing history and why Chernobyl calls our view of the world into question."[28] On both occasions when the author permits herself to reflect publicly on her work, the chapters in which she does so follow shocking accounts of suffering. In *Chernobyl Prayer*, it is the story of a woman whose husband, a firefighter, has died in agony from exposure to massive amounts of radiation.[29] In *Boys in Zinc*, it is the story of a mother whose son, a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, has committed murder after his return to the Soviet Union.[30] Alexievich gives the sources their voices, then—as her readers, shaken by what they have just read, try to collect themselves—addresses the readers herself. As she does so, she seems to step down from the pedestal of writer/philosopher/prophet upon which Russian literary and journalistic culture has sometimes placed reporters. Suddenly, she is much closer to the people. In the case of *Chernobyl Prayer*, geography also has placed her physically close to disaster. Alexievich is from Belarus—which, bordering Ukraine, suffered dreadful consequences from the accident—a fact not lost on her interlocutor in this passage. Stepping down from the lofty viewpoint of "writer as sage" does not remove the obligation to fulfill the role. In this case, proximity brings a greater expectation from readers:

> A year after the disaster, someone asked me, "Everybody is writing. But you live here and write nothing. Why?" The truth was that I had no idea how to write about it, what method to use, what approach to take. If earlier, when I wrote my books, I would pore over the suffering of others, now my life and I have become part of the event. Fused together, leaving me unable to get any distance.[31]

Perhaps she does not need to be directly engaged. Having placed these reflective passages after the grim episodes which, as examined earlier, are the openings to both books, Alexievich's work draws its strength from its proximity to the ordinary people to whom she gives voice. Her entire technique is to amplify nonelite voices. Perhaps there is also an element here of a trait Hugh Kenner identified in Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. "Political discourse being feverish with newspeak, he concocted his plain style to reduce its temperature."[32] In a Soviet society where instruction and interpretation were handed down from on high, elite voices—and nonelite voices that served to confirm elite statements—shoved everything else out of public discourse. Now, as the Soviet Communist Party's decades of power came to an end, the nonelite voices shoved back. Alexievich's selection of sources

enables this process. Elite voices—whether those of military commanders in Afghanistan, or of politicians in Moscow—are heard only at a distance, and readily contradicted. "It was only after the May Day celebrations were over that Gorbachev appeared" on television, observed a member of a folk choir (the disaster happened in the early hours of April 26, so the official silence lasted for days), before concluding, of the glib assurances that "there was nothing to worry about," . . . "And we believed him."[33] One detects a strong sense of betrayal, which has in turn led to bitterness.

There are some elite voices in *Chernobyl Prayer*, such as former senior members of the Institute of Atomic Energy, Belarus Academy of Sciences,[34] but generally Alexievich's sources describe the catastrophic events they have experienced from a more modest—and therefore more dangerous—level. There are far more private soldiers than senior officers among the military sources, far more firefighters and cleaners than professors of nuclear physics. Those who are in more senior positions are characterized by the scale of their disillusionment being proportionately greater. In *Boys in Zinc*, a major, the commander of a battalion, was shouted at on a visit to a cemetery by the mother of a soldier. Her rage was prompted by the fact that he had survived, even if he did "have grey hair." Her son, by contrast, was so young that he "had never even shaved."[35] The major has lost his faith in the dying system. "I can't just stand there with my boys any longer and feed them propaganda,"[36] he concluded. Vladimir Matveyevich Ivanov, former first secretary of a Communist Party district committee, called himself "a committed Communist,"[37] yet he concluded his account of his experiences with a confession that he was reading the work of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, one of the regime's most determined critics, and had himself—despite having obeyed instructions from on high to convey the message that all was well—personally experienced as a result of the disaster consequences far more devastating than the major's loss of faith. "Now we've been written off by history, as if we don't exist. I'm reading Solzhenitsyn now . . . I think . . . (*Silence*.) My granddaughter has leukaemia . . . I've paid for everything. A high price . . . "[38] Ivanov's age is not given, but if he is a grandfather, it seems reasonable to assume that he is in his late forties at the very least—just the generation suffering the most from the transition to what he terms, "Wild West capitalism."[39] It is as if, in its death throes, the Marxist-Leninist system was finally, and unintentionally, achieving one of its aims: taking away the privileges of elites. Wild West capitalism is no respecter of status in the Party. Vladimir Matveyevich is suffering along with everyone else.

Faith, Magic, and Materialism

Alexievich's work is built on the ruins of Soviet propaganda. It is a new start, albeit with a debt to older traditions: a journalism for a world where this propaganda, as the major cited above bleakly concludes, has lost its meaning. The distant voices of general secretaries and generals are questioned in a way that would once have been impossible: the materialism of Marxism-Leninism, orthodoxy for most of the century, is challenged by resurgent, older faiths such as religion, folk-wisdom, even magic, as Alexievich's sources seek to make sense of the disaster and dizzying social change at the center of which they find themselves. Decades of official atheism—this was a country after all, where, in the first years after the Bolshevik Revolution, a group calling itself the "League of the Militant Godless" had received state funding[40]—were being challenged. Now the system that had propagated this godlessness was cracking. The system being weak, the older influences' contradiction of Soviet doctrines becomes an attack, and the voices of Alexievich's contributors are the means by which the attack is delivered. In the early section of *Boys in Zinc*, Alexievich tells her reader, "There are no atheists here. And everyone is superstitious."[41] This apparently simple observation is in fact a bold challenge to the entire Soviet military campaign in Afghanistan, and to the system itself. For what are the troops doing in Afghanistan, if not their international duty to spread Marxism-Leninism, both in theory and practice, with the ideological atheism that entails? While, as noted earlier, *Chernobyl Prayer* has also been given the title *Voices from Chernobyl* in one translation, the original Russian title, *Чернобыльская молитва*, translates directly to *Chernobyl Prayer*. The very choice of that title seems to serve the same purpose: its defiance of official godlessness even more blatant.

For the voices from the Prohibited Zone embrace and share a collective prayer: a faith renascent as a response to the materialist system that has failed them so badly. One resident of the village of Bely Bereg (the whole of this section of the book is a collection of observations, many of them no more than a few lines[42]) summarized the sense of isolation—and the state of an entire failing superpower—with revealing desperation:

> They've started coming here. Making movies about us, though we never get to see the films. We've got no TV or electricity. All we've got is the window to look through. And prayer, of course. We used to have Communists instead of God, but now there's just God left.[43]

A fellow villager believes that the Book of Revelation has been written with them in mind.

> What's written in the Bible is all coming true. In the Bible it says about our collective farm. And about Gorbachev. It says there'll be a big leader with a

> mark on his forehead, and a great power will crumble to dust. And then the Day of Judgement will come.[44]

Yet another resident of the Prohibited Zone refers to the fact that, in Ukrainian, "Chernobyl" means "wormwood"[45]—the name given in the Book of Revelation to a star that poisons the waters of the earth.[46] Much older creeds return to explain the collapse of the system that sought to vanquish them. The official pronouncements are exposed as empty.

If religion can help to explain the catastrophes that are visited upon the late Soviet Union, then other preternatural forces can help to mitigate them. If "everyone is superstitious" when serving in Afghanistan, the same is true of people left back in the Soviet Union. One major—and therefore one of the more senior officers of the elite whose contribution appears in *Boys in Zinc*—related that, on his return, his mother "confessed" that he had returned unharmed because she had "put a spell" on him.[47] Perhaps less surprisingly, the people affected by the Chernobyl disaster also turned to magic, whether to the "sorcerers" who "performed in stadiums"[48] or the "wise women" and "whisperers, witches,"[49] whom one desperate mother sought out in her search for a cure for her son's radiation sickness. Those who tried to remain above and apart from the superstition were troubled by its ubiquity. As the TV psychics offered to "energize" water—and thus supposedly make it safe to use—Slava Konstantinovna Firsakova, doctor of agricultural sciences, despaired of her "colleagues, people with degrees in the sciences" who put three-liter jars close to the screen to give them healing properties.[50]

It was not just the Marxist-Leninist system that was coming to its end. There was, Dr. Firsakova concluded when she looked back a few years later to the time of the accident, a "total eclipse of common sense. Generalized hysteria."[51] Some of the folk wisdom and superstition seems to take on an especially Russian nature. There are numerous references to vodka's supposed effectiveness as a prevention against radiation. Vodka is praised variously as "a first-rate method for restoring the immune system,"[52] and, with the unlikely and unexpected addition of goose excrement, promoted as a means of protecting male fertility.[53] If in *Boys in Zinc* Alexievich prepares her reader for this assault on materialism her contributors are going to launch (i.e., the section mentioned above about the fact that there are no atheists, and everyone is superstitious), then the section in *Chernobyl Prayer* where she "interviews herself"[54] is even more explicit:

> The churches filled up again with people—with believers and former atheists. They were searching for answers that could not be found in physics or mathematics. The three-dimensional world came apart, and I have not since met anyone brave enough to swear again on the bible of materialism.[55]

The overall effect is to create a record—through the medium of ordinary people's voices—of a moment of colossal change. Like the villager, cited above, who reflected that the Communists' departure left only God, many of Alexievich's sources know that they are living the end of an era. As they do so, they are not witnessing the birth of a new age so much as a Gramscian interregnum—accompanied by the "morbid symptoms"[56] (in this case, disastrous military adventures and nuclear catastrophe) that Gramsci saw as part of any such era.

Understanding History through War and through Disaster as Warfare

To try to make sense of their era, Alexievich's contributors have, furthermore, frequent recourse to more recent history. Their own faith in Soviet mythology may have been shaken so that it is shattered, yet they still evoke the relatively recent past to try to understand the horrors of the present. World War II, known usually in Russian as "The Great Patriotic War" (Вели́кая Оте́чественная война́),[57] is an especially powerful point of reference. Victory in the war was an endless source of heroic pride to those generations who contributed to it. In today's Russia, the numbers of those who lived through the war, especially those old enough to fight, are greatly diminished. The sense of heroic pride is not. President Vladimir Putin's address on Victory Day (May 9, which is a public holiday in Russia) in 2017 exemplified the way this chapter in Russian history has become a sacred national memory. "But there was not, there is not and there will never be a power that could defeat our people," Mr. Putin said in his speech on Red Square. "They fought to the bitter end defending the homeland, and achieved the seemingly impossible."[58]

The rescue workers at Chernobyl are asked to do the impossible, although they do not at first realize the nature and scale of the task they face; many of them are not even told where they are going until they are under way.[59] Villagers living inside the Prohibited Zone are in the dark, too—at least to begin with. Seeing the sky "buzzing" with aircraft, one villager concluded, "we must be at war."[60] The soldiers drafted to fight this war were baffled too, but in a different way. For one of them, it "was a war that was a mystery to us; where there was no telling what was dangerous and what wasn't."[61] All the interviewees are familiar with World War II—it is part of Soviet history, part of their nation's story. In the areas closest to Chernobyl, many of which were occupied by the Nazis, it is part of personal history, too. In both these senses, national and personal, it provides a means of understanding that which is bewildering, terrifying, potentially deadly. It provides ways both of interpreting and responding. Pursued by police officers acting on orders to

evacuate the disaster zone, some villagers "hide in the forest. Like hiding from the Germans."[62] Even years after the accident, those who experienced it still use the Soviet experience in World War II as a point of reference. Gennady Grushevoy, a member of the Belarusian Parliament and chairman of the Children of Chernobyl Foundation, talked of children being taken to military museums in order to understand past wars. "But actually, nowadays, it's completely different. On 26 April 1986, we faced war again; and that war is not over."[63] Again, that was the date when the Chernobyl disaster began. Sergei Sobolev of the Chernobyl Shield Association, concluded, "They call it 'an accident,' 'a disaster,' but it was a war. Our Chernobyl monuments resemble war memorials."[64] Inevitably, given the time of the catastrophe, some of the soldiers ordered to the clean-up operation have served in Afghanistan, too. At least one volunteered for both.[65] Those who experienced both—as volunteers or as conscripts—have a rare perspective on the two disasters that helped to bring down a superpower. The two experiences provided contrasting emotions of relief and despair. "When I got back from Afghanistan, I knew I'd live! After Chernobyl, the opposite was true: it was when you were back home that it would kill you."[66] Yet another member of the Soldiers Choir felt that his understanding would only come with time. "And we'll understand at least something, I reckon, in another twenty or thirty years. I was in Afghanistan (for two years) and in Chernobyl (for three months)—the most vivid moments of my life."[67] The reader is left to wonder what this soldier would make of it now—now that his "twenty or thirty years" since the disaster have passed. Of course, given the levels of radiation to which he was exposed, it is very possible that these "most vivid moments of [his] life" in fact hastened his death.

For the contributors to *Boys in Zinc*, World War II—and the subsequent Soviet portrayal of the heroism of that war—acts as a great source of inspiration; so great, in fact, that it makes the disillusionment that follows all the more crushing. "I wanted to be at war. Only not this war, but the Great Patriotic War,"[68] says one civilian employee. One private finds the heroism turned on its head. "We played the part of the Germans—that's what one young guy told me,"[69] he reflected of the way the Afghans they had supposedly come to help actually saw them: as occupiers. The heroic Soviet martial image of World War II serves only to disillusion those who have been inspired by it when they crash into the reality of Afghanistan. "Maybe I couldn't imagine a different kind of war, one that wasn't like the Great Patriotic War. I loved watching war films ever since I was little," a civilian employee reflected, apparently still shocked at the memory of "[m]en lying there, scorched all over. Mutilated."[70] There are echoes elsewhere of other journalistic accounts

of that conflict that, as President Putin's words above attest, still stands as the heroic highpoint of Russia's twentieth century. Other soldiers whom Alexievich encounters have undergone different transformations. Schooled in Soviet mythology, they look to tales of the Great Patriotic War to understand their experience. In these changed times, the effect of those stories is actually to promote self-doubt, even self-loathing. "We played the part of the Germans" seems to sum it up. Alexievich's technique here is a new one for new times. She draws on older, familiar narratives to assist audiences trying to understand that which they struggle to comprehend. The propaganda of the Soviet journalism that went before is no longer credible.

The End of Soviet Journalism

Part of that "We played the part of the Germans" disenchantment stemmed from the fact that the only journalism known to many of Alexievich's contributors was propagandistic Soviet journalism: its purpose often to conceal by omission rather than to reveal. When revelations of reality eventually came, readers were disillusioned. As the revelations became more numerous, Soviet journalism's days were numbered. Reflecting on his own experience—referred to above—as a resident of Moscow kept in ignorance at the time of the Chernobyl disaster, and of the conclusions he was therefore able to draw on the state of Soviet journalism, McNair has written, "For Soviet journalists, those ten days of enforced silence turned out with hindsight to be the final, desperate gesture of a Party hierarchy whose rigid control of the mass communications system was by early 1986 already breaking down."[71] Alexievich seems to sense this very strongly. The first reference to journalism the reader of *Boys in Zinc* encounters is, "Here they call the journalists 'storytellers' "[72]—the single quotation marks indicating that the term *storytellers* is referred to with a derogatory sneer. Such journalists are not seekers after truth in Afghanistan but the inventors of fantasy. As Roderic Braithwaite has pointed out of the political decision that lay behind this kind of reporting, "To maintain the fiction that it was not a real war, Soviet journalists were forbidden to report the fighting or the casualties."[73] Most of the official Soviet journalism depicted in the two books examined here seems to be perceived in this way. The soldiers in Afghanistan, all of those affected by the Chernobyl disaster, and the author herself, all seem to have reached the same conclusion as McNair: the rigid control of mass communication was breaking down. It might continue to try to function. It was not to be believed.

Simply, Soviet journalism—facing unprecedented political challenges in this period—is not equal to the task. "I met some cameramen from

Moscow,"[74] Alexievich writes soon after her arrival in Afghanistan:

They were filming the loading of a 'black tulip'—an An–12 plane that takes coffins back home. Without raising their eyes they tell me that the dead are dressed in old army uniforms from the 1940s, still with breeches instead of trousers; sometimes even these uniforms are in short supply, and they're put in the coffin without being dressed. Old wooden boards, rusty nails.[75]

The reader knows that none of these details will ever be seen on air. So does Alexievich, who is led to ask, "Who will believe me if I write about this?"[76] Perhaps one of the most striking episodes is the experiences of the cameraman Sergey Gurin (he whose favorite writer was Hemingway). His is an account of filming that which is illusion, while ignoring that which really told the story: like an old woman who had been told to clear away the contaminated earth, but, as she did so, kept as fertilizer the manure that lay on top of it. "Pity I didn't film that,"[77] Gurin admitted. Regarding illusion, he goes on location where livestock that have been contaminated are being buried in a pit. "I stood with my back to the trench and shot an episode in the finest Soviet documentary tradition: bulldozer drivers reading their copy of *Pravda.*"[78] Sobolev, of the Chernobyl Shield Association, later involved in trying to protect for posterity the memory of what happened, saw the other side of this. "We have no documentary material about how people were evacuated or livestock was moved out. There must be no filming of a disaster, only of heroism!"[79] The disaffection among soldiers serving in Afghanistan is as severe. "They wrote in the newspapers that our soldiers were building bridges and planting avenues of friendship and our doctors were treating Afghan women and children,"[80] remembered one private of the time when he was training. With the benefit of experience, another gave a grimmer, more realistic, assessment of what the Soviet presence in Afghanistan was really doing. "I saw so many ruined *kishlaks* [small villages or settlements]. But not a single kindergarten, not a single school that had been built, or tree that had been planted—the ones they wrote about in our newspapers."[81] The same soldier related how those rosy accounts had especially infuriated him personally, as he recalled his comrade, with whom he used to mock what they read as they sat in the common toilet, who had since been killed. "Not a word about us, fuck it . . . But only yesterday forty of our boys were torn to shreds. Two days earlier I was sitting here in the latrine with one of them and reading these papers, hooting with laughter,"[82] because such accounts were so out of touch with the reality they were confronting.

The overall impression is not one of journalism at the end of the twentieth century, but much closer to its beginning, at least in the sense that there are echoes of the way British journalism during World War I came to be

judged. The anger of the soldiers in *Boys in Zinc* echoes the cynical voices of troops encountering journalists in the poems of World War I, a conflict in which, as Philip Knightley argues, "More deliberate lies were told than in any other period of history, and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the truth."[83] The laughter of the Soviet infantryman in the toilet is a reaction that Siegfried Sassoon's characters might readily recognize. As the wounded soldier at the end of his poem "Editorial Impressions" snidely suggests—having been regaled with a reporter's facile observations about "that splendour shine/ Which makes us win"—"Ah, yes, but it's the Press that leads the way!"[84] World War I was seen by those who fought in it—and, subsequently, by some of those who reported it, as a shameful episode in the history of British journalism. As Sir Philip Gibbs, one of the war correspondents later wrote, "There was no need for censorship of our despatches. We were our own censors."[85] This kind of reporting led to the kind of cynicism that Sassoon's wounded soldier sneered at the correspondent in the poem.

Now we see the same some sixty-five to seventy years later in the Soviet Union. In *Boys in Zinc*, the reporting of Afghanistan does the same for Soviet journalism. One unidentified civilian employee began an account, thus: "How did I end up here? It's very simple. I believed everything they wrote in the newspapers."[86] For another private, it was the end of trust in the authorities. "Afghanistan set me free. It cured me of the belief that everything here is right, that they write the truth in the newspapers and show the truth on the television."[87] For this young soldier, it was a liberation. Afghanistan and Chernobyl were two national traumas which, even as they played a role in ending a social and political system, put Soviet journalism to the test. It failed and, in consequence, lost the trust of its audiences to such an extent that it could never recover.

Foreign journalists appear only as minor characters in Alexievich's writing, but their presence is, for all that, highly important. They are absent from *Boys in Zinc*, the presence of western reporters hardly welcome in the Cold War–era Soviet armed forces (although as the time for withdrawal in 1989 approached, there were opportunities for international correspondents to go to report from the Soviet side). In *Chernobyl Prayer*, foreign reporters appear as harbingers of change: their ability to stake out the graveside of a Chernobyl firefighter a sign of the new freedom of movement they enjoyed under *perestroika*. "The cemetery is besieged by foreign journalists. Continue to wait,"[88] is the message the hapless widow of the firefighter hears over the walkie-talkie of a colonel who has been assigned to accompany her. Here the foreign journalists are an unsettling, yet unseen, force. They are to be

avoided so that they cannot see the reality of what the widow must suffer. At other points, they materialize to ask questions unlike those posed by the more obedient Soviet reporters and cameramen. "Would you take your children somewhere there was plague or cholera?"[89] asks a German reporter of a mother who has fled post-Soviet bloodletting in Kirghizia, only to end up in the disaster area. An "English journalist" tried and failed to learn from helicopter pilots, who had flown over the reactor, whether exposure to radiation had affected their sex lives. "Not one of them would speak frankly," said Sobolev, who had accompanied the reporter. Undeterred, the reporter gets the full story from the waitresses in the café where the meeting with the pilots had taken place. "Slavs just do not talk about these things. It's unacceptable,"[90] Sobolev protested, in his remarks to Alexievich. The arrival of the foreign journalists is an intrusion, their questions a breach of established cultural mores and as such a sign of change.

Then there is Alexievich's place as journalist in her narratives. Aside from locating herself in a wider Russian literature-journalism tradition and noting the personal challenges of writing about the war in Afghanistan and about the Chernobyl disaster, Alexievich's voice rarely intrudes directly. On occasion, one of her sources will address her. For example, one explains how she should describe him—" 'director of the apocalypse zone.' (*He laughs.*) 'You can write that.' "[91] Other than moments like that we are rarely aware of her presence. Yet she is there, of course—an omnipresent and omniscient author, at least in the sense that she has gathered, selected, and structured the material into her work. They may be others' words, but ultimately what emerges is her account. One of her interviewees is the journalist Anatoly Shimansky. He too addresses Alexievich directly—although he could be speaking her words. "I'll give you that notebook. It'll just end up lying among my papers. Well, maybe I'll show it to my children when they grow up. It is history, after all."[92]

Conclusion: A New Picture of the World

"What's really lacking in all these theatres is sufficient people who are deep experts on the language and the region to actually produce the options to ministers," complained Rory Stewart, then chair of the British House of Commons Defence Select Committee, in a 2014 interview.[93] He described the situation in the British Foreign Office where, after the Russian invasion of Crimea, "The Crimea desk officer had to be moved across from the South Caucasus—and the Russian analysis section had been closed in 2010."[94] Stewart was referring to the way in which Western policy makers had failed to keep an eye on what was happening in the former Soviet Union, and arguing that, as a result, dramatic developments that redrew the map of

Europe had not been foreseen. There is a lesson in his words for journalism, too. As in intelligence gathering and diplomacy, its effectiveness relies upon the quality of the information sources it has at its disposal. If Western diplomacy failed to anticipate the invasion of Crimea, then Western journalism, in the shape of the results of the 2016 British decision to leave the European Union, and the election later that year of Donald Trump as president of the United States, has had its blind spots, too. While there were rare voices who predicted these outcomes, the majority did not. They had probably been talking to the wrong people. It is true that Alexievich is looking at the recent past, rather than trying to predict the future—but this approach of gathering countless testimonies from mainly nonelite sources might have a wider application, too.

Svetlana Alexievich talked to the people she needed to—those "hundreds of voices" she had heard—in order to tell the story of her changing times. Her methods have attracted criticism. In a 2016 article for the *New Republic*, Sophie Pinkham charged that Alexievich's "work opts for subjective recollection over hard evidence; she does not attempt to confirm any of her witnesses' accounts, and she chooses her stories for their narrative power, not as representative samples."[95] Pinkham went on, "by seeking to straddle both literature and history, Alexievich ultimately succeeds at neither."[96] Alexievich referred to such criticism in her Nobel lecture. "I work with missing history," she explained. "I am often told, even now, that what I write isn't literature, it's a document. What is literature today? Who can answer that question? We live faster than ever before. Content ruptures form."[97] These are all reasonable points, although her later statement in the same passage, "There are no borders between fact and fabrication, one flows into the other,"[98] seems ambiguous. Is this a lament in the era of fake news, or a defense of subjective interpretation? Her next sentence suggested the latter. "Witnesses are not impartial. In telling a story, humans create, they wrestle time like a sculptor does marble. They are actors and creators."[99] The creative element of Alexievich's own work has raised questions from other commentators. "L'écrivain qui a défini son genre comme un 'roman des voix' est donc à l'écoute de personnages dont elle réécrit les propos pour forger des images à forte charge émotionnelle" (The writer who has defined her genre as a 'novel of voices' is therefore listening to characters whose remarks she rewrites to form images with a strong emotional charge),[100] conclude Ackerman and Lemarchand. Still, this is a new era requiring a new kind of explanation. There is perhaps an echo here of Michael Herr's verdict on the reporting of the Vietnam War: "Conventional journalism could no more reveal this war than conventional firepower could win it."[101]

For all her obvious admiration of, and inspiration from, the great works of Russian literature, Alexievich is also frank about the simpler interpretations of existence from which her sources draw strength.

> What was most interesting of all in those early days was not talking with the scientists, not with the officials or the high-ranking military men, but with the old peasants. They lived without Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, without the Internet, yet their minds somehow made space for the new picture of the world. Their consciousness did not crumble.[102]

"Their minds somehow made space for the new picture of the world." This was the key to survival not only through the Chernobyl and Afghanistan disasters, but through the whole collapse of the Soviet Union. Alexievich's work may depart from the straight lines of conventional reporting, but it surely has huge value as a form of journalism, and a form of history: not necessarily history as written by the victors, but history as understood by those who fought against the confiscation of their past, and all the while made space for the new picture of the world.

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Notes

[1] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 217.

[2] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 10.

[3] Alexievich, 201.

[4] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer.* Alexievich, *Voices from Chernobyl*, is a different translation of the same work. The author of the present study chose to work from the Penguin edition because he feels that the title in English renders more correctly the original Russian, and refers to religious faith, which he considers an important theme in the work.

[5] Alexievich, "Nobel Lecture: On the Battle Lost," para. 21.

[6] Davies, *Soviet History in the Yeltsin Era*, 6.

[7] Vartanova, "The Russian Media Model," 128.

[8] Zassoursky, *Media and Power in Post-Soviet Russia*, 11.

[9] Zassoursky, 10.

[10] Rantanen, *The Global and the National*, 30.

[11] Vartanova, "The Russian Media Model," 124.

[12] Vartanova, 125.

[13] Rantanen, *The Global and the National*, 29–30.

[14] McNair, Glasnost, Perestroika *and the Soviet Media*, 2.

[15] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 77.

[16] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 78.

[17] Hartsock, "The Literature in the Journalism of Nobel Prize Winner Svetlana Alexievich," 45.

[18] Hingley, *Russian Writers and Society in the Nineteenth Century*, 24.

[19] Vartanova, "The Russian Media Model," 136.

[20] Vartanova, 135.

[21] Alexievich, "Nobel Lecture: On the Battle Lost," para. 1.

[22] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 13.

[23] Alexievich, 15.

[24] Vartanova, "The Russian Media Model," 135.

[25] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 15; see Lermontov, *A Hero of Our Time*, 176.

[26] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 14.

[27] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 118.

[28] Alexievich, 24–33.

[29] Alexievich, 6–23.

[30] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 1–7.

[31] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 25.

[32] Kenner, "The Politics of the Plain," BR1, para. 14.

[33] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 183.

[34] Alexievich, 203, 222.

[35] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 199.

[36] Alexievich, 199.

[37] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 243, 248.

[38] Alexievich, 248.

[39] Alexievich, 245.
[40] Service, *A History of Modern Russia*, 136.
[41] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 18.
[42] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 46–60.
[43] Alexievich, 57.
[44] Alexievich, 54. This is presumably a slightly confused reference to the biblical book of Revelation, chapter 13, in which a seven-headed beast rises up from the sea and causes all "to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads" Rev. 13:16 (King James Version). Then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev has a birth mark on his head.
[45] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 74.
[46] The Bible, Rev. 8:11.
[47] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 118.
[48] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 159.
[49] Alexievich, 187.
[50] Alexievich, 159.
[51] Alexievich, 159.
[52] Alexievich, 84.
[53] Alexievich, 106.
[54] Alexievich, 24–33.
[55] Alexievich, 26.
[56] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 276.
[57] Translation mine.
[58] Putin, "Speech at Military Parade," para 7.
[59] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 76.
[60] Alexievich, 47.
[61] Alexievich, 84.
[62] Alexievich, 53.
[63] Alexievich, 156.
[64] Alexievich, 177.
[65] Alexievich, 91.
[66] Alexievich, 83.
[67] Alexievich, 81.
[68] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 53.
[69] Alexievich, 30.
[70] Alexievich, 215.
[71] McNair, Glasnost, Perestroika *and the Soviet Media*, 3.
[72] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 14.
[73] Braithwaite, Review, 232–33.
[74] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 17.
[75] Alexievich, 17.
[76] Alexievich, 17.
[77] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 119.
[78] Alexievich, 119.

[79] Alexievich, 175.
[80] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 25–26.
[81] Alexievich, 89.
[82] Alexievich, 81.
[83] Knightley, *The First Casualty*, 80.
[84] Sassoon, "Editorial Impressions," 78.
[85] Gibbs, *Adventures in Journalism*, 231. See also, Knightley, *The First Casualty*, 97; 109.
[86] Alexievich, *Boys in Zinc*, 51.
[87] Alexievich, 32.
[88] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 19.
[89] Alexievich, 73.
[90] Alexievich, 177.
[91] Alexievich, 87.
[92] Alexievich, 137.
[93] Elwes, "Rory Stewart interview: Britain's strategic gap," para. 3.
[94] Elwes, para. 1.
[95] Pinkham, "Witness Tampering," para. 4.
[96] Pinkham, para. 5.
[97] Alexievich, "Nobel Lecture: On the Battle Lost," para. 21.
[98] Alexievich, para. 21.
[99] Alexievich, para. 21.
[100] Ackerman and Lemarchand, 47 (translation mine).
[101] Herr, *Dispatches*, 175.
[102] Alexievich, *Chernobyl Prayer*, 26.

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Above:
Portrait of Mrs. James (Christina) Smith, author of *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language* (1880). Photo by Thomas J. J. Wyatt. Public Domain.

Top right
Portrait of Watkin Tench, c. 1800, author of *A Narrative Expedition to Botany Bay* (1789) and *A Compete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson in New South Wales* (1793). Artist Unknown. Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

Bottom right:
Memorial stone of Henry Savery—author of *Quintus Servinton*, the first convict novel, published in 1830—on the Isle of the Dead. Photo by Dysprosia-commonswiki.

Having Your Story and Data Too: The Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism Database

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Abstract: The Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism (ACNJ) database (1788–1901) is a digital archive of colonial literary journalism. It is an expression of cultural memory in Australia using examples of colonial writers and their featured works—from the journalists who captured the bushranger Ned Kelly and his gang, to those who sailed undercover to expose the "blackbirding" trade in northern Australia, to the women who first wrote and published Australian profiles, including the earliest known written portraits of Aboriginal Australians. Research institutions are increasingly interested in creative digital dissemination strategies to target audiences for exploring, interrogating, and communicating new knowledge both within and beyond academia. At the same time, the focus of archival theory, in acknowledgement of the political framework behind archiving, has moved from evidence to memory. The online archivist has been transformed from a passive curator to a community facilitator, asking questions around the role of archives—whether the archives are being posited as projects of collective identity that serve the interests of the community in power or as diverse collections from a range of communities with differing levels of empowerment. With those factors in mind, this study explores the creation of the database and its transfer from an experimental WordPress site to being hosted by AustLit, the online national literary research resource. In the process, the study examines the issues involved in establishing and building the database, which range from attempts to define the form as it evolved in Australia's colonial history, to the potential role of the database as a cultural narrator, a creator and facilitator of cultural memory, and a creative dissemination strategy rendering social historical themes in a democratized online form that can be delivered to a broad constituency of users.

Keywords: literary journalism – journalism history – Australian journalism history – digital history – digital archives

> Within a society memories are contested and contradictory. Who controls the keys?
>
> Cultural institutions are trying to respond to this complexity. On the one hand they offer the security of authority—sources to be trusted in [a] world overflowing with information. But they are also looking for ways of capturing and representing alternative voices — Tim Sherratt, 2015, para. 17.

The Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism database represents the first systematic, sustained exploration of the practice and development of literary journalism in Australia. In the process of identifying writers of literary journalism—also known in Australia as narrative journalism—and presenting them and their work online, the ACNJ database has acted as an explanatory nexus linking users to preexisting online archives, while presenting new contextualizing information written by the site's creators. The database began as a theoretically informed, low-cost web publication created on WordPress. In its latest iteration on AustLit,[1] the database provides research context and synergies through its placement within the nation's main research site, which covers a diversity of areas, from general Australian literature to Indigenous writing, film, radio, television, and theatrical productions. At the same time, its inclusion on AustLit contributes to formal recognition in Australia of literary/narrative journalism as a literary field in its own right.

The creation of the Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism database involves preserving cultural memory while creating a cultural narrative of this journalistic form. Cultural memory, defined here to include literary journalism texts as expressions of a form created in the past but speaks to both the present and the future, provides the building blocks for a community of scholars to facilitate building the community's identity. This immediately raises the issue of the role of archives in the creation and entrenchment of power. Shared cultural histories contribute to cohesion, that sense of kinship and belonging among people who will never meet that Benedict Anderson conceptualized in his "imagined political community" discourse.[2] Archives help societies construct and preserve their heritage, acting as what archivists have called "touchstones" that reinforce community values, survival, and protection of rights.[3] Archival cultural narratives such as this one, which tells the story in archival form of the beginnings of literary journalism in Australia, can be considered as collective cultural capital, contributing to the depth and wealth of a community, both in the economic sense, but also in terms of supporting cultural dynamism, and inspiring feelings of connectedness across a community of writers, readers, and researchers.

Yet, the archivist must tread warily. Digital historian Tim Sherratt says that the practice of remembering the forgotten is not just a matter of recall

or rediscovery, but a battle over the boundaries of what matters, with archives potentially reflecting only the dominant culture.[4] Choices about what to include and exclude can entrench existing power structures rather than invite diversity and recognition of a society's marginalized groups.[5] This has relevance to this archive. Literary journalism, a field that once dropped between the cracks of English and journalism/media departments in the academy,[6] is gaining increasing international recognition, not least because it allows the lives of ordinary people to be championed in memorable and affecting ways. Yet, not all groups within Australia's colonial society are represented, or represented equally. From its very beginnings in Australia, literary journalism has been a form belonging to settler culture, with particular voices notably absent, e.g., those of women and the First Peoples. The ACNJ database is a step towards rectifying existing gaps in the archival practices and formalizing cross-institutional recognition of literary journalism in Australia. At the same time, in recognition of the status of the archive as an exercise in power, it has been deliberately constructed as a representative database that can be reconfigured and rewritten in the future as new knowledge comes to light.

Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism Database

The ACNJ database is a small-scale pilot project, underpinned by an intention to preserve and make accessible examples of Australia's narrative journalism history in a democratized online form that can be delivered to a broad constituency of users. It began as a theoretically informed, low-cost, and accessible web publication using WordPress that doubled as an archive. Created by Willa McDonald with the assistance of Bunty Avieson (the authors of this study), and Kerrie Davies, using seed funding from Macquarie University, the database was launched in 2015 by the university's Centre for Media History.

As a representative site, the ACNJ database makes no attempt to be comprehensive in its coverage of narrative journalism history, but instead presents interested audiences with links to writers, short biographical material that contextualizes their work, and examples of their writing. The original WordPress site linked users to preexisting online databases while presenting new contextualizing biographical information for every entry written by the site's creators. It currently features more than thirty colonial writers of narrative journalism with links to their original writings, where available, on Trove.[7] An online library database aggregator hosted by the National Library of Australia in partnership with various content providers, Trove has links to more than half a million Australian and online resources that include books,

images, historic newspapers, maps, music, and archives. The ACNJ database links users directly to the original newspapers and journal/magazine articles held on Trove. On the WordPress site, where the articles were not available through Trove, they were uploaded to the original database. Thus, that version of the database also collated and published original journalism not already digitized and accessible in other places. The WordPress version of the database also linked to each writer's entry, where possible, in the online *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.[8] The ACNJ database is now part of AustLit, which is the most comprehensive record of Australia's publishing history. AustLit's mission is "to be the definitive information resource and research environment for Australian literary, print, and narrative cultures."[9] Maintained and supported by a collaboration of universities since it was founded in 2000, AustLit describes itself as "an authoritative database about Australian literature and storytelling, with biographical and bibliographical information, full text, exhibitions and rich online content."[10] The invitation to join AustLit was an important next step. While the original ACNJ database attracted nearly 5,500 visits without institutional hosting or publicity, its reach on AustLit is far greater. AustLit references more than 300,000 creators and approximately one million works. The move is providing solid institutional backing for the database, while acknowledging Australian narrative journalism as a field with its own importance in Australia's literary culture.

While many of the writers in the ACNJ database were already acknowledged in AustLit because of their imaginative writing—novels, plays, and poetry—their journalism has gone largely unrecognized. Yet, as Josephi and Müller point out, there has always been an alliance between journalism and fiction in Australia, not only because writers wrote across genres but because they brought the techniques of one into their work in the other.[11] Ken Stewart argues that from 1855 to 1955, literary Australia was largely a journalists' Australia, noting that many novelists also wrote journalism.[12] David Conley observed twenty years ago that in the years since the first convict novel was published in 1830 by Henry Savery, himself a convicted forger, at least 168 Australian journalists had written novels.[13] These interconnections are now being acknowledged by the addition of "affiliation notes" to the relevant AustLit entries for each writer, describing and linking to their narrative journalism work. The entries are collated under the badge "Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism," accompanied by a short, explanatory article to provide context.[14]

The impetus for the ACNJ database came from Brooke Kroeger's Undercover Reporting website, Deception for Journalism's Sake: A Database, which is a companion to her 2012 history of undercover reporting, *The*

Truth About Deception.[15] Kroeger realized the value of the journalism she was unearthing, wanting to make the original articles publicly available, rather than trapped in a reference list at the back of an academic monograph. Kroeger said in an interview in New York in 2015, "All this material was rather lost. It hasn't been digitized yet. It was hard to find and . . . you had to know the articles exist to find them. It wasn't easy."[16] Kroeger's references now comprise a large, comprehensive, and accessible online collection of original journalism in the database hosted by New York University.

Besides contributing to knowledge of Australia's intellectual history, the research underpinning the ACNJ database is unearthing specific information relating to the practice of journalism and its impact on Australia's cultural development—information that is being made available in its original form for users to access, evaluate, and draw their own conclusions. For example, research into the reporting of the demise of the bushranging Kelly Gang demonstrates the profound impact that journalism has had on Australia's cultural history. There are few stories as well known in Australia as the tale of Ned Kelly, which has spawned a sprawling cultural industry from a plethora of artworks, plays, and films (including Australia's—and the world's—first feature film[17]) to books such as Peter Carey's Booker Prize winning novel, *True History of the Kelly Gang*, published in 2000.[18] In Australia, Kelly is a powerful symbol for a range of ideas, from a masculinist ideal of freedom in a lawless frontier, to a heroic champion of the underdog, a brave rebel against protestant and British authority, and a political agitator for a republic.[19] Few people know the names of the journalists who reported on the capture of the Kelly Gang at the 1880 Siege of Glenrowan, in rural Victoria, yet their texts are the basis on which the legend and the cultural industry of Ned Kelly have been built.[20] The database allows researchers to access the original reporting via Trove to make their own judgment about this cultural indebtedness.

In a similar example, in contrast to the situation in the United States and Britain, little historical work has been done on tracing the evolution of the press interview in Australia. Christopher Silvester notes one of the first interviews published in the United States was done with the Mormon Brigham Young and appeared in the *New York Tribune* in 1859.[21] In Britain, interviews were popularized by the publisher W. T. Stead, who ran them in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the early 1880s.[22] But the date when interviewing began in Australia is still unknown. This research has revealed that eyewitness reports were published in the early 1870s with possibly the first interview seamlessly incorporated into an article of literary journalism by John Stanley James, writing as the Vagabond in his series "A Month in Pentridge" published

in the *Argus* in 1877.[23] The original versions of the articles and the Vagabond's interview are collated in the ACNJ database and available via Trove.

The Beginnings of Literary/Narrative Journalism in Australia

The creation of the ACNJ database required the researchers to grapple with the definition of literary/narrative journalism particularly as it has been practiced in Australia. While Tom Wolfe's 1973 manifesto defining the New Journalism was a starting point,[24] it soon became clear that to rigidly impose a late twentieth century North American definition on colonial Australian "reporting" would be inadequate. At the very beginning of this research, fundamental questions arose about the research terms. What did *Australian* mean in the decades before Federation in 1901? What did *published* mean in a fledgling British colony? Could the notion of journalism stretch to mean writing published outside newspapers and magazines, particularly if those more usual avenues did not yet exist?

While the term *literary journalism* presupposes an established press, containing as it does notions of reporting and publication, for the first forty years of the colony there was no free press in Australia. Readers were few and writers even fewer. Although a wooden printing press came out with the First Fleet, it was years before anyone trained in the printing trade arrived to run it.[25] The situation began to change when a trained printer, George Howe, was sent to New South Wales in November 1800. In 1802, he printed Australia's first book, a dry tome of government rules: *New South Wales General Standing Orders.* A year later, he published the first newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, which became the mouthpiece of the colonial government. Total government censorship was in place until the 1820s, and while Howe managed to publish more than a hundred poems in the newspaper, including some he wrote himself, his newspaper was no outlet for literary journalism.[26]

Instead, there were other forms of publication that carried uncensored, lively, factual information about Australia in the absence of a free press—the journals of the explorers, published mostly in book form in England, letters written home by convicts and settlers, works of memoir, and sketches published once a local free press began to surface. A brief examination of these via some of the writers contained in the database is valuable in providing an insight into the more recognizable forms of literary journalism that would emerge later in the development of the colony.[27]

The Explorers

When Watkin Tench, a Marine Corps officer, left Portsmouth with the First Fleet on May 13, 1787, he recognized the stories of his

experiences would be eagerly snapped up by Britain's reading public. He arranged with Debrett's before he left England to record his impressions of the journey and the establishment of the colony. He wrote two books that are still in print today: *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, published in 1789, and *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson, in New South Wales,* published in 1793.[28] Both are valuable for their vivid descriptions and literary style and have earned the reputation of being Australia's earliest works of literature.[29] Tench was not the only one to write about the beginnings of white settlement in Australia. Others included Governor Sir Arthur Phillip; the Deputy Judge Advocate and Lieutenant Governor David Collins; and Naval Surgeon and naturalist John White—all of whom were more important historical figures than Tench.[30] Yet, Tench's are the most memorable books and have had the greatest reach. His work was exceptional because it was factual yet written with literary intention using literary techniques to inform and entertain an audience. He used carefully styled journal entries as scenes incorporating detail, occasional dialogue, and characterization. The writing was immersive. It also carried a strong narrative voice and demonstrated an unusually open, empathetic approach in its descriptions of the people he was observing—whether military, convict, or Aboriginal. After Tench came the published journals of other explorers, [31] which are still in publication and show that literary journalism—in the form of books written by educated British free men and published in England—issued from the very formation of the New South Wales colony.

Letters

The work of another explorer, Charles Sturt, raises an interesting question regarding the meaning of *publication*. Like the other explorers, Sturt published two books about his journeys of discovery into the Australian desert: *Two Expeditions into the Interior of Southern Australia*, published in 1833, and *Narrative of an Expedition into Central Australia*, published in 1849. During his expeditions, he sent home detailed, descriptive letters, which were then circulated by the recipients, including the governor of South Australia. These were published and republished by various newspapers throughout the colony. Often, they appeared with an explanation, but sometimes not. Gibbney describes Sturt in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* as "a careful and accurate observer and an intelligent interpreter of what he saw."[32]

In the absence of a formal postal service, the earliest news from the colony was sent home in letters via the captains of the returning First Fleet.[33] A number of those letters survive and paint a vivid picture of life in New South Wales. For example, the First Fleeter George Worgan wrote long letters to his

brother with revealing accounts of the settlement, attaching an extract from his journal dated from January 20 to July 11, 1788.[34] While Worgan's letters were not constructed with the same writerly talent as the works of Tench, they appear to have been written with literary intention and include lively descriptions of his impressions. Although the letters were never published commercially, it can be argued that in the absence of an established press, they are an important and instructive form of literary reporting from the early days of the colony.

Women's voices were rarely heard, even in later colonial publications, but letters were one way women could express themselves and document their surroundings. Elizabeth Macarthur, wife of the soldier, entrepreneur, and pastoralist John Macarthur, was jointly responsible with him for the establishment of the Australian wool industry. Her letters home concerning her journey to New South Wales are regarded as rare and important records of voyages on convict transport, while her later letters give informative accounts of the beginning of her family's farming in Australia.[35]

Memoir

Letters and journal entries remained popular structural forms used by later writers in and about Australia. An example is Ellen Clacy's book, *A Lady's Visit to the Gold Diggings of Australia in 1852–1853*. Based on her diaries, the book describes Clacy's adventures with her brother and gives valuable historical descriptions of what life was like on the Victorian goldfields, particularly for women. There has been speculation about the accuracy of Clacy's account, but Priestley's recent research argues that while Clacy's memoir deceives the reader as to the length and nature of her visit to the goldfields, her book can be read as "a valid eyewitness account."[36]

Clacy's work raises the issue of memoir generally and whether it can be included in the category of literary journalism in early Australia. Many examples of early Australian memoir provide the reader with intriguing, factual information about life in the colony, as Clacy's does. In such cases, they become valuable first-hand reports not only of the writer's experiences but also of the place, time, and circumstances in which they were living. Yet many a memoir focuses more heavily on the author as the subject of the story than the external world, making it less likely to double as literary journalism. The line is a fine one and not always easy to draw, as demonstrated by Christina Smith's published memoir.

Smith was the first white woman to settle in the district of Rivoli Bay, South Australia. The year was 1845. As missionary and teacher, she formed close connections with the local Booandik people, which formed the basis for

her reminiscences, which were published in 1880. These were issued under her married name of Mrs. James Smith, with the title: *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines: A Sketch of Their Habits, Customs, Legends, and Language: Also an Account of the Efforts Made by Mr. and Mrs. James Smith to Christianise and Civilise Them*. Smith's aim was to record information about the Booandik before they disappeared under the force of European colonialism.[37] Although written in the style of memoir, her book works as an ethnography of the Booandik tribe.

Remarkably, Smith's book includes accounts of fourteen Booandik people who converted to Christianity and with whom Smith was closely acquainted.[38] These are the first biographical accounts of Aboriginal people so far discovered in Australian literature. While in many ways the book paints a stronger picture of Smith than it does of her subjects, it is not because Smith makes herself the main character in her story. Rather, it is because her missionary fervor and assumptions of cultural superiority dominate her relationships and her writing. Such attitudes of Smith's, however, are only part of the story; her writings demonstrate she formed genuine friendships with the people she wrote about.[39] Her focus is always, unwaveringly, on the Booandik people, and the reader is given a strong picture of the cultural and physical violence perpetrated by the white settlers.

Unfortunately, Smith's work, like that of many of the ethnographers, particularly the women diarists and writers who became accidental recorders of the impact of colonialism, stands in for Australia's First Peoples speaking for themselves.[40] As Tim Murray states, "One of the most striking aspects of contact history in Australia is in the fact that identifiably Aboriginal responses to the reality of murder and dispossession were rarely heard until the twentieth century."[41] The journalistic and authorial practices brought by the settlers were underpinned by a belief that aboriginal Australians were of a race so inferior to the European they were morally and legally invisible. As Stephen Muecke posits, the aboriginal peoples were unrepresentable—culturally dead—to settler society except as reinscribed through European writing and modes of knowledge.[42] They were either ignored by the press or treated as *the problem*, which suited the dominant ideology and provided a justification for the continued taking of land, as well as ongoing violence.[43] Indigenous voices are notably absent from the database, as they were from colonial society. Michael Rose has identified *The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle* between 1836 and December 1837, written by missionary educated Tasmanians, as the first aboriginal newspaper in the Australian colony.[44] For a range of complex reasons, essentially driven by the racism and greed of colonialism, it seems the next aboriginal newspapers and magazines were not

produced for another century. Consequently, Christina Smith's writings raise questions concerning the extent to which colonialism shaped the literary journalism produced in the colony, and vice versa; and how far the literary journalism attempted to disrupt and challenge the colonial enterprise. The decision to include Smith's memoir here is in recognition of her attempts to break the silence imposed on the First Peoples and their treatment, enabling at least some knowledge to seep through the unofficial censorship imposed by the dominant white society.

Sketches

Journalistic in nature, the sketch as a free-standing genre appeared in Australian periodicals and newspapers from the time censorship was lifted in the 1820s. The first sketches published in the colony were satirical portraits of prominent Hobart townsfolk written by the convict forger Henry Savery (1791–1842).[45] They were published "in the anti-establishment Tasmanian newspaper, the *Colonial Times*, under the heading 'The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land,' " and later published in book form "under the same title in 1830, becoming Australia's first book of essays." Savery went on to write Australia's first novel, *Quintus Servinton*, published in 1830.[46] From that time on, the sketch was increasingly featured in Australian newspapers and journals and was a favored form for writers, particularly columnists, such as Richard Rowe and Marcus Clarke.[47]

Emergence of a Press

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of a thriving press, strongly influenced by the journalistic practices of both Britain and the United States. Sally Young notes that by 1888, more than sixty daily newspapers had been launched in Australia, while twenty-one of these were being published concurrently in the 1890s.[48] Lurline Stuart notes that almost 600 periodicals were published over the century dating from the founding of the first literary periodical in 1821.[49] While publications came and went, often in a short period of time, a small number of these survived for extended periods, especially the metropolitan newspapers and their associated magazines, and were regular outlets for literary journalism.

John Stanley James (the Vagabond) used immersive undercover journalism to write about the marginalized and disadvantaged for the *Argus* newspaper in 1876 and 1877.[50] He is among the many literary journalists in the database whose articles have provided important glimpses into life in the colonies before Federation. Thomas Carrington, who was primarily a political cartoonist in Melbourne, used the form in a memorable eyewitness account, told in first person, of the capture of the infamous bushranger Ned Kelly

and his gang in rural Victoria in 1880.[51] The poet, short story writer, and reporter A. B. "Banjo" Paterson used it to movingly describe the experiences of soldiers in the Boer War.[52] Journalists George Morrison[53] and J. D. Melvin[54] wrote narrative journalism to convey their undercover investigations at different times into the "blackbirding" [55] trade that transported Indigenous Australians and Pacific Islanders to work on plantations and agricultural stations in northern Australia. Annie Bright is notable because her work as both a journalist and later the editor of *Cosmos* magazine in Sydney firmly established profile writing as part of Australian magazine journalism at the end of the nineteenth century.[56]

Creating the Archive as a Definition of the Form

The ability to digitize has profoundly changed how archivists approach cultural memory, in the sense of what can be produced, reproduced, and shared through cultural forms. Digitization allows for cultural memory to be conceptualized, stored/archived, and shaped in ways not previously available.[57] The selection of material included in the AustLit archive took three researchers, already experienced in the field, approximately twelve months to source, using a combination of primary and secondary sources, and working on the project part-time. The resulting collection is far from exhaustive, with writers and works selected as representative of a field that is still only nascent in the way it is defined and discussed in the academy.

For this reason, the database is intended to operate as a *living* archive, subject to expansion and change as more information emerges from users and researchers. Archives should not be seen as passive, that is, merely a presentation of cultural artifacts, or static in the sense of ever being complete collections. Nor are they objectively formed, with each artifact containing inherent relevance or significance. Rather, all archives are constructed according to context, availability of materials, and the perspectives afforded by history according to the prevailing power structures of their time. They are also beholden to the knowledge, experience, and subjectivity/ies of the archivist/s. An archive is constructed via individual appraisal, what Richard Cox and Helen Samuels call the "first responsibility" from which all else flows.[58] Once defined as a collection it then performs as a *system of dispersion*[59] producing, reproducing, and transforming the social phenomena it presents. The pieces selected for the database involve an element of reporting, the use of literary techniques such as characterization or the use of scenes and dialogue, and an identifiable narrative voice.

The selection of the pieces for the AustLit database has necessarily meant imposing an order—a constructed classification and historical narrative—

on the articles and their authors. Terry Cook suggests that archivists bear responsibility for retrospective inclusion.[60] He notes the focus of archival theory shifting in the 1980s from considering archives as harbingers of truth and evidence, to archives as records of story and social narrative. He described the transformation of archivists from passive curators to more dynamic community facilitators, ". . . part of a societal and governance process of remembering and forgetting, of concern about power and margins, in which the archivist consciously embraced a more visible role in co-creating the archive."[61]

Cultural institutions have historically presented archives in spaces that are simultaneously civic, social, and political, as well as experiential. The digital archive extends these spaces, expanding the possibilities that have opened up through the affordances of new media technologies. As Russo and Watkins argue, in harnessing these new media platforms and the new literacies of digital cultural communication, cultural institutions must expand their "curatorial mission[s] from the exhibition of collections to the remediation of cultural narratives and experiences."[62] The web allows new contexts and connections. As Sherratt notes, "Not just new ways of finding archives, but new ways of seeing them."[63] While ideally the database would be more *dynamic* in its encouragement of users communicating through the sites, the commenting function on the WordPress site was dismantled because of malicious bots. There is no equivalent function on the AustLit site. Nevertheless, readers have used the newly available email contact address to pass on extra information to the primary database creator, demonstrating that users take some ownership of the archived material and develop a certain kinship in a shared research enterprise.

The nature of the internet also disrupts the ways database information is accessed and used. Unlike the reading of a historical monograph, the ACNJ database allows other researchers to take a serendipitous approach and navigate their own way through the links. It invites users to construct their own narrative regarding the presented material while enabling challenges, at least to a degree, to this institutional version of that history. Archivists Wendy Duff and Verne Harris discuss archival records "as always in the process of being made," not locked in the past but "opening out of the future."[64] The ACNJ database allows the journalism discourses of the past to be accessible now, while also enabling the research to be open-ended and those discourses to be challenged. There is no longer a distinct beginning and an end as required in a monograph. Information can be added, changed, and subtracted over extended time. Community is created. Audience participation and contribution are part of the knowledge transfer and exchange.

Conclusion

The ACNJ database was created to locate the important—as well as the underrecognized—literary/narrative journalism of colonial Australia. By collecting and analyzing works, the initial aims—which continue to evolve in light of new understandings—were to begin defining the field; develop some understanding of the cultural specificities of the emerging Australian *voice*; and contribute to international discourse about narrative journalism. While listed among the original aims was the development of an Australian canon of literary journalism, it has become clear that the choices of what should be included or excluded demonstrate that an archive is an exercise in power.[65] As Achille Mbembe states, "The archive is . . . not a piece of data, but a status,"[66] reflecting membership of the archived item in the equivalent of an exclusive club. Many of the pieces selected for the ACNJ database had already been through a selection process that served the dominant culture in the way they were produced and published for a white, patriarchal, colonial press. Archival choices in this case constitute another stage of selection, by educated white women working within an institutional university setting that is an important educational arm of settler culture. However, the opening of the definition of colonial literary journalism in the archive, beyond the constraints of newspaper or magazine publication—and the decision to make the archive open-ended and revisable—is reflective of the database creators' attempt to disrupt the problem of the archive serving only the dominant paradigm. The openness of the archive provides some transparency of methods, which is a topic of scholarly discourse across a number of disciplines.[67] Clare Birchall says that while we don't live in transparent times, we live in an age of transparency advocacy because transparency "depoliticizes what are essentially political decisions."[68] What we used to believe, because we thought the author was *objective* we now believe because we can see through the author's writings to the sources and values that brought them to that position. This ethos of forensic accountability is gaining traction in communications and speaks to the philosophical aims of the database, making the raw data available for others to ask different questions, privileging the data over any singular interpretation.

The writings that are collected and published on the ACNJ database largely come into meaning through the interpretations brought by users. These historical artifacts are a starting point. Jacques Derrida writes in his 1995 paper, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Question," that the question of the archive, ". . . is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what this will have meant, we will only know in the times to come."[69]

David Bearman suggests that archives should be seen as "marshaling center[s]" that enable people, not to observe some distant past, but to mobilize the past within their own lives—to find connections and meanings.[70] The ACNJ database demonstrates that literary journalism has been written in Australia from the time of First Settlement, bringing historical journalism and its discourses into the present moment. The institutional support for the database ensures the texts also reach into the future, potentially allowing for open-ended exploration by diverse users for a range of motivations.

The Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism database sits at the intersection of convergent media technologies, enabling new ways of curating, presenting, and experiencing early narrative journalism in the emerging colony of Australia. It attempts to challenge institutional hegemony through retrospective inclusion. It makes available the political, cultural, and social issues of the day through this form of reportage on ordinary people, while also using the affordances of the online platform to allow for the serendipity of individual connections and experiences to emerge. As Sherratt says,

> In this new post-truth world, it's going to be more important than ever to challenge what is given, what is "natural," what is "inevitable." Our cultural heritage will be a crucially important resource to be mobilised in defence of complexity, nuance, and doubt—the rich and glorious reality of simply being human.[71]

An important sentiment in this digital age.

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Notes

[1] AustLit, "About AustLit."

[2] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

[3] Battley, Daniels, and Rolan, "Archives as Multifaceted Narratives," 155–57. See also, Millar, "Touchstones," 105–26.

[4] Sherratt, "Unremembering the Forgotten," para. 23.

[5] Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive," 19–26.

[6] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 204–45.

[7] "About Trove."

[8] The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* is available in both hardcopy and online versions. It is produced by the National Centre for Biography at the Australian National University. Eighteen volumes of the *ADB*, including a supplementary volume of "missing persons" have been published so far. The online version can be found at: http://adb.anu.edu.au/.

[9] AustLit, "About AustLit."

[10] AustLit, "About AustLit."

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

[12] Stewart, "Journalism and the World of the Writer," 174–93; 180.

[13] Conley, "Birth of a Novelist," 47.

[14] AustLit, "Australian Colonial Narrative Journalism."

[15] Kroeger, Undercover Reporting: A Database; Kroeger, *Undercover Reporting*.

[16] Brooke Kroeger (journalist, author, and professor of journalism at New York University), unpublished interview by Willa McDonald, New York, May 2015.

[17] *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, directed by Charles Tait in 1906, was inscribed on the UNESCO's Memory of the World Register in 2007 as the first full-length narrative feature film produced anywhere in the world. Accessed July 2, 2019. http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-8/the-story-of-the-kelly-gang-1906/.

[18] Carey, *True History of the Kelly Gang*.

[19] McDonald and Davies, "Creating History," 33.

[20] McDonald and Davies, 33–49.

[21] Silvester, Introduction to *The Penguin Book of Interviews*, 4.

[22] Silvester, 7.

[23] James [the Vagabond], "A Month in Pentridge." The interview was with the bushranger Harry Power and is contained in the second installment of the series, published in the *Argus* on Saturday, March 3, 1877, page 9. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/5915268.

[24] Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, 3–52.

[25] The convict George Hughes was the first government printer, appointed in 1795, but he was untrained. He taught himself to use the small wooden screw press that came out on the First Fleet. "Hughes, George (?–?)." *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

[26] George Howe, also a convict, replaced Hughes five years later. Howe was born into a printing family on the island of St. Kitts in the West Indies. His father was Thomas Howe who was the government printer at Basseterre on St. Christopher's Island. He received a classical European education and gained extensive skills as a printer on the *Times* and other newspapers. Byrnes, "Howe, George (1769–1821)."

[27] In arriving at this schema, the authors have taken the lead from Elizabeth Webby and her edited collection, *Colonial Voices*.

[28] Tench, *Sydney's First Four Years*; Fitzhardinge, "Tench, Watkin (1758–1833)."

[29] Merle, "Watkin Tench's Fieldwork, 199–219; Fitzhardinge, "Tench, Watkin (1758–1833)."

[30] These men are all listed in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. See Fletcher, "Phillip, Arthur (1738–1814)"; "Collins, David (1756–1810)"; Rienits, "White, John (1756–1832)."

[31] For a collection of these journals, prepared by Sue Asscher as e-books, see Project Gutenberg Australia's "Journals of Australian Land and Sea Explorers and Discoverers." Accessed July 3, 2019. http://gutenberg.net.au/explorers-journals.html.

[32] Gibbney, "Sturt, Charles (1795–1869)," para. 20.

[33] State Library of New South Wales, *From Terra Australis to Australia: Letters Home*.

[34] State Library of New South Wales, *Worgan, George Bouchier, 1757–1838.* See also Watling, *Letters from an Exile at Botany-Bay*.

[35] Macarthur, "Letter to Eliza Kingdon," in Webby, *Colonial Voices*, 95–99.

[36] Clacy, *A Lady's Visit*; Priestley, "Identifying Ellen Clacy—A Cautionary Tale," 119–28, 126.

[37] Smith, *The Booandik Tribe of South Australian Aborigines*, iii–iv.

[38] Smith; also McDonald, "Precursor to the Profile," 43–59.

[39] McDonald, 52; McDonald and Avieson, "Against the Tide," 29–37.

[40] Izett, *Breaking New Ground*.

[41] Murray, "In the Footsteps of George Dutton," 204.

[42] Muecke, *Textual Spaces*.

[43] Meadows, V*oices in the Wilderness*.

[44] Rose, *For the Record*, xxix–xxx, 3.

[45] Hadgraft, "Savery, Henry (1791–1842)," para. 2.

[46] McDonald, "Precursor to the Profile," 45, 45–46.

[47] Baxter, "Rowe, Richard (1828–1879)"; Elliott, "Clarke, Marcus Andrew (1846–1881)."

[48] Young, *Paper Emperors*, 51.

[49] Stuart, *Australian Periodicals with Literary Content, 1821–1925*, ix.

[50] McDonald, "A Vagabond," 65–81.

[51] Carrington, "Catching the Kellys," 18.

[52] A list of articles written by Paterson as war correspondent covering the Boer War can be found on *Trove* at https://trove.nla.gov.au/list?id=5560. Individual

titles are too many to list here, but include "With the S. S. Kent Contingent," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, December 28, 1899, 5, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/14216858?; "From the Seat of War," *Sydney Morning Herald,* January 12, 1900, 5. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/14232606?; Free State Fighting," *Argus,* May 11, 1900, 6. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/9540863?; "A Day Under Fire," *Argus,* August 15, 1900, 9. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/9551948?; "Basutoland." *Sydney Morning Herald***,** October 6, 1900, 7. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/14373344?. See also Semmler, "Paterson, Andrew Barton (Banjo) (1864–1941)."

[53] Morrison's work has yet to be digitized by *Trove*. The full list plus pdfs of Morrison's eight articles, published in the *Leader* between October and December 1882, which detail his undercover work on the blackbirding ship *Lavinia*, can be found in Kroeger's Undercover Reporting database. See also Gregory, "Morrison, George Ernest (Chinese) (1862–1920)."

[54] The series of thirteen articles Melvin wrote for the *Argus* on "The Kanaka Labour Traffic" are available on *Trove* as follows: "A Representative on a Recruiting Schooner," December 3, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8488604; (1) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Natives Homeward Bound; The Voyage to the Solomon Islands," December 5, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8489072. (2) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Reception of Returned Labourers by Their Tribes; The First Attempt to Recruit," December 6, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8489286; (3) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; The Natives Shy; Inspection by a Warship," December 7, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8489506; (4) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; The Safeguards against Deception; First Recruits" December 8, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8490003; (5) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Operations in Port Adam; Additional Recruits Obtained; Refusal of Recruits," December 9, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8490738; (6) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Death of a 'Return'; A Large Number of Recruits Obtained," December 10, 1892, https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8491115; (7) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Re-engagement of Former Labourers; Two Women Accepted; Death of a Recruit," December 12, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8491580; (8) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; The Last of the 'Returns' Landed; Brisk Recruiting," December 15, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8492809; (9) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Competition between Labour Ships; Re-Victualling Necessary." December 16, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8493183; (10) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; In Missionary Precincts, Large Accession of Recruits," December 17, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8493698; (11) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; A Full Ship; The Ninetieth 'Boy' Obtained," December 19, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8494201; (12) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Return to Bundaberg; Safe Landing of the Boys; Some

Kanaka Characteristics," December 20, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8494500; (13) "Our Representative on a Recruiting Schooner; Concluding Comments; Stringency of the Regulations; The Cost of a Kanaka," December 22, 1892. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8495285. See also Corris, "Melvin, Joseph Dalgarno (1852–1909)"; Melvin, *The Cruise of the Helena*.

[55] "Blackbirding" was the name given to the practice of kidnapping Pacific Islanders to be used as forced labor, particularly on the Australian cotton and sugar plantations. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "blackbirding."

[56] McDonald, "Precursor to the Profile," 54–56.

[57] Van House and Churchill, "Technologies of Memory," 296.

[58] Cox and Samuels, "The Archivist's First Responsibility," 28.

[59] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 37–38.

[60] Cook, " 'We Are What We Keep,' " 173–89.

[61] Cook, 179.

[62] Russo and Watkins, "Digital Cultural Communication," 149.

[63] Sherratt, "Contexts, Connections, Access," 209.

[64] Duff and Harris, "Stories and Names: Archival Description," 284.

[65] Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive," 19.

[66] Mbembe, 20.

[67] See, for example, the work of Birchall, "Radical Transparency?"; Tkacz, *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness*; and Triplett, "Transparency Group.

[68] Birchall, "Radical Transparency?" 78.

[69] Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," 27.

[70] Bearman, "Archival Methods," para. 21.

[71] Sherratt, "Caring About Access," para. 12.

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Marilynne Robinson speaking at the Covenant Fine Arts Center during an interview at the 2012 Festival of Faith and Writing at Calvin College. Photo by Christian Scott Heinen Bell.

Banned in Britain: Marilynne Robinson's Environmental Literary Journalism

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Abstract: Although considered one of the world's most distinguished living authors for her novels, Marilynne Robinson consistently regards her relatively underappreciated, nonfictional 1989 *Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State, and Nuclear Pollution* as her magnum opus. Few are aware that a twenty-five-year gap (1980–2005) separated her first and second novels, during which she ardently pursued the craft of nonfiction prose. As the crowning achievement of that period, *Mother Country* ranks among the environmental movement's most radical works, notable for its unprecedented assault on Great Britain's nuclear program. Like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Robinson's environmental literary journalism builds on the genre's method of civic engagement. Her writing blends artfulness and moral insight and deploys a representational and discursive strategy for social critique that features shocking imagery and tropes of pastoral apocalypse. This study argues that these staples of "toxic discourse" on the effects of pollution situate Robinson with literary journalists who build upon Carson's socioenvironmental approach, which exposes the toll of rampant and unfettered industrial waste. The study is important because it highlights a largely forgotten yet invaluable contribution to environmental literary journalism. *Mother Country* is a work that not only elicited a major lawsuit for libel against Robinson but was also subsequently pulped and banned in Britain. Robinson's achievement stands out for its indictments of corruption on behalf of government and industry perpetrated through the media.

Keywords: Marilynne Robinson – environmental literature – literary journalism – censorship – social ecology – activist media

Although known mainly for her fiction, Marilynne Robinson dedicated a major portion of her prime years to the craft of nonfiction prose during the twenty-five-year gap (1980–2005) between her first two novels, *Housekeeping* and *Gilead*. Committed to the "real world, that is really dying," Robinson's literary journalism marked the first decade of that period with *Mother Country: Britain, the Welfare State and Nuclear Pollution*, a work banned in Britain and listed as a finalist for the National Book Award for Nonfiction in 1989.[1] The book targets the British government's attempts to "[manage] public reaction" to its "radioactive contamination of the world's environment."[2] This objective serves the text's larger goal to "break down some of the structures of thinking that make reality invisible to us."[3] "A bookish woman like myself," as she described herself, "with a long, quiet life behind her, has few opportunities to shock, even scandalize, and that is part of the appeal" of her assault on the British nuclear program.[4]

Like Rachel Carson's 1962 environmental classic *Silent Spring*, which developed from her *New Yorker* series revealing the impact of pesticides on humans and wildlife, *Mother Country* began as activist longform journalism published in *Harper's* Magazine in February 1985. Titled "Bad News from Great Britain," Robinson's article was an exposé, revealing more than thirty years of contamination of the Irish Sea.[5] In the tradition of Carson, Robinson's environmental literary journalism builds on the genre's method of civic engagement, which John J. Pauly defines as cultural interpretation and critique through narrative strategies of "artfulness and moral insight."[6] As an international bestseller, Carson's *Silent Spring* was at the forefront of her generation's "turn toward questions of culture and away from standard categories of news coverage that no longer adequately captured that era's sense of its own experience," as Pauly describes the movement.[7] David Abrahamson notes that *Silent Spring* "is often cited as one of the seminal texts of a new environmentalist awareness which emerged in the mid-twentieth century."[8] Decades later, in the 1980s, Robinson leveraged the "interpretive caste of literature" with "the contemporary interest of journalism," according to Edwin Ford's early definition of literary[9] to expose the impact of government and industrial interests on the environment and human communities.

Within an oeuvre dominated by highly acclaimed fiction, Robinson consistently alludes to her only nonfiction book, *Mother Country*, as the proudest accomplishment of her long career.[10] What is its place in the tradition of environmental literature, particularly with respect to Thoreau and Carson? What rhetorical techniques by this renowned prose stylist distinguish its writing and drive its politics? In light of the seriousness of its original impact that simultaneously elicited its banning in the United

Kingdom and placed it among the finalists for the National Book Award, the book warrants renewed critical attention. Tom Wolfe has claimed that the New Journalism was more adept than fiction and conventional news at addressing his era's social reality.[11] Robinson's literary nonfiction is similarly more effective than fiction and traditional journalism at capturing the full range of liabilities intrinsic to the escalating nuclear industry of the 1980s. *Mother Country* accomplishes this through representational and discursive strategies for social critique featuring shocking imagery and tropes of pastoral apocalypse, staples of "toxic discourse" on the effects of pollution.[12]

These strategies illustrate how "Robinson's solutions to problems, whether interpretive or ethical-political, usually turn on a shift in language," according to Alex Engebretson.[13] The literary stylistics of *Mother Country* serve the larger political aesthetic behind her activist antinuclear agenda, placing it among the environmental movement's most potent assaults on the plutonium industry, one threatening enough to have sparked a series of vigorous counteroffensives from the press to the courtroom.

The following section situates Robinson's literary journalism in the tradition of activist environmental writing and theoretically frames her own journalistic alternative to mainstream British media. Next is a textual analysis of Robinson's radical rhetoric that deconstructs linguistic bias shaping Britain's neglected welfare state. Her operative literary techniques link class and empire to obfuscating reports of nuclear waste routinely pumped into the Irish Sea at the Sellafield nuclear plant on the shore of England's storied Lake District, the charming countryside that originally inspired William Wordsworth. The concluding section details the fate of Sellafield and Robinson's legacy of activist environmental journalism.

The Social Ecology of Robinson's Literary Journalism

Mother Country operates in the "social ecology"[14] (or socioenvironmental) tradition of environmental literature concerned with deciphering the social and political mechanisms behind the human impact on nature. By contrast, "deep ecology" focuses on "the value of nature in and of itself," as told through narratives of self-sufficiency in the wild by authors such as Wendell Berry, Gary Snyder, and Edward Abbey.[15] Influenced by Martin Heidegger, Norwegian environmentalist Arne Naess portrays deep ecology as the contemplative individualistic pursuit of meaning in nature premised in "the realization of a self that encompasses both the individual and the cosmos."[16] Although it can include moments of epiphany in nature, socioenvironmental writing is concerned with exposing environmental crimes to defend the health of ecosystems. To this end, Robinson's "linguistic aestheticism deployed all

the resources of language," as Tim Jelfs explains, but is "never simply about language" given its commitment to environmental consciousness raising.[17]

As with socioenvironmental works such as *Poison Spring: The Secret History of Pollution and the EPA* by E. G. Vallianatos with journalist and nonfiction writer McKay Jenkins,[18] *Mother Country* exhibits the core traits of literary journalism, defined by Josh Roiland as "a genre of nonfiction writing that adheres to all the reportorial and truth-telling covenants of traditional journalism, while employing rhetorical and storytelling techniques more commonly associated with fiction."[19] Literary techniques in the journalistic storytelling[20] of *Mother Country* include the central symbol of the Sellafield plant as dark satanic mill; scene setting in which the idyllic English countryside is cast against the menacing encroachment of plutonium waste; the characterization of British and U.S. news consumers, scientists, and government officials; escalating class-driven conflict and tension drawing readers into the narrative; an incredulous, urgent tone; and a transparent first-person perspective. Robinson can be placed with "many of the best American nature writers" Scott Slovic identifies who have "long realized that the anecdotal imagination—the affinity for the specific, the experiential—plays an important role in our reception and expression of information about the world."[21] Her use of anecdotal first-person interludes is consonant with that of writers in this vein, from Henry David Thoreau[22] to Barry Lopez, who, Slovic notes, "have discovered how the insertion of an occasional personal narrative, whether as a sustained structural trope or as a segue from one topic to another, can transform a dispassionate treatise"—or in this case a dry political tract—"into a lush evocative story, with the experiencing, writing self becoming an inextricable part of the subject matter."[23] In this literary journalistic mode, the nondisclosure of one's biases and subjectivity in nonfiction narrative is disingenuous, as Robin Hemley has argued.[24]

Through what Norman Sims defines as a "humanistic approach to culture" in literary journalism "as compared to the scientific, abstract, or indirect approach taken by much standard journalism,"[25] Robinson's literary journalism accomplishes social ecology's objective of elucidating the social and political implications of human impacts on the environment. Traits also resonating with Sims's definition include her attention to accuracy, responsibility, and advocacy for the interests of ordinary lives regarding the impending horrors of toxic pollution, particularly through prose emphasizing "voice . . . and attention to the symbolic realities of a story."[26] By situating Sellafield in the broader context of empire and class, *Mother Country* displays the kind of thorough research into the subject's context that Mark Kramer deems essential to narrative journalism.[27] Robinson's journalistic impulse is

evident in her aim to raise the consciousness of her readers, to "cast out nets or lures . . . appropriate to snagging a bit of reality for them."[28]

In *Mother Country*, Robinson embraces the politically pertinent space of nonfiction as a tonic for the relatively detached realm of fiction in which she had been previously operating as a novelist. Through nonfiction, she discovers the new authorial role of service to the public good, thus assuaging the impending sense that "the worth of my own life [was] diminished by the tedious years I have spent acquiring competence in the arcana of mediocre invention," like an expert on "some defunct comic-book hero or television series." She casts this "grief borne home to others while I and my kind have been thus occupied" as a dereliction of duty to the public on behalf of democracy—the core principle of journalism in free societies—that "lies on my conscience like a crime."[29] Hewing close to lived experience through what Hartsock describes as the literary journalistic "common sense-appeal of the shared common senses,"[30] *Mother Country* represents Robinson's transformation into a public intellectual.

Mother Country shares the designation of *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson's landmark 1962 indictment of pesticide use, as a "classic example of literary nonfiction designed to raise public consciousness," a concern deemed valuable due to its "potential for political influence," according to Scott Slovic.[31] Carson's biographer Priscilla Coit Murphy points out that "writing nonfiction to inform and raise public consciousness locates the work of such books" as Carson's—and Robinson's, as is argued here—"squarely in the same tradition as periodical journalism."[32] Beginning with her *Harper's* piece, writing for political influence demanded a new understanding of language for Robinson. What was only abstract metaphor in her fiction took on the heft of lived experience in her turn to literary journalism sometime during the early 1980s. It was then, as Jelfs aptly illustrates, that she looked up from her fiction to discover a real world "in which the durability of a certain species of discarded matter—plutonium waste—is not a metaphorical proposition, but a state-sanctioned fact of everyday life."[33]

Anticipating slow journalism's signature technique that "*enacts a critique* of the limitations and dangers" of mainstream news,[34] Robinson applies her socioenvironmental approach. For her, social and political change "begins with consciousness and language, flowing out from the mind and into the wider culture," as Engebretson notes.[35] Equal parts advocacy and documentary journalism that "reads like a short story or a novel," *Mother Country* is committed to making "a truth claim to phenomenal experience,"[36] as stated in John Hartsock's foundational definition of literary journalism. Rather than setting out to "invent stories or otherwise actively deceive"—techniques Ted

Conover considers anathema to ethical narrative journalism,[37]—Robinson adheres to facts and rigorous reporting to promote her environmentalist agenda. "It was largely a consequence of the experience of writing *Mother Country* that I began what amounted to an effort to re-educate myself," Robinson recalled of this key turning point in her authorial development.[38]

Narrative is central to environmental writing's unique power to bring us—that is, every reader in touch with "our lives 'out in the world,' " as Scott Slovic observes.[39] The reason is that "over its long course of coming to power, ecology became a narrative mode because natural science never fully rejected vernacular language," and because environmental writing "advanced from description to advocacy after 1960, as its stories presented ethical choices that affect land and people," as William Howarth notes.[40] Narrative description in environmental nonfiction then took on the New Journalism's more decisive "demythification of secular myth, or the cultural and by extension personal assumptions that a society and its individuals tend to take for granted, according to Hartsock's explanation of the movement's aptitude for "making the familiar unfamiliar."[41] *Mother Country* similarly identifies with Ursula K. Heise's description of the environmentalist social movement's aim, "to reground human cultures in natural systems and whose primary pragmatic goal was to rescue a sense of the reality of environmental degradation from the obfuscations of political discourse."[42] Hence the dismantling of media messaging to lay bare such degradation reflected in the title "Bad News from Great Britain" of her *Harper's* piece.

Although Carson had a passionate concern for what Nixon describes as the "complicity of the military-industrial complex in disguising toxicity, both physically and rhetorically," her writing says little directly about empire and class.[43] *Mother Country* picks up where *Silent Spring* leaves off in this regard, as Robinson deals directly with empire and class via Britain's imperialist governance that has chronically compromised the wellbeing of its poor. Robinson shares Carson's "shift from a conservationist ideology to the more socioenvironmental outlook that has proven so enabling for environmental justice movements."[44] Like Carson, Robinson focuses on what Nixon has called "the dubious funding of partitioned knowledge" on toxic waste and its "baleful public health implications."[45] Robinson weds environmental literature's concern for marginalized groups with epistemological questions "[W]hat do we know? how do we know? how do we organize this knowledge?" of the sort raised by Barry Lopez.[46] Such questions highlight undercurrents contributing to "the mentality that would produce poisonous wastes and experiment with nuclear weapons."[47]

Rhetorical inconsistencies regarding the British nuclear program during

the 1980s were particularly copious—she quips that they could "provide material for a dozen sobering volumes"—because of the Official Secrets Act. Under the Act, Robinson writes, "the British impound all government records for thirty years and then release them selectively," making it a "crime for anyone to reveal, without authorization, any information acquired by him as a public employee." The thirst for the truth in her narrative is intensified by the unreliability of most published contemporary histories of Britain, which "are typically undocumented, vague, lame, and opinionated or, when they are memoirs, self-serving."[48] She situates herself here outside the realm of *opinion*, which she regards as undocumented polemic, a point reinforcing how subjectivity does not necessitate sensationalism, but can be reinforced by in-depth reporting and research. Further, hers is not a memoir either, but instead literary journalism in a censorious environment. First–person longform accounts indeed can fulfill the ethnographic and analytic approach media scholars have called for to provide the public with more accurate information.[49]

Engebretson has noted the cultural privileging of fiction over nonfiction writing as a literary category because the former is more often associated with creativity and imagination, deemed "superior to the mundane, literal-mindedness of 'journalism.' "[50] His point about the importance of nonfiction in her corpus is crucial for understanding why *Mother Country* should be considered literary: Robinson's "intention is not for the nonfiction to supplement the fiction but rather for the nonfiction to be an equal and complementary intellectual discipline."[51] The book enters her into a tradition now continued in *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* by Elizabeth Kolbert, *The End of Nature* by Bill McKibben, and *Nature Noir: A Park Ranger's Patrol in the Sierra* by Jordan Fisher Smith.[52]

Robinson's activist literary journalism deserves recognition for its place in the environmentalist movement. Her revelation in *Mother Country* of industrialization's threat to the ecosystem and human health builds on the foundation of Thoreau's 1856 *Walden* and, as mentioned, Carson's *Silent Spring*. "Carson challenges the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)," as Priscilla Coit Murphy observes, "on the issue of contamination of consumer foodstuffs."[53] Robinson is similarly guided by Carson's "question 'But doesn't the government protect us from such things?' " to which Carson also answers, " 'Only to a limited extent.' "[54] *Mother Country* is an apt companion piece to John McPhee's *The Control of Nature*, which also appeared in 1989. Focused on the desecration of America's mightiest and most storied river, McPhee sounds a similar note in his litany of oil and chemical companies invading the shores of the Mississippi. "The industries," he writes, "were there because of

the river," especially its "navigational convenience and its fresh water." Texaco, Exxon, Monsanto, and Dow Chemical among a host of others "would not, and could not, linger beside a tidal creek." As with the proprietors of Sellafield, "for nature to take its course was simply unthinkable." In an outraged tone resonant with Robinson's, he envisions "the Sixth World War would do less damage to southern Louisiana. Nature, in this place, had become an enemy of the state."[55] Since then, oppositional voices have emerged, such as Bill McKibben, editor of *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, and Phyllis Austin, feminist alternative press eco-journalist and coeditor of *On Wilderness: Voices from Maine*.[56] Robinson shares Carson's belief "that the public had a fundamental 'right to know' " and "should be mobilized to act to improve the system" in the spirit of Sinclair Lewis and Harriet Beecher Stowe.[57] Squarely in the tradition of radical intellectual culture, Robinson cites influential authors known for their activist journalism. Horace Greeley, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Karl Marx are among the activists who disrupted the rhythms of the news cycle with their revolutionary voices in the periodical press along with labor advocates such as Edward Bellamy. All appear in the Social Bibliography she appends to the text of *Mother Country*.[58]

Robinson's Social Bibliography is contiguous with her religious beliefs, which are central to not only her politics, but also her sense of herself as a writer. Shannon Mariotti and Joseph Lane argue that her democratic outlook is consonant with her spiritual sense that is captured in her words, "To identify sacred mystery with every individual experience, every life, giving the word its largest sense, is to arrive at *democracy as an ideal*," her Whitman/Emerson-inspired belief, "and to accept the difficult obligation to honor others and oneself with something approaching due reverence."[59] The practice of her narrative nonfiction craft thus redoubled her conviction, argue Mariotti and Lane, that "religion should motivate us to fight for tolerance, recognition of difference, and justice in terms of gender, class, and race."[60] That fight, she believes, should be waged publicly for the widest audiences possible. That democratic ideal, however, often relies on the rhetorical figure of the nation, which, Tim Jelfs has argued, "[undercuts] the efficacy of [*Mother Country*'s] environmentalist critique, precisely because the true object of that critique, the dumping at sea of toxic nuclear waste, is not so much a national, as an international problem."[61] Jelfs has also argued that framing pollution practice in terms of national characteristics, in this case Britain as the title *Mother Country* indicates, renders a "peculiarly one-eyed approach to the environmental history of the United States."[62] The points are well taken, but tend to downplay that *Mother Country*'s central aim is not to target the national character of England so much as to hold it and nations

like it—"Is there any reason to believe the British are entirely exceptional in adopting such strategies of self-destruction?" [63] she asks—responsible for the hard truths behind its nuclear program, and its implications for the cancer and leukemia victims near the Sellafield plant. She is equally critical of the U.S. national character, especially the "tacit connivance of their silence" on the issue.[64] The U.S. arm of Greenpeace, further, spurned her request to help write the book, which was eventually banned in the United Kingdom because of her allegation that the British arm of the environmental group had failed to report ocean dumping.[65] The plight of the common citizen and their right to a safe environment is central to the book's critique of the welfare state, which stands as a "protest against the marginalization of the people on the periphery of British society in the 1980s," as Mariotti and Lane show.[66] The government's placating use of the media to downplay the seriousness of nuclear pollution is part of a larger pattern of oppression. "Oppression," as John S. Bak astutely points out of writing in censorious political circumstances, "has fueled the production of literary journalism as much as, if not more than, freedom has."[67] Robinson may have approached the writing of *Mother Country* from the perspective of American literary journalists feeling, as Bak writes of them, "impunity to ramble on like a Tom Wolfe or to bite the hand that reads you like a Norman Mailer,"[68] All information in the news reports Robinson parses in *Mother Country* first "passed through a filter of official approval, simply by virtue of the workings of the Official Secrets Act and the government's exercise of prior restraint," or through "regular, off-the-record briefings of journalists by government, which are a major source of news."[69]

News of Her Own

Robinson's literary technique of casting herself in the narrative dramatizes her transformation from outraged citizen to activist literary journalist. Robinson's range of tones—from outrage to compassion to dark humor—favor shocking imagery and jarring ironic juxtapositions between official language and lived experience. *Mother Country* follows Carson's signature method in *Silent Spring* of "presenting one aspect of the problem, providing explanations and illustrative incidents, and concluding with exhortations to acknowledge the problem and demand solutions."[70] Like Carson, Robinson recreates imagined scenarios rooted in sociological fact fraught with threatening dramatic tension pitting an unsuspecting public at the peril of an industry and government willing to compromise its safety for profit. Unlike Carson, Robinson puts greater emphasis on representing civic life amid nuclear industry through the evidence of headline news, revisiting official versions of stories to provide meta commentary exposing their logical gaps,

manipulative twists, and ideological import. The radioactive fallout Carson figuratively compares to DDT pesticide contamination to elevate the stakes of *Silent Spring*'s truth claim is the reality Robinson unearths in *Mother Country*.

Robinson's "gift for lyricism" joins a "relish for disputation"[71] in *Mother Country*, as Alex Engebretson describes it, reflecting what Bak calls literary journalism's "significant and controversial" nature. Its significance lies in its capacity to raise "our sociopolitical awareness about a disenfranchised or underprivileged people," in this case the British working class and citizens exposed to deadly radiation, while its controversial nature derives from its "emphasis on authorial voice" that can intensify reader responses.[72] In accessible, jargon-free language, the narrative raises awareness and elevates the public discourse on industrial and environmental science then dominated by abstract, dispassionate scientific accounts and oblique mainstream media reporting in 1980s Great Britain.[73]

Mother Country offers "an explicit reaction to the phenomenon of journalism" by providing an alternative to conventional news lacking moral conviction, a creative response Mark Canada has identified in the American literary tradition.[74] Just as Rebecca Harding Davis's "Life in the Iron-Mills" and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*[75] shatter the silencing effect of conventional news, Robinson's nonfiction probes beneath the morally indifferent Sellafield headlines that drew her ire. She shares Davis and Sinclair's aim to replace deceptive mainstream media "with a particular brand of news of their own" that provides "their own forms of truth-telling in opposition to a press that, in their eyes, was failing in its role as reporter and reformer."[76] Discursive humanistic narrative was Robinson's response to the truncated brevity of conventional news.

Robinson thus adopts the role of "lady novelist as petroleuse"—despite risking "seem[ing] ill-tempered and eccentric" and "veering toward anarchy"—in order to break down official structures of thinking, to "jar a pillar or crack a fresco, or totter a god or two" with such directness that "no one will therefore take my assault as symbolic rather than as failed."[77] Although emboldened by the prospect of writing for real political change, she is not "the hyper-competent, and confident, hero of [her] tale," as Conover has warned against.[78] Instead she confronts, she writes, "the epic scale of my narrative" and "deficiency in treating this great subject" due to the United Kingdom's censorious Official Secrets Act, and because she knows "very little about plutonium" from a scientific expert's perspective. However, she dryly assures the reader that "I know better than to pour it into the environment," hoping "the British nuclear establishment will learn something from my work."[79] She thus situates her narrative in the

humanistic tradition of literary journalism Conover defines as being in opposition to the positivist one associated with the inverted pyramid and "5Ws" of standard journalism.[80]

Robinson's reaction to news coverage of Sellafield is consonant with Eric Heyne's assertion that "just because we are without absolute rules universally accepted for the construction of accurate or meaningful narrative, we do not have to conclude that therefore we cannot claim that one story is truer than another."[81] In this manner, Robinson turned her literary eye toward the British news's submerged agency and ethical vacuity that resembled a botched narrative. "Sometimes the news reads suspiciously like unusually clumsy fiction," she quipped, noting how "a fiction writer has to braid events into a plausible sequence," a point she emphasized to her creative writing students. She saw this lack of coherence between events as a symptom of how 1980s British "news is simply a series of reported incidents which, one assumes, manifest varieties of accident and causation, plausible if they were known."[82] Yet "there are no grounds for this assumption," she realized. Although "the American zeal for establishing a narrative context for events" allows readers to "set events one beside another to see how they cohere," they tend to falsify rather than clarify events, often distracting readers with apolitical celebrity and soft news gossip.[83]

By playing the role of benevolent patriarch, Margaret Thatcher's administration emphasized that it had taken steps to protect citizens from radioactive "*foreign* wastes" that "enter the country at Dover and are transported by rail through London." Meanwhile, the ministry promised to continue production of "finished plutonium [that] will be shipped from Scotland into Europe by air,"[84] at a safe distance from Britain. Such oblique reporting of the very bad news of contamination surfaced in Michael Kenward's article in the *New Scientist*.[85] In it, the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) is cast as a benevolent environmental watchdog. Yet, as Robinson points out, NRPB's plan for the investigation of Sellafield allowed—and even encouraged—the government to override that plan if it "wants to point its watchdog at new scents."[86] Appalled by Kenward's article, which William Brafford in a 2013 review of *Mother Country* called "a puff piece about a functionary,"[87] she draws the provocative connection that "this 'independent' watchdog agency is to allow its agenda to be set by the government, which is also the nuclear industrialist and trash collector."[88] Those two roles are as civically incongruous as they are lyrically discordant, sounding a note of conflicted interest in government's dual function to serve the nuclear industry and the welfare state, figured here in the quotidian and thus paradoxically alarming, image of trash collection.

Such coverage of the Sellafield nuclear plant led Robinson to ask, "whose judgment and what reasoning lie behind these practices and arrangements?" She laments that "the question is never broached,"[89] reflecting *Mother Country*'s activist agenda to expose this self-justifying news cycle: "The British government, the great constant behind the notional shifts of management, the proprietor and stock holder, never loses its ability to reassure the public, assuming the lofty role of inquirer into its own doings and finding nothing seriously amiss." Such pseudo self-regulation amounts to "nothing a little finger wagging will not put right, a little expression of lack of confidence in the management." The government leveraged the media as a public relations tool "to let the public know what it must accept," in order to "produce quiet, while the government launches into the vast program of construction that will make Britain an ever greater center of plutonium extraction and waste dumping."[90] The technique of deconstructing the logics of such industrial imperatives amplifies her contrarian tone aimed at raising public awareness in the face of prevailing quietism, a journalistic impulse that maintains her "outward focus on cultural revelation" as opposed to memoir's "inward focus on personal revelation," as Hartsock defines the genres."[91]

Beyond coverage of Sellafield in these outlets, other forms of environmental writing remained silent on the issue of nuclear pollution, from the *hook and bullet* outdoor-adventure genre to practical utilitarian works for industrialists to aesthetic pieces praising nature itself. No-nukes bestsellers like Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth*, Robinson notes, focused on impending nuclear war to the exclusion of other problems, as well as that of "cleansing the sea of tons of radioactive sludge, and cleansing the air and the earth, and discovering and limiting the varieties of harm already done." The problem stemmed from this systematic omission, placing it "outside democratic political control, first of all because books about nuclear issues do not tell the public the problem exists."[92] By exposing this gap in the publishing industry, she signals the need for activist socioenvironmental literature, a self-reflexive gesture that situates *Mother Country* squarely in that genre.

The Radical Rhetoric of Mother Country

Sellafield did not attract the media attention garnered by accidents and spectacular disaster events such as Three Mile Island. This is because "slow violence," as Nixon terms it, in the ongoing operation of a plant such as Sellafield "poses acute challenges, not only because it is spectacle deficient, but also because the fallout's impact may range . . . to the transnational and . . . may stretch beyond the horizon of imaginable time."[93] Robinson indicts not only Britain, but the United States for slow environmental violence in

the ongoing operation of plutonium plants in Anchorage, Alaska, and at the Hanford site in Washington state.[94]

To unmask Sellafield's slow violence, Robinson deconstructs nationalistic ideology, which to her appears most pointedly in the muted tones of euphemistic cheer inherent in the dialect of the British news media. *Mother Country*'s narrative form consists of "cultural documentary reflected and refracted through interior consciousness," as Hartsock describes of James Agee.[95] It blends the urgency of activist reform with the inner subjectivity of ethical apotheosis. Like Agee, Robinson attempts, in Hartsock's words, "to break through conventional habits or 'myths' of seeing that consign or objectify"[96] social convention. She finds sheer terror, for example, in the simple act of going to the beach. "It seems to me indecent," Robinson writes, "that people are not warned away from this uniquely contaminated environment."[97] The beach lies in the shadows of "the largest source, by far, of radioactive contamination of the world's environment." This region in Cumbria by the Irish Sea is home to a "variety of sheep raised in that picturesque region [that] still reflects the preference of Beatrix Potter, miniaturist of a sweetly domesticated rural landscape" where literary tourists travel to "William and Dorothy Wordsworth's Dove Cottage." This recognizable domestic idyll of rolling green countryside is savagely undercut by surreal Kafkaesque horror delivered with well-mannered aplomb: "The lambs born in Cumbria are radioactive,"[98] the beach glows with toxic plutonium, and "the plant is implicated in these deaths of children" in the area in "an excess rate of 1,000 percent the national average."[99]

As a reflection of Mark Kramer's call for literary journalists to "cherish the structural ideas and metaphors" that present themselves while reporting and writing,[100] Robinson's *Mother Country* provides a vignette of this fallen Eden that echoes Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* that begins with a similar provocation of "A Fable for Tomorrow."[101] In it, Carson weaves the tale of an idyllic town "in the heart of America" suffering "a strange blight" that had sickened and even killed animals as well as its citizens. All suffered from "mysterious maladies" resulting in "a strange stillness. The birds, for example—where had they gone?" Hauntingly, spring arrived "without voices."[102] Both Carson and Robinson deploy what Hartsock calls "narrative literary journalism [that] embraces the more personal as revealing a different dimension to the cultural in the attempt to narrow the empathetic distance between the protagonists in the discourse, the author, and the readers."[103] Through her first-person account of her incredulous reckoning with the sanitized news, Robinson counters what Walter Benjamin identified as twentieth-century journalism's tendency to "[paralyze] the imagination of

their readers" through objectivist reports designed "to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader."[104]

England's established narrative that Robinson so deftly deconstructs is reinforced by the news media which "see and do not perceive, hear and do not understand"[105] the full import of the atrocities perpetrated by the processing of plutonium on such a massive scale. This was due in large part to England's role as a major world power under pressure to stockpile nuclear weapons on a scale far greater than its diminutive island could safely accommodate. But that condition of conducting massive nuclear production on a tiny densely populated island presented dangers directly challenging Britain's cultural self-definition. Quietism prevailed. "The British are amazingly docile" in their "quietness and goodwill for which they are legendary," a charming characteristic that nonetheless justifies their "impenetrable ignorance," Robinson remarks. Protest is incongruous to a culture rooted in a sense of propriety defined by the studied avoidance of inconvenient truths like radioactive waste. When such subjects arise, the British avert their eyes, "meanwhile, winging in to drop a tear on the grave of Dorothy Wordsworth and snap a few photos of a gentler world."[106] The operative literary technique of scene setting in this passage imagines a tourist's excursion to the British countryside, immersed in sentimental reverence for the nation's literary heritage, as captured symbolically by the commoditized teardrop and photo of Wordsworth's grave. The tableau is deliberately hyperbolic, one designed to conjure up the docile English countryside and accepted cultural understandings and interaction therewith, in order to highlight, through ironic juxtaposition, the dark nuclear threat behind this blissful literary pilgrimage to Wordsworth country. The voice of what Engebretson calls "the disappointed expatriate" overwhelms the scene, sounding the book's keynote of expected delight in Britain's charms and storied literary past "spoiled by moral outrage."[107] These are the sentence-level brushstrokes of Robinson's literary art that serve the book's larger political aesthetic.

Such instances illustrate how shifts in language are the key to social and political change in *Mother Country.* Writing in the vein of Carson, she criticizes complacency in the culture, especially by the way British citizens and English-speaking visitors are ideologically anesthetized by the news that "is absorbed by the public very quietly, which means that the government has made a fair estimate of public passivity."[108] Such passivity is abetted by how "the 'clever' of Britain, whose distinguishing marks are verbal first of all, consider themselves their culture's ornament and justification." Their language often refers to its own authority of custom and tradition, whereby words such as "slum,"

which is "cant slang from the word 'slumber,' " are freighted with classist implications. Given the endless workdays of the average working class citizen, "these people must have done little more than sleep in the few hours they had to themselves," she notes, adding that the upper classes have nonetheless held them in contempt for being "deficient in domestic culture."[109] She traces this sentiment from George Orwell's depiction of the working class—especially in his portrait of them in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, as "bitter or imbecile and uniformly evil-smelling"—to Thatcher's privatization of public housing that literally turned millions of poor into the streets.[110]

Language is thus both the subject of her interrogation and the means of her own rhetorical performance. Such ethnographic social critique appears through shocking imagery playing out the industrial logics of the commercial nuclear industry. Beyond the profit motive, she does not ascribe a particular intent behind such deceptive use of language that masks and aids the dumping of toxins into Britain's own environment. Careful not to pin Sellafield's operation on a single motive, she instead provides "an etiology and a history, in which the institutions which expedite it and the relations it expresses evolve together."[111] In conjunction with empire, the profit motive clearly subordinated public service, a point emphasized in socioenvironmental literature.

The text reveals Britain's violence toward the poor through its nuclear program. "Sellafield amounts, in its dinosaur futurism," a cogent phrase capturing the oxymoron of such nuclear advancement, "to a brutal laying of hands on the lives of people: a blunt, unreflecting assertion of power."[112] Herein Robinson turns to what Sims describes as "attention to ordinary lives," a core characteristic of literary journalism.[113] Even well-meaning crusaders on behalf of the working class, such as Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding, inadvertently justified class bias and the Poor Laws, as Engebretson observes of *Mother Country*,[114] socially immobilizing the common man as a "great reservoir of pathology, crudeness, belligerency, vice, and malice."[115] The slow violence she points to is not only industrial, but cultural, especially as exhibited in the code of the gentleman. The impropriety of illegitimate children, for example, takes precedence over the ongoing pollution of the environment: "They fret because at random babies are fathered and neglected and become in their turn bad young men. They do not fret that babies are poisoned in the womb,"[116] she writes, leveraging parallel repetition with syntax turning on the verb "fret" and noun "babies" for maximum rhetorical impact. Her insistence throughout the text that England is not exceptional in such cultural blindness nonetheless turns to local descriptive detail to bring the narrative a visceral nearness. When stating that "plutonium concentrates in the liver, kidneys, and bone marrow," for example, she adds, "it passes into the food chain—

into black pudding and kidney pie,"[117] thus bringing an otherwise abstract point in a horrifying embodied reality through defamiliarized imagery, recasting charming English fare as deadly poison. Such imagery of poisoned wombs, radioactive sheep, and glowing beaches serve her central claim that destruction lies beneath this charmingly clever culture known for its propriety and reason. Crucially, this technique of ironically recasting British culture in horrific light leverages hyperbolic sensational imagery to fuel her activist agenda. Such an impassioned ethical presence eschews "scholarly disinterestedness for moral commitment," Engebretson observes,[118] and thus contributes a prime example for the strains of criticism in literary journalism studies dedicated to the writer's voice and its treatment of subject.[119]

This theme of linguistic power extends to scientists and government officials who strategically deploy the terms *dispersed* and *undetectable* to describe plutonium waste sent into the air and sea, in effect making it *nonexistent* since it exists outside of the immediate phenomenological world of the five senses. A major point of *Mother Country* is thus to make the invisible slow violence of nuclear waste visible and to amplify the reality of its impact on humans and nature through literary devices, with which she says, "I know I will shock my readers"[120] at both sentence and narrative levels. The power of slow violence in this sense meets the power of slow journalism to thoroughly elucidate the full scale of its contours and patterns of its existence.

Her subjective narrative voice rejects formal scientific objectivity not only to maximize the book's political impact, but to provide a corrective against "the somber, officious, foolishness"[121] with which government officials treat nuclear waste. One Cumbria resident, for example, was forced to sell her *defective* home at a lower price after sending her vacuum cleaner bag to the United States, where it tested positive for radioactivity, "because it had a defect—the contamination."[122] Hence Robinson's "problem in writing this apocalyptic tale in a style suited to the importance of its subject" lay in the culture's normalizing nomenclature, reflected in using the term "defect" to describe a home saturated with plutonium.[123] In foregrounding her outrage, "I am angry to the depths of my soul that the earth has been so injured while we were all bemused by supposed monuments of value and intellect," she begs both pardon for writing that "has perhaps taken too much of the stain of my anger and disappointment," and assistance in reading this narrative "by always keeping Sellafield in mind." With a novelistic pause, she glosses her narrative's central symbol, "Sellafield, which pours waste plutonium into the world's natural environment, and bomb-grade plutonium into the world's political environment. For money."[124] Through the technique of characterization,

Robinson casts Sellafield as a nefarious and voracious force that consumes capital as readily as it toxifies both nature and the geopolitical peace.

The most arresting revelation of Robinson's narrative is also the most intimately subjective moment in the text. It describes her jarring discovery that Greenpeace—the original whale conservationists and guardians of the sea who would inspire radical branches of the environmental movement such as Earth First and the Sea Shepherds—was complicit, perhaps inadvertently, in the Sellafield cover-up. Robinson retells the event as portrayed by official reports, and then follows with a forensic analysis with Poe-like precision. This replicates her method of retracing deceptive scenes in the media's dominant narrative to reveal the reality beneath.

Through a bizarre publicity stunt reflective of the government's effectiveness in conditioning public opinion—or *engineering consent*, as public relations pioneer Edward Bernays would have it[125]—Greenpeace proved more lapdog than watchdog. At stake for literary journalism studies in this case is recognition of the unique power of socioenvironmental reporting and writing to capture and decode duplicitous media messages from recognized sources of authority. In this case, Robinson exposes dubious tactics, the results of which directly aid industry at the peril of common citizens.

Striking a pose of opposition, Greenpeace tested the outer limits of its credibility with the reading public in its reports of what Robinson found the most absurd mission in its history, a plan that disintegrates rapidly when held up to scrutiny. A group of bronzed young divers manned a vessel with the objective of capping the double pipeline that had been spewing plutonium into the Irish Sea. The *rescue mission* was actually a pseudo-event akin to the *fake live shot* that became a staple of broadcast television news in the 1980s. In its reports to the media, Greenpeace cast the organization as heroically launching into action after a family had written their member of Parliament raising concern about the conditions near the plant upon return from a holiday at the seashore where they were accosted by a stranger. The informant was "an employee of the plant, nameless and faceless as figures in this narrative very often are," as Robinson points out. The figure told the young family "not to allow their children to play on the sand" because "children absorbed the material many times more readily than adults."[126] Robinson invokes the leitmotif of innocent children under threat of nuclear contamination.

At this moment, Robinson's slow journalism enacts a critique of the news story as it appeared in mainstream media. Once the ministry received the message of alarm, according to Greenpeace's improbable tale, the organization sent divers beneath the sea "to cap the pipeline." Because "over a million gallons" of radioactive material passed through that pipeline "in the course

of a day," Robinson rightly questioned whether "people working under water [could] actually hope to cap a double pipeline through which so much toxic liquid was flowing?" Such exposure to radioactivity would certainly harm the divers, and capping the pipeline would precipitate further disaster by flooding the shore and "the interior of the plant," making for "a dubious piece of environmentalism." Reports insisted that Greenpeace's mission would have succeeded had the divers not discovered that "the [pipe's] mouth had been changed so that the cap they had prepared for it would not fit," an explanation suggesting the government's surveillance over Greenpeace.[127] Perhaps the least credible aspect of the story was Greenpeace's willingness to expose its own divers to waters they had not measured in advance with a Geiger counter, which later revealed radioactivity at 1,500 times normal levels.[128] Incredulous, Robinson asks, "Why would fit young men with their lives before them, diving near the pipeline *because* it released radioactivity, and who had a Geiger counter along, *not* test the condition of the water before they entered it?" The operation as it was reported presumed that "one could dive into the thick of the most prolonged and intense contamination in the world and rise out of it as fresh as Wordsworth's Proteus," an apt literary allusion given the proximity of the poet's Cumbria cottage to the scene.[129]

Coverage of Greenpeace's attempts to cap the pipeline, according to Robinson, reflected the organization's desire to appear proactive (at the behest of the government) and willing to face mortal risk to save the environment. But it was a farce, she submits, designed to assuage public concern by leading readers to believe that Greenpeace had made a heroic effort to solve the problem with its young team of divers. Robinson figuratively enters the scene as editor, scanning the narrative for plausibility and concluding that "the idea of capping pipeline from which comes a massive flow of toxic materials clearly must be scrapped on grounds of implausibility." She also notes that "the detail concerning the contamination of the divers and their boat had best be crossed out, too, since the reader would wonder about the other ships in the Irish Sea that day and the catches pulled up through the toxic film" and shipped to other countries for sale.[130] The more reasonable and sustainable course of action, she argues, would have been to launch a cleanup effort. The government removed contaminated sand, she notes, only at the end of the profitable tourist season on the Cumbria beaches.[131]

Rather than concocting an air-tight conspiracy theory here and throughout *Mother Country*, Robinson makes clear that "so very much misfeasance is not compatible with the idea of actual conspiracy" but instead part of a broader cultural predilection of misplaced priorities with which multiple U.S. groups are also complicit. She exposes the serious errors which stem from a combination

of authoritarian censorious governance and ill-conceived publicity stunts.[132] The Greenpeace dive into the toxic waters of Sellafield, Robinson explains, could have been attributable to faulty Geiger counters. "In fairness, Greenpeace seems to have a Geiger counter problem." Yet she points out that although they had several on their boat that were functional according to news coverage, "they seem[ed] not to use them to maximum effect." Broadening the implications, she notes "their shortcomings in this regard replicate precisely those omissions of government, industry, the regulatory agencies, and the scientific community which create the aura of mystery around Sellafield, an uncertainty a little monitoring could so quickly dispel."[133]

The Fate of Sellafield and Legacy of Mother Country

The central symbol of Robinson's narrative—the Sellafield plant as a dark satanic mill—was unsustainable, as she predicted. Although the British government censored her cautionary tale of public alarm, antinuclear protocols ironically went into effect in the years to follow. By 1993, Britain banned the dumping of nuclear waste into the sea. Sellafield, the world's first commercial nuclear power plant designed to produce bomb grade plutonium on an industrial scale, commenced decommissioning in 2008.[134] By 2016, Sellafield accounted for more than twice the expenditure of all other Nuclear Decommissioning Authority sites combined, as costs and delays escalated, topping £117.4 billion in 2015–16.[135]

The fallout from *Mother Country* ranged from the courtroom, in which Greenpeace showed no mercy in suing Robinson to the fullest extent of the law, to the pages of the *New York Review of Books* where she endured a savage British counterassault.[136] The content and style of her literary journalism positioned her as a threat to the nuclear establishment, and a voice of radical environmentalism within the larger culture. Greenpeace demanded that Robinson redact *Mother Country*'s allegations that the organization was "both duplicitous and inept with regard to its coverage of nuclear waste dumping into the sea."[137] The book continues to be banned from sale in the United Kingdom. The defenders of Sellafield took issue with Robinson in the *NYRB* after the initial *Harper's* piece was published. Among her fiercest detractors upon its reception was Dr. Douglas Black, a British chemical engineer who insisted that contaminants were not harmful because they were dispersed at sea and/or stuck to the ocean floor. To Robinson, this claim was tantamount to the "destruction of evidence,"[138] but is generally not seen this way because Sellafield occupies cultural terrain "where there are no such things as liability and culpability."[139] In another logical sleight of hand, Black argued that plutonium could only be linked to the area's soaring leukemia

death rate if a decrease in waste resulted in a decrease in disease. Since no plans to reduce waste existed, such measurements were impossible. This meant "future leukemia excesses will *exonerate* the plant, as present ones have done."[140] Information about Sellafield was limited and of poor quality despite Greenpeace's claim to have placed a mole in the plant. The laxity of laws and lack of public information through the press were due to the British government's interest in maintaining and expanding its nuclear program under Thatcher and protecting its tourist revenue from the popular beaches of Cumbria. Stylistically, after deploying a barrage of legal diction—"evidence," "liability," "culpability," "exonerate"[141] in recounting Black's counterattack.[142] Robinson's tone shifts from fierce disputation to a heartfelt direct address to the reader. She ends by expressing her "greatest hope" that "we" will have "the courage to make ourselves rational and morally autonomous adults, secure enough in the faith that life is good and to be preserved, to recognize the grosser forms of evil and name them and confront them." She asks, "Who will do it for us? . . . Greenpeace? The Duke of Edinburgh?"[143]

Robinson stands out for her first-person narrative account that renders a shocking Carsonesque glimpse at the lived reality—one affecting the everyday lives of common citizens—behind the industrial logic and justification of nuclear pollution. Robinson's belief that "the cost in human well being as a part of the calculations that go into economic decisions can be valued at almost nothing" resonates with socioenvironmental writing on the topic of toxic waste. "American Greenpeace was no help to me in writing the book," she said in a recent interview, noting that their current pamphlets disingenuously credit themselves for having " 'scored a ban' on sea dumping of nuclear waste" although they knew well that "British Greenpeace sued me for damaging their reputation, though I grieve at my failure to have done so."[144] Even among the most radical environmental journalism, Robinson bears the distinction of operating as watchdog of the watchdogs. The book's reception was profoundly influenced by its censorship that removed it from the market of readers to which it spoke the most directly. Readers may have agitated for tighter pollution restrictions and a concerted cleanup effort of Sellafield had Greenpeace, who ironically might have otherwise supported the book's activist agenda, "not succeeded in having the British edition banned and pulped."[145] Although banned in Britain, Robinson's message that "abuse of the natural environment involves contempt for the health and the life of human beings"[146] has not been silenced like the songbirds of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.

The current generation of environmental literary journalists now faces the challenge of becoming the new watchdog of watchdogs to call out

corruption, a process that can involve immersion into environmental groups. Charles Bowden renders an inside account of a Greenpeace voyage in *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing*,[147] a work that shows the influence of Hunter S. Thompson and Edward Abbey. Like Bowden, who passed away in 2014, only the most courageous of writers enter their culturally sanctified realm and act as the alternative press, the police of the police, as Emerson once said, judges of judges. "Such a truth-speaker," he wrote, "is worth more than the best police, and more than the laws or governors;" because officers and elected officials "do not always know their own side, but will back the crime for want of this very truth-speaker to expose them."[148] Herein lies environmental literary journalism's power, in Hartsock's words, to enable society to "engage in a healthy self-critique" regarding human impact on nature by "making the familiar unfamiliar."[149]

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Notes

[1] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 236; Stevens, "Marilynne Robinson: A Chronology," xiii.

[2] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 31, 3.

[3] Robinson, 32.

[4] Robinson, *The Givenness of Things*, 116.

[5] Robinson, "Bad News from Britain," 65–72.

[6] Pauly, "Literary Journalism and the Drama of Civic Life," 77.

[7] Pauly, 77; Pauly, "Journalism and the Sociology of Public Life," 148.

[8] Abrahamson, "The Counter-Coriolis Effect," 83n4.

[9] Ford, foreword to *A Bibliography of Literary Journalism*, i.

[10] Robinson, "The Art of Fiction," 37–40, 60. *Gilead* won a Pulitzer Prize in 2004 and was followed by her 2008 publication of *Home*, its prequel that won the coveted Orange Prize for Fiction awarded in the United Kingdom. That year, the *Times* of London proclaimed Robinson "The world's best writer of prose," however arguable such designation is in a global context. Robinson, "Heaven Is a Place on Earth; Interview," by Appleyard.

[11] Wolfe, "Why They Aren't Writing the Great American Novel Anymore," 272.

[12] Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 35–54.

[13] Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 102.

[14] Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," 507.

[15] Heise, 507.

[16] Heise, 511. See Naess, *Ecology, Community , and Lifestyle*.

[17] Jelfs, "Marilynne Robinson's Turn to the 'Real World,' " 134.

[18] Vallianatos, with Jenkins, *Poison Spring*.

[19] Roiland, "Derivative Sport," 176.

[20] Sims, *True Stories*; Kramer and Call, *Telling True Stories*; Schudson, "News as Stories"; Kidder and Todd, *Good Prose.*

[21] Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*, 152.

[22] Foundational research in literary journalism studies names Thoreau, one of the most influential nature writers in the genre, among six other authors who blend literature and journalism in their books. Thoreau was thus an early exemplar of the writer who "is sufficiently journalistic to sense the swiftly changing aspects" of his dynamic contemporary moment, "and sufficiently literary to gather and shape his material with the eye and hand of the artist." Ford, foreword, i.

[23] Slovic, *Seeking Awareness*, 152.

[24] Hemley, *A Field Guide for Immersion Writing*, 10. Robinson's exposure of her own personal biases has drawn controversy. Although it is not explicit in *Mother Country*, her liberal Protestantism drives her activist politics, as it does all of her nonfiction. In his *Harper's* piece on Christians as public intellectuals, for example, Alan Jacobs assailed Robinson for her article "Fear," a critique of the religious right's high-jacking of Christianity to fuel its obsession with gun ownership. "If Robinson wants to persuade her fellow American Christians to reject the culture

of guns and overcome their fear, *The New York Review of Books* is an odd place to do it," Jacobs alleged. Jacobs, "The Watchmen," para. 31, web. Her conversations published in the *NYRB* with then–President Barack Obama, rather than a more radical figure such as Cornel West, struck Jacobs as equally suspect, given that "fear" is a term that might apply to the figure "who promised but failed to close the prison at Guantánamo Bay," Jacobs, web, para. 35. In these ways, he argued, Robinson is another intellectual creature of "the liberal secular world" and its tepid ineffectual neutrality, para. 34. Robinson's rejoinder indicated that the essay "Fear" was originally delivered as a speech for a conservative church in Michigan, precisely the audience Jacobs claimed she was studiously avoiding by presenting her argument to liberal intellectual readers of *NYRB*, Robinson, "Letters: Acts of Faith," 2. Further, Robinson did not select Obama for the *NYRB* interview as Jacobs assumed, but instead accepted the President's invitation. Just as ineffectual secular quietism hardly describes Robinson's nonfiction, neither does atheism. Fox News, for example, insisted that her discussion with Obama was a partisan occasion to allege "that Obama hated Christianity," which in fact was precisely the opposite of the exchange. Robinson, *What Are We Doing Here?*, 298–99.

[25] Sims, *True Stories*, 12.

[26] Sims, 12.

[27] Kramer, "Reporting for Narrative," 27.

[28] Robinson, "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson," by Schaub, 240.

[29] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 32.

[30] Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 152.

[31] Slovic, *Seeking Awareness*, 169.

[32] Murphy, *What a Book Can Do*, 204.

[33] Jelfs, "Marilynne Robinson's Turn to 'The Real World,' " 137.

[34] Le Masurier, "Slow Journalism: An Introduction," 405 (emphasis in original).

[35] Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 102.

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

[37] Conover, "Immersion and the Subjective," 171.

[38] Robinson, Interview, "The Art of Fiction No. 198," by Fay, 62.

[39] Slovic, "Ecocriticism," 13; see also Adamson, *American Indian Literature*, xiii.

[40] Howarth, "Some Principles of Ecocriticism," 74–75.

[41] Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 151.

[42] Heise, "The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism," 505.

[43] Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, xi.

[44] Nixon, xi.

[45] Nixon, xi.

[46] Lopez and Wilson, "Dialogue One," 15, quoted in Slovic, *Seeking Awareness*, 163.

[47] Slovic, 163.

[48] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 31, 30–31.

[49] Davis, "Slowing Down Media Coverage," 462–77; Neveu, "Revisiting Narrative Journalism," 533–42.

[50] Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 100. It is telling of *Mother Country*'s critical neglect as book-length literary journalism on par with her novels that it is relegated to discussion in the "Essays" chapter of *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, after coverage of her novels in the book's first chapters.

[51] Engebretson, 100.

[52] See Kolbert, *Field Notes from a Catastrophe*; McKibben, *The End of Nature*; Smith, *Nature Noir*.

[53] Murphy, *What a Book Can Do*, 7.

[54] Carson, *Silent Spring*, 181.

[55] McPhee, "Atchafalaya," *The Control of Nature*, 6–7; see also Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, 411.

[56] See McKibben, *American Earth*; Austin, Bennett, and Kimber, *On Wilderness*. For more on Austin, see Whitt, *Women in American Journalism*, 116–21.

[57] Murphy, *What a Book Can Do*, 13.

[58] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 259–61.

[59] Robinson, *When I Was a Child, I Read Books*, xiv; quoted in Mariotti and Lane, *A Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson*, 2 (emphasis mine). See also Robinson, *When I Was a Child, I Read Books*, ix–xvi.

[60] Mariotti and Lane, 3.

[61] Jelfs, "Democracy and Other Fictions," para. 16.

[62] Jelfs, "Democracy and Other Fictions," para. 16. See also Jelfs, "Marilynne Robinson's Turn to the 'Real World, That Is Really Dying,' " 133–47.

[63] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 26.

[64] Robinson, 22.

[65] O'Rourke, "A Moralist of the Midwest," para. 25.

[66] Mariotti and Lane, *A Political Companion to Marilynne Robinson*, 3.

[67] Bak, introduction, 6.

[68] Bak, 6.

[69] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 31. The climate of the British press, and the nonfiction book publishing industry by extension, continues to be strikingly censorious. As a U.S.-born media and literary scholar, I, too, underestimated the severity of the British libel laws, as the publisher of an academic journal operating out of the United Kingdom refused another version of this article despite favorable peer reviews. The publisher indicated that its legal team could not allow for publication because the article treated a book banned in Britain, a revealing case in point illustrating the authoritarian nature of its legal code that actively suppresses free speech. Britain not only banned Robinson's book, but also made clear it would censor any discussion of it, even of a scholarly nature nearly thirty years after the book's banning. The British government continues to maintain libel laws far stricter than those in the United States.

[70] Murphy, *What a Book Can Do*, 7.

[71] Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 103.

[72] Bak, introduction, 1.

[73] Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 100.

[74] Canada, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*, 121, 80.
[75] Davis, "Life in the Iron-Mills," 3–34; Sinclair, *The Jungle*.
[76] Canada, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*, 121, 124.
[77] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 32.
[78] Conover, "Immersion and the Subjective," 171.
[79] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 143.
[80] Conover, "Immersion and the Subjective," 168.
[81] Heyne, "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction," 489.
[82] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 207.
[83] Robinson, 209.
[84] Robinson, 209 (emphasis mine).
[85] Kenward, *New Scientist*, 58–59.
[86] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 182.
[87] Brafford, "The Unsettling Emergence of Marilynne Robinson," para. 10.
[88] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 182.
[89] Robinson, 209.
[90] Robinson, 210.
[91] Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 151.
[92] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 228–29; see also Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*.
[93] Nixon, *Slow Violence,* 47. Cold War logics also factor in. Due to its proximity to Western Europe, for example, the 1986 Chernobyl explosion in Russia received more media attention than the 1984 Bhopal disaster in India. As Nixon astutely observes, Chernobyl could be readily "assimilated to the violent threat that communism posed to the West," whereas Bhopal could be "imaginatively contained as an Indian problem" Nixon, 47.
[94] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 232, 216.
[95] Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 38.
[96] Hartsock, 39.
[97] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 11.
[98] Robinson, 3.
[99] Robinson, 221, 220.
[100] Kramer, "Reporting for Narrative," 28.
[101] Carson, *Silent Spring*, 1.
[102] Carson, 1–2.
[103] Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 4.
[104] Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 159; see also Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 15.
[105] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 207.
[106] Robinson, 228.
[107] Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 103.
[108] Robinson, *Mother Country*, 31.
[109] Robinson, 91, 90.
[110] Robinson, 129.
[111] Robinson, 37.

[112]Robinson, 42.
[113]Sims, *True Stories*, 12.
[114]Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 105.
[115]Robinson, *Mother Country*, 22.
[116]Robinson, 23.
[117]Robinson, 148.
[118]Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 104.
[119]Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 151; Sims, *True Stories*, 12.
[120]Robinson, *Mother Country*, 26.
[121]Robinson, 153.
[122]Robinson, 153.
[123]Robinson, 153.
[124]Robinson, 32–33.
[125]Bernays, "The Engineering of Consent," 113–20.
[126]Robinson, *Mother Country*, 210–11.
[127]Robinson, 211.
[128]Robinson, 211.
[129]Robinson, 213 (emphases in the original).
[130]Robinson, 214.
[131]Robinson, 217.
[132]Robinson, 22.
[133]Robinson, 213–14. The incident was one of many in Greenpeace's long history of controversy, in part due to its hierarchical structure consisting of a small group of individuals who control both international and local divisions. Finger, *Research in Social Movements*, 16. In the digital age, Greenpeace's use of stunts for favorable PR to promote their organization without affecting real change, furthermore, occurred most conspicuously in its 2006 "Guide to Greener Electronics," which ranked Apple at the bottom in terms of toxic material for its cell phones. Greenpeace, "Electronic Companies Race for Top." Another example of the dubious environmental ethics was the British government's attempt to downplay the critical nature of the accident at the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan in 2011. "Anti-nuclear people across Europe have wasted no time blurring this all into Chernobyl and the works," a British official wrote in a leaked email. "We need to quash any stories trying to compare this to Chernobyl," Edwards, "Revealed: British Government's Plan to Play Down Fukushima," para. 12. Echoes of Sellafield thus continue well into the twenty-first century.
[134]Three firms from France, the United States, and the United Kingdom accepted £6.5 billion to complete the project over a five-year period. The *Guardian* carried a report that the British government issued an indemnity to protect Sellafield from liability for all spills and accidents, including those caused by the firms responsible for carrying out the shutdown. Reversing an operation of this size proved extraordinarily expensive, as Sellafield accounted for forty percent of the government's funds for the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority in 2009. Delays and escalating costs have increased dramatically over time, particularly in 2013

when the costs for operating Sellafield leaped from £900 million to £1.6 billion. Hencke, "MP's Anger as State Bears Cost of Any Sellafield Disaster."

[135]Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, "Nuclear Provision"; National Audit Office, "Progress on the Sellafield Site."

[136]Engebretson, *Understanding Marilynne Robinson*, 108. See Perutz, "Is Britain 'Befouled'?" 51–57.

[137]Stevens, "Marilynne Robinson: A Chronology," xiii.

[138]Robinson, 217–18.

[139]Robinson, 217.

[140]Robinson, 220 (emphasis mine).

[141]Robinson, 154, 252n, 9, 220.

[142]Robinson, 217–21.

[143]Robinson, 236.

[144]Robinson, "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson," by Stevens, 257.

[145]Robinson, "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson," by Stevens, 257.

[146]Robinson, "An Interview with Marilynne Robinson," by Stevens, 256.

[147]Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing*.

[148]Emerson, "Concord," 1:306; see also Dowling, *Emerson's Protégés*, 50, 294n27.

[149]Hartsock, *Literary Journalism*, 151.

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Portrait of Joris van Casteren by Stephan Vanfleteren, afgekocht.

As If Their Activities Could Explain Something: Joris van Casteren and *Het zusje van de bruid*

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Abstract: Joris van Casteren (b. 1976) is undoubtedly one of the most famous literary journalists in the Netherlands. In his stories he creates a peculiar atmosphere by drawing on diverse elements, such as the choice of topic, original perspectives, and his typical, dry, matter-of-fact style. His breakthrough came with his 2008 book, *Lelystad*, in which he describes his own coming of age in a brand-new city built on new Dutch land. In *Het zusje van de bruid. Relaas van een onmogelijke liefde* (The sister of the bride: a tale of an impossible love), published in 2011, the writer goes back nine years in order to describe his own love story with a rich, intelligent, and artistic, borderline patient who is addicted to alcohol and drugs. The book caused a stir, and Van Casteren was reproached for transgressing the limits of privacy and morality. This study argues that Van Casteren challenges the boundaries of literary journalism by using different techniques. One is an absence of explicit emotions that he combines with suggestive and sometimes slightly bizarre signs of those emotions. This aligns with the abundance of scene and the absence of interpretation and judgment. The study argues that the effect of distance and uncertainty generates an open atmosphere that allows the author to touch upon basic human questions, such as loyalty and responsibility, as well as the creation of meaning and sense, and the limits of understanding both one's own motives and those of others.

Keywords: Dutch literary journalism – Joris van Casteren – rhetorics of nonfiction – literary journalism – literary criticism

Already at a young age, the Dutch narrative journalist Joris van Casteren (b. 1976) enjoyed a fine reputation, with much-appreciated articles about Nigeria, once promising but now forgotten poets and authors, and life on the edge of society in the Netherlands. One of his best-known early reportages, for example, is "De man die 2 1/2 jaar dood lag" (The man who lay dead 2 1/2 years) and the gruesome discovery Van Casteren investigates by interviewing the man's neighbors and relatives. The book was published in 2003.[1] The autobiographical *Lelystad*, published in 2008, was received with praise as well, although some fellow citizens felt insulted by the negative way they were portrayed.[2] But when Van Casteren's next book came out in 2011, the warm receptions turned frigid. It seemed that the journalist had crossed a line in his *Het zusje van de bruid. Relaas van een onmogelijke liefde* (The sister of the bride: a tale of an impossible love).[3] In this book about his failed relationship with a wealthy woman suffering from borderline personality disorder,[4] Van Casteren describes a tumultuous love story that had ended nine years before, with Joris walking out. Two critics immediately accused the writer of hypocrisy and pummeled the book.[5] Not long after, the newspaper *Vrij Nederland* let him know that it would no longer need his services. A heated debate ensued about love, responsibility, and the ethical standards of narrative journalism. By 2019 Van Casteren's career was again thriving, and he enjoys again the status of well-respected author. But the arguments that came up in the debate at that time deserve a closer look.

This study examines the perceptions of narrative journalism that emerged from the intense debate. In order to understand why *Lelystad* was successful and exactly which line was crossed in *Het zusje van de bruid*, a concise analysis of the two books is presented. The focus next will be on the explicit statements formulated by critics, in an effort to explore the rationale of the implicit standards that support their critiques. Finally, a discussion of the author's characteristic style as well as the subject matter will raise key issues for literary journalism. These include the relationship between writers and their sources, and the role of journalistic stories as a quest for new meanings.

Young Joris in Lelystad

On a hot June day in 1976, the young Van Casteren family moved from a tiny apartment in Rotterdam to a house in the newly built city of Lelystad. Firstborn son Joris was only five months old. The little family joined the thousands of pioneers who were attracted by this new Dutch conquest of water and the utopian project it represented. Thirty-two years later, in the 2008 book he published about his childhood and youth, the writer summarizes his experience.

In *Lelystad*, van Casteren describes his youth in a setting that is populated by his divorced parents and their new partners, and the many classmates and neighbors with whom he roamed the cheerless housing blocks. Dozens of sad life stories and events are depicted: idealists argue, couples betray each other, small traders go broke, officials make statements, hotheads resort to their fists, hustlers are caught, and real criminals go free. About his father's job interview, Van Casteren writes: "My father got on well with the members of the education committee. He had long hair, just like them. They wore John Lennon glasses and clothes they made themselves out of colored fabric. My father repeated what he had written in his letter. My mother sat there in silence."[6]

Joris is an intelligent boy with great powers of observation. His school life is determined by the pedagogical experiments of all too idealistic teachers who are given free rein in Lelystad. Order and structure are taboo, with boredom and lack of direction the consequence. On this subject, he writes:

> The children who grew up in Lelystad only had themselves as an example. There were no previous generations who had achieved something, who had left their mark on the city. The city did not exude the triumph it was meant to; there was no triumph to speak of. Was it possible for people to be proud of a set of new homes built on a desolate plain?[7]

It is for that reason that Joris and a friend decide they are "also going to join in the vandalism."[8] He ends up being detained at the police station a couple of times, but fortunately he is too young to be prosecuted in earnest. His budding love life consists mainly of a series of disappointments. But one day, while he is watching a television program, what he sees and hears ultimately changes his life:

> That evening . . . I stumbled onto a public channel with a documentary about Dutch experimental poets. I saw sleazy men with unkempt hair in smoky spaces babbling incoherent texts. I heard unknown words that sent sparks through my skull.
>
> For a while I was confused. It was the feeling I had when I entered a cathedral for the first time in the old country. Useless pomp and circumstance which blew your mind, disruption which disturbed all logic.
>
> The poetry activated an area in my brain that had never been activated before. In Lelystad I had never seen anything or anybody aiming for something higher, or it must have been the artists who had remained unknown, smearing clots of paint on their canvases and taking them to the art loan center.
>
> That evening I discovered what a metaphor was. In Lelystad things were just as simple as they were. A mailbox was a mailbox, a parking lot was a parking lot. Trees did not look like crooked statues, they had been neatly

> and properly planted. Nothing looked like anything else, everything looked like itself. Lelystad was a serum against your imagination.
>
> In Lelystad there was no symbolism. Nowhere could you see an ornate façade, an Ionic pillar or a baroque tympanum. Not one building or object depicting something. There was nothing that referred to the battle that had been fought against water.
>
> Lelystad had been made by practical people who didn't want to leave anything to chance. Every possible onset to chaos had been restrained beforehand. Lelystad had no unexpected forms evoking associations. The only thing the agricultural engineers from the Civil Service were unable to keep in check were the hallucinatory cloudscapes being blown across the city at high speeds.[9]

Joris decides to start writing poetry, swaps his jeans for camouflage, and becomes a punk. As a result, he becomes more alienated from the environment in which he grew up, as people react angrily to his new image. Nevertheless, he can still count on his parents—the story of his youth ends with a move to Utrecht, where he is admitted to the School of Journalism. It sounds almost too good to be true: a bored youth from a disadvantaged city sees, by coincidence, a program about experimental poetry, discovers the existence of metaphors and symbolism, decides to start writing poetry, and ultimately becomes a respectable (narrative) journalist.

Lelystad could be called a story of invention. In writing a book about his youth in Lelystad, the author invents both his own and the city's destiny. He shows how he grew up in a city without symbolism and without any reference to its history, a city designed by engineers and architects and their naïve ideas about order and functionality. In separate chapters, Van Casteren recounts in well-documented detail how their dream of a new world evolved over time. He describes how Cornelis Lely (1854–1929) devised the ambitious plan to drain the Zuiderzee, how Cornelis Van Eesteren had designed a stunning "urban plan,"[10] and how the "pragmatic" engineers rejected the architectural project because they wanted to build functional houses, totally devoid of imagination, in perfectly straight avenues.[11] Joris quotes: " 'Perhaps all those modular units were constructed too neatly,' a doctor said. 'An overdose of urban planning logic can also lead to planning neurosis'."[12] Van Casteren discusses the power struggle between the engineers and the local authorities, the crime, the desperation, the boredom, and the many well-intentioned rescue projects that failed one by one. Unfortunately, "The agronomic engineers thought that their architectural order would also produce a social order,"[13] he writes, "but nothing appeared to be further from the truth. Initially the idea prevailed that unemployment, psychological distress, and crime could be labeled as childhood diseases; yet, in the 1980s the city derailed completely."[14]

As a witness from inside, Van Casteren brings the city to life. This arduous labor of invention also shows in the way the narrative is presented. The style is rugged and dry, and the story is told in short, plain sentences without much dialogue. Poignant descriptions with telling details and striking quotes afford the many folksy stories a tragicomic undertone once in a while, as this unembellished description might demonstrate: "Children with extreme behavioral problems attended his school. While my father tried to implement the principles of Maslow[15] in practice, one of those children started hurling chairs."[16] Expressions of emotions or judgment are rare, which adds to the strikingly enigmatic tone of the book.

Plain Style Meets Shocking Story

These characteristics of style and tone reappear in Van Casteren's next book, *Het zusje van de bruid*. The story, however, is different. The title, which translates literally with its subtitle, as "The sister of the bride: a tale of an impossible love," recounts the love between Luna,[17] a wealthy, intelligent, beautiful, funny, and talented borderline patient who is addicted to alcohol and drugs, and Joris, a journalist who writes articles about social injustice and about promising authors who have fallen into obscurity. The story's structure is fairly traditional and unfolds more or less chronologically, from their initial meeting through an intense and erratic relationship and ends with their final parting. The first-person narrative describes how Luna, already in the first encounter, at her sister's posh wedding, draws all eyes to her as a result of her personality: quick-witted and funny, sophisticated, unconventional, and unpredictable. Luna tries to rebel against her rich parents by building her own life, yet after every relapse she succumbs to their care once more. Joris recounts their best times, as well as their lowest lows, and details his attempts to protect Luna from herself. He talks about her work, her family, her friends, and his job: the interviews, the writing, the magazine, his colleagues.

The peculiar style of the writing repeatedly challenges, testing the limits of the reader's understanding. In fact, the presentation of the material in no small part propels the dramatic tension: the sharp contrast between the dry, matter-of-fact writing and the tragic story in all its shocking detail. From the very first paragraphs of the book, troubling flashbacks penetrate the mind of the narrator at the beginning of his quest: when he is sitting in his car, almost a decade later, looking at their house in Amsterdam, having decided to write their story.

> I got into my car and drove over there. I parked in a space under a linden tree on the side of the street opposite the house. Sticky drops fall on my car: honeydew, secreted by greenflies feeding on the leaves of the linden tree. I just went through the car wash yesterday.

> Things went okay for me. In the self-dimming inside mirror I see the children's car seats in the back seat. One blonde hair of the pretty, clever, sweet mother hangs on the headrest of the electrically adjustable passenger seat.
>
> Between the car and the house, the water of the Oude Schans is splashing. Boats full of tourists pass by, pleasure yachts with German flags. From the Oosterdok they sail into the city, under a steel bridge, where the traffic of the Prins Hendrikkade crosses over. Houseboats lie by the quay. If I were to step on the gas, I would land on the roof of the Casa Aqua.
>
> At the opposite side a parking space is free. I quickly drive to it. I park the car in reverse and hit a bike that falls down, clattering. Now I'm standing right in front of the house. Only the street and a narrow sidewalk are in between. I see the winding staircase behind the reflecting windows on the first floor. At once I hear again the sound of the winding staircase.
>
> A wire is dangling from the windowsill under the windows of the second floor. It was wound around two flower boxes that used to stand on the windowsill. We had bought them with her mother, at a garden center in Wassenaar.
>
> Not so long afterwards she wanted to climb out of the window. Her mother held her by her legs. She tore the wires loose and pushed the flower boxes down. They landed next to a man with a dog, who kept screaming for quite some time.
>
> Eight years ago, I was in the house for the last time. Afterward I returned a couple of times to look at the house, in the evening, when it was dark, to see whether there was any light on one of the floors.
>
> I wandered around, along surrounding alleys and streets. Everything in her proximity was filled with meaning. At a construction site near the Oude Schans I saw workers who were pouring concrete in the middle of the night. I started to take notes, as if their activities could explain something.
>
> Now it is different. It's during the day, and I brought a laptop. My car is an observation post. I drove here from my house on the other side of the city. I know I will write about her. For a long time I suppressed this urge, to avoid offending anyone.[18]

However tragic the story, the narrative style is remarkably plain and dry. The book consists mainly of descriptions of settings and events, and quotes or short dialogues. Concise, paratactic sentences accumulate into short anecdotes that follow each other like staccato beats, often with no clear link. The first–person narrator rarely reveals any of his own thoughts. He is even less inclined to interpret or comment on the events described, or on how Luna thinks. This lack of introspection and interpretation creates a sense of alienation, an aura of mystery. The narrator appears to have no control and becomes lost in the course of the events. From the beginning the writing is presented as a painful quest for meaning: "Everything in her proximity was filled with meaning. . . . I started to take notes, as if their activities could explain something."[19]

The narrator's focus is entirely on Luna. Her words and actions propel the story forward and determine, to a broad extent, Joris's actions. Again and again, he tries to repair the damage she causes and get their lives back on track. An example:

> Two days later the magazine organized a dinner party at a Lebanese restaurant. Colleague A., colleague B., the older married woman, and the daughter of the philosopher were there too. "Are you still with that whore?" the older married women asked. "He's with a junkie now," said the daughter of the philosopher.
>
> Luna called. I ran out of the restaurant in order to understand her better. She was in Wassenaar lying with a bottle of vodka in the bed in the spare room where her granny stayed on visits. "I put out a cigarette on my arm," she said. "I feel really relieved, now I can finally go to sleep." Colleague B. opened the door of the Lebanese restaurant. "What would you like as a main course?" he asked.
>
> The next day I went to Wassenaar. Luna lay in the spare bed with a bandage around her arm that had been put on by the G.P. in the morning. She tore off the bandage and almost proudly showed me her arm. I saw seven dark red, superficial burn marks, shiny because of the ointment for burns. Some burn marks were so deep that they could bring a rolling marble to a stop.
>
> She had also tried to swallow her entire supply of Seroxat. The Shell director had jumped on top of her and had managed to make her spit out the pills.
>
> I sat on the edge of the bed. "I will not do this again, Sweetie," Luna said. "From now on things will really get better."[20]

Joris appears to stumble endlessly from one situation to another. The two women at the table are also ex-girlfriends of his, which gives this tragic passage a comical feel as well. The tragicomical tone sometimes seems to appear in the naming as well: except for Luna and Joris, the characters are never called by their names. Instead, they are supplied with a set description: Luna's father is called "The Shell director," a neighbor is "the poet that was also a publisher," and his wife: "the wife of the poet that was also a publisher." The title of the magazine for which Joris worked is also withheld, referred to only as "the magazine." This penchant for periphrasis creates a new enigma for the reader: on the one hand it could be an attempt to create (professional? ironic?) distance, or to emphasize alienation, while on the other, it seems like a running gag intended to provide a little respite from the tragedy of the theme.[21] It is definitely an allusion to the idea of source protection, both a journalistic code and a popular style element in realistic novels.

Adverse Critical Reaction

Two established critics drubbed the book, thus setting in motion a controversy in which supporters and opponents of both man and book engaged. Creating this kind of controversy is definitely an old media trick—any attention, good or bad, is good for book sales. However, it also pays to look closely at the arguments and try to work out the norms on which the criticism and the defense are based.

The most personal attack comes from Natasha Gerson, critic at *De Groene Amsterdammer*, the magazine where Van Casteren worked at the time of his relationship with Luna. "The magazine" does not come off well in the book: colleague A., Joris's brother-in-law, for example, appeared to act as a middleman purchasing heroin, via an editor-in-chief, for Luna's father, who wants to help his daughter cut down on the drug.

Gerson begins her piece, which is titled, in translation from the original Dutch, "Journalistic degradation of a relationship con artist,"[22] with an extensive disclaimer: Gerson is not acquainted with Van Casteren, has no bone to pick with him, and is even less familiar with Luna. Moreover, Gerson writes the piece in her own name, not in the name of the editorial office, which she had to convince to publish it. "This piece is published in the magazine that appears here and there in the book. Yet, I had to insist to have it published, because the editors weren't all that enthusiastic about it. And I agree with them that any attention to this book is too much."[23] Nobody could accuse her of an ad hominem attack; when she goes after Van Casteren, she claims the attack is based on his work. Yet she "does not intend to discuss the quality of the book." Rather, she wants to challenge it "as an example of journalistic degradation," and to do this formulates "an appeal for a moral revival in the publishing and media world."[24] It is not just Van Casteren who is reproached—the publisher and the Dutch Foundation for Literature that awarded him a grant for the book are blamed as well.

Van Casteren is accused of "insensitive disloyalty" toward his former girlfriend. He is a man "devoid of soul" who wrote a book "with less introspection than the riff-raff described in criminal biographies." According to Gerson, the most shocking aspect does not even concern the explicitly described, abusive situations in which the out-of-control characters end up. She provides a series of examples of similar stories that have appeared recently, both fictional and nonfictional. Rather, what is so outrageous to Gerson is the audacity with which the main character, a famous journalist, "exposes" himself as "a parasite and relationship con artist." Van Casteren's so-called love is nowhere to be found in the journalistic piece: his familiar, anemic "I'm-a-journalist" trick obviously does not work this time around,

for Gerson. The only thing he's up to is to profit from Luna's wealth and to continue benefiting from her mental confusion: "which brings" Gerson to her "actual charge: from the outset, his so-called love appears to rest on the possibility of the delayed account of a tourist watching from the sidelines. Tenderness is rarely involved, and sex does not seem to play a role either. More importantly, he never had any intention of actually helping her at all."[25]

According to Gerson, Joris faked his love so that he could write this "semi-literary, semi-finished product" later on. She goes on to paraphrase the whole story, in which she roundly denounces him from beginning to end, trying to demonstrate his cowardice, heartlessness, and cynicism, as well. She calls Van Casteren a jerk and, among other things, a well-educated upstart who "is not completely right in the head," who tries to present himself under the guise of journalism. People like him should not be given free rein on such delicate subject matter, she concludes, even if such a book might make a good addition to their journalistic resumés.[26]

The journalistic standard focused on here is both ethical and thematic: a journalist should not write about his own failed relationship with an unstable woman, out of respect for her and her family. But instead of presenting good arguments for this claim, Gerson moves from her indignation about the allegedly immoral act of publishing such a book to blaming the I, that is, the narrator and main character, for taking the position of a tourist watching from the sidelines and omitting introspection. She then concludes with an overall accusation of the author's despicable personality and his presumed lack of love. His decision to write and publish the book is confused with the way the main character, that is, Joris, is presented and with the judgment about Joris's bad behavior and his lack of love for Luna. (Unfortunately, as is the case with many failed love relationships, the question as to why it failed is complicated, and anything but a simple matter of guilt). Gerson did notice Van Casteren's "anemic 'I'm-a-journalist' trick,"[27] which shows that she is aware of matters such as style and composition, but this did not prevent her from mixing up things.

In her zeal to cast Van Casteren as a hypocrite, Gerson goes a good deal further, proposing that his fascination with Luna was based solely on the possibility of publishing their story later on. She extracts the "evidence" for this from the book itself. This is her argument: From (the way he describes) his behavior in the story it seems evident that Joris did not love Luna (1), so the only reason for his relationship with her is the prospect of writing a book and making money with the story (2). Because it is clear that (2) does not necessarily follow from (1), this slapdash line of reasoning rather demonstrates how Gerson is keen to tarnish Van Casteren with both personal

and professional misconduct.[28] In short, Gerson confuses the question of journalistic integrity with ill-considered and unreasonable judgment about a lover's (mis)behavior.

A clearer focus could have generated a stronger case. It is indeed obvious that the book touches upon certain boundaries of journalism. The question of intimacy between a journalist and his source, for instance, is interesting to develop. One of journalism's core issues is journalistic accountability and the corresponding relationship between the journalist and his or her sources. Yet, in the case of literary journalism, personal involvement by the journalist is widely accepted, as immersion and subjectivity are tools that render depth and meaning to the story. John Pauly, for example, studied how New Journalism brought such issues to the fore: "As a style of cultural politics, the New Journalism forced journalists and fictionalists alike to confront what it means to be a writer and to be written about, what writers owe their subjects and readers, and by what habits society organizes its practices of public imagination."[29]

Even more, scholars such as David Eason explore how, for many New Journalism writers, the roles of actors and spectators are no longer clearly defined and observing is considered as an act of analysis as well. As such, those writers depart from many forms of journalism where the interpretive stance is maintained, where passive spectators bear no responsibility for what they watch, and where the distinction between lived and observed experience implies that "real life is someone else's."[30] One might ask whether Gerson is sufficiently aware of such important narrative journalism issues.

In his response to Gerson's accusations, Van Casteren could easily push at an open door. He posits a rigorous division between personal motivation and the final story: "However, entertain the thought that I had indeed sought this situation out in a calculated effort, like a war reporter purposefully setting out for the battlefront, even still it remains peculiar to employ this as a case against a book in a review." He states that the quality of a book has nothing to do with the personal experiences and intentions of the author, nor with the way in which he processes those experiences in the book.[31]

Although Gerson promised not to discuss the quality of the book, she brings up matters of style and genre. "If it had been fabricated, we could have said that the drab rendering of the awful first person was a brilliant stylistic device," she states.[32] To her, the case apparently is different when it comes to fiction: when writing, poor losers can depict themselves in any possible despicable way, but journalists are not supposed to create any despicable first-persons as drab depictions of themselves. In summary, Gerson claims that personal failures must not serve as a source of inspiration for journalism but as

a source of inspiration for fiction, in which the fictional first-person narrators are also given the stylistic freedom to drably depict themselves. This reveals that she subjects the content as well as the style of narrative journalism to specific norms and restrictions. If the story was made up, the drab rendering of the awful first person might have been considered a brilliant stylistic device. But the story is real, which means an embargo on publication, and, in violation hereof, the instruction to be clear about your responsibility in questions of love and remorse. Gerson tries to draw a clear dividing line between the two genres and impose strict regulations upon literary journalism.

Criticism of style and genre choices forms the basis of Elsbeth Etty's piece "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden" (Leading a dangerous life safely together).[33] Etty, who, unlike Gerson, does not venture onto the thin ice of heavy moral and personal accusations, instead pretends to focus firmly on the literary problem itself. In her opinion, the book fails because the highly sensitive and tragic subject matter is not suitable for a report. She maintains that nonfiction is capable of producing stunning literature, but that it is not the appropriate place for mystification. In his previous book, *Lelystad*, Van Casteren succeeded in gracing ostensibly banal details with meaning, she claims, but what worked for a dystopian story like *Lelystad* fails entirely in one about a failed love affair. The author has not found a literary solution for this problem, she argues, so the book devolves from tragedy to banality.

Moreover, in Etty's opinion, Van Casteren does not do what a journalist should: instead of bringing the truth to light, he conceals it, despite the "ceremony of seemingly objectifying words."[34] By concealment she refers to the simple fact that Joris's fellow players are not referred to by name, and in so doing she oddly ignores the general journalistic code of source protection that the author applies here, albeit ironically. Obviously, in a case like this, with a famous journalist talking about his own past, it is not difficult for an inquisitive person to find out who the sources really are. But the point here is that Etty accuses Van Casteren of concealing facts and therefore not doing what a journalist should do.

Etty explains the problem of the "objectifying words" as follows: "Apparently the story about a dangerously ill woman and her family cannot be objectified by the author. Finally, Van Casteren is more than an observer: he is a party involved in the drama, perhaps partly to blame for Luna's plight."[35] By this she most probably means that because of his personal involvement Van Casteren cannot present the story objectively. Etty does not accuse Van Casteren of immoral behavior, as does Gerson; rather, she claims that deep personal involvement prevents writers from rising to the adequate stylistic standards of narrative journalism, even if they try to. In her conclusion, she

connects this psychological inhibition to the genre question: "A journalistic reportage is not the most appropriate genre for something as intimate as the failure of your relationship; poetry or fiction lend themselves better to the expression and conveyance of the feelings accompanying this topic."[36] The psychological matter has been turned into a question of genre: complex feelings and intimacy do not belong in journalistic reportage.

Fiction is a better place for (real) emotions, she claims, and the book fails because Van Casteren, as a journalist, prevents himself from expressing his emotions. As proof of this, Etty refers to a passage in which the first-person narrator says he feels nothing (during a heroin trip that Luna asks for). Etty interprets this "flat, colorless tone"[37] that emanates throughout the book as a (failed) attempt at journalistic distance: "It was raining. I didn't care about getting wet, nothing mattered any more. I didn't feel any love for Luna, I hardly felt any love for anything."[38] This example is a highly problematic argument, as it clearly proves the exact opposite: in this passage, Joris fully reveals his feelings of pain, loneliness, and despair. There is no sense whatsoever of a "flat, colorless tone."

Etty's problematic interpretation of the quote reveals an interesting confusion. To her, fiction is the place for complex emotions, whereas journalism only renders simple and straightforward emotions. Apparently narrative journalism style should not only be careful with the expression of emotions, but it should in the first place be simple and straightforward enough to be read on a literal basis. The underlying norm in this matter is one of literalness, once again giving in to the idea that in journalism, facts are facts, and reality can and should be presented *as it is*.

After a series of questions about Joris's personal motives—Is his journalism unbiased and detached enough? Is he showing aggression toward former colleagues?—Etty wonders why the author does not reveal any of his motives. She subsequently refers to a passage in which the author finally divulges something about himself: " 'Why were you with someone like that?' asks the young man. I told him about my earlier obsession with suicide victims and junkies, that I also wanted to commit suicide or be a junkie. I just wanted to be able to do it safely somehow. 'I thought that would be possible with her.' "[39] With regard to this confession too, she scoffs. Joris wants to live dangerously, but safely, somehow! He demonstrates that he has no answers, she argues, and that he does not understand what Luna wants. Once more Etty refuses to show any understanding for the complexity of paradoxical desires, for the confusion and despair of the young Joris, who has succumbed to the irrational lure of danger and transgression. She concludes (rightly so!) that she simply cannot understand the book's purpose: "*Het zusje van de bruid*

is not fiction, not literary nonfiction and is in no form or fashion whatsoever, journalism. At most it is a failed account of a failed love."[40]

Gerson's and Etty's remarks appear to set quite a few standards for narrative journalism, briefly listed here:

- Do not write about your own failures, errors, and tragic loves (ethical standard);
- And do not write about intimate, personal themes.
- If, however, you do write about sensitive themes such as tragic love:
  - Show introspection;
  - Do not write as if you were a tourist watching from the sidelines;
  - Do not play the "I'm-a-journalist" trick;
  - Clearly express your feelings of love, despair, and remorse;
  - Write about tenderness and sex;
  - Be explicit with regard to your intentions;
  - Do not write about a wealthy woman who struggles with borderline personality disorder (embarrassing);
  - Do not describe any "disgusting" scenes (unless they are new in the literary tradition);
  - Do not write about your own writing activities or about your writing colleagues (embarrassing);
  - Do not omit any "facts" (provide all names);
  - Do not apply for any grants or funds; and
  - Draw clear lines of distinction between fiction, literary nonfiction, and journalism.[41]

In short: according to Gerson and Etty, literary journalism must respect a limited theme choice and employ a clear style that allows for straightforward interpretation. This way of thinking differs from the general appreciation of literary journalism, as it is expressed, for example, in Thomas Connery's observation "that literary journalism attempts to show readers life and human behavior, even if what actually emerges is life's incomprehensibility and the inexplicability of human behavior."[42]

In the following sections, the grounds for the critics' underlying assumptions are discussed.

In Defense of Method

When Van Casteren receives an email from the editor-in-chief of *Vrij Nederland*, informing him that he is no longer welcome because of his "views on journalism," he decides to respond. In "Leg jij die pen maar neer" (Just keep your hands off that pen),[43] he describes his book as "a highly

intimate, literary-journalistic account concerning my relationship with an incredibly wealthy girl with borderline disorder, and with whom I was head over heels in love."[44] He tells how disastrous the relationship was, how he finally ended it, and how he continued to struggle with psychological problems for years. Writing the book, on the advice of a writer colleague, seemed "a painful process but also one of enlightenment."[45] In terms of tone, Van Casteren continues, "It had to be an affectionate book, devoted to her. But it also had to be brutal and ruthless, the way it often was with her. I wanted, as always, to present the shocking situations dryly, stripped of emotion. I leave the interpretation and judgment up to the reader."[46]

Here the author places emphasis on his method. He assures that it is no different in *Het zusje van de bruid* from his other work. He explains why he is always so frugal when it comes to making emotions explicit: he leaves it up to the reader to interpret and judge, even in such disquieting situations. Van Casteren describes how he struggled to find an appropriate form for his story, and why he chooses to be cautious with interpretations and emotions. These concerns dovetail with the findings of scholars such as Connery, who considers the interweaving of style and meaning as precisely forming a crucial interface between literature and literary journalism: "In a literary work, and in literary journalism, style becomes part of the meaning conveyed; the structure and organization of language interpret and inform."[47]

Chris Anderson takes this idea even further. In his work on the rhetorical and stylistic aspects of nonfiction, he claims:

> Nonfiction reportage is more than informative: it is an effort to persuade us to attitudes, interpretations, opinions, even actions. The rhetoric of reportage is subtle—it must be interpreted, the texts read carefully for nuances of imagery and tone—but it is there, powerful and persuasive. Hollowell, Weber, and Hellman have demonstrated that the use of point of view, symbolism, and other literary techniques makes the New Journalism inherently and consciously "fictive." Only a naïve reader, they suggest, ever regarded *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* or *In Cold Blood* as literally true or free of the author's shaping attitudes and perceptions.[48]

Van Casteren is well aware of the challenges he poses to the reader. He realizes how puzzling the contrast between the dreadful situations and the dry tone must be. The reader, who is at a loss as to how to think of it, is encouraged by this reticence, and maybe comes to realize how the silences of the narrator reveal not only the helplessness of the characters, but also the very process of interpretation and meaning making. This is what Anderson means when he writes "that these broadly 'literary' devices are perhaps more importantly rhetorical strategies for shaping the reader's attitudes and perceptions."[49]

Van Casteren continues his response with a comment on the genre issue. He callously undermines Etty's plea for another genre. "Etty thinks that it is better for books about disturbing topics that come dangerously close home to be fiction. Then we always have recourse to 'Thank God it's not true. It's just made up.' Yet, the unmasking of this open-ended interpretability is precisely where literary nonfiction packs its punch."[50] With these words Van Casteren identifies an important aspect of the problem. In his opinion, the themed, moral, and stylistic limitations Etty imposes on journalistic work reveal primarily how she attempts to protect herself from the tragic, complex, and paradoxical situations of the "real" world, a world in which people, for example, can realize that they want to lead *a dangerous life safely somehow*. Here Van Casteren staunchly defends strong literary journalism stories that do not shun tragedy and complexity, leaning upon the familiar topos that reality surpasses fiction.[51]

Fictional and nonfictional stories often appear to have to satisfy different sets of criteria. Critics seem to prefer fiction as an appropriate genre for complex themes. Fiction relies on the freedom of imagination and relieves writers from moral (Gerson) and psychological (Etty) worries. Yet, the preference for fiction can be a way of ignoring the stylistic opportunities that come with nonfiction. As Pauly puts it, somewhat wittily:

> Literary critics enjoy debunking the realism of nonfiction stories, for they hope to affirm the fictiveness of all narratives. Having settled journalism's hash, philosophically speaking, critics can deny all claims to representation, and hence free the literary imagination from its earthly entrapments. I would agree that all narratives are fictions, and that realism mostly means a set of shared stylistic conventions for dramatizing authenticity. I would also maintain that the New Journalism offered something as a form of journalism, not just as a disguised, inferior form of fiction. The New Journalism can still remind us that the truth of all writing is a matter for social negotiation.[52]

Possibly, this realism is what Gerson and Etty expect from nonfiction. Van Casteren is definitely inventing a style that does not fit into this tradition of journalism. There is rather another tradition to which Van Casteren's work might refer. In his work on the social, cultural, and historical framework of the New Journalism, Eason has shown how reporters place themselves in relation to the traditions of journalism. In this well-known classification of realist versus modernist writers, Van Casteren would undoubtedly fall under the modernist category:

> Realist reports reflect faith in the capability of traditional models of interpretation and expression, particularly the story form, to reveal the real.

> Although the reports acknowledge cultural relativism in their attention to the various symbolic worlds of their subjects, this awareness is not extended to the process of reporting, which is treated as a natural process. Modernist reports call attention to reporting as a way of joining writer and reader together in the creation of reality. Narrative techniques call attention to storytelling as a cultural practice for making a common world.[53]

In *True Stories*, Norman Sims writes that "Eason himself has lost interest in the distinction. He recently said it was the experimentation that made New Journalism interesting for him. 'I think of it primarily as a series of literary experiments, less a thing than some ventures'."[54] Eason's words might very well apply to Van Casteren's work: it is the experiment with new themes and forms, it is the rhetorical invention of bringing actual themes to life.

And What about Luna?

Now there is place to further consider this cultural practice by turning to other critics and their contributions to the views of reality. The critics agree that Joris should have taken better care of himself and the sick young woman Luna, at the time. Their judgments of his writing the book range from immature behavior to cold calculation and hypocrisy. Fortunately, one critic succeeded in contextualizing these judgments more broadly and thus also produced a more effective interpretation of this behavior. In "Requiem van een onmogelijk verzet" (Requiem of an impossible rebellion), Gijsbert Pols denounces the "new prudery" and taboo related to talking about one's personal aporia before it has been fully processed and "been afforded a place."[55] Joris appears nowhere as the ideal son-in-law. Pols says: "The Joris van Casteren in this book is someone who hangs apathetically above his own life, unable to assume responsibility for himself or others, impotent when faced with his own emotions. However, he has written a great book."[56]

Pols understands the criticism put forward by the "sensible people," but as a "fool" Joris is able to consider life more profoundly: "He understands it better—and not just when it concerns Luna."[57] Here the tone of the book, which shows the turbulent struggle of characters that desperately try to escape their misery, is acclaimed. According to Pols, the book is also a struggle against the mentality of the "sensible" people around them who, out of decency, want to comply neatly to social norms:

> It is a mentality that experiences this well-being as self-evident, views happiness as a right and is incapable of imagining an existence beyond a Saturday afternoon's shopping. If something goes wrong, we quickly find a solution and should that one not work, we move on to the next one and the next, and the one after that. *Het zusje van de bruid* portrays a version of the Netherlands that is imbued with this mentality. . . .[58]

This is also Luna's struggle, in Pols's opinion. It is precisely the "sensible" that Luna desperately tries to rebel against. Luna's wealthy parents live in this "solutions-oriented country," a country that lives in denial of all forms of pain and misery, a country in which a name and a solution are deftly devised for each problem, a country in which rich, beautiful, intelligent girls should be happy. This is where Pols brings out the socio-critical aspects of the book, and he immediately succeeds in extricating Luna from the obvious role of voiceless victim the critics had intended for her, in total conformity with the social norms of the solutions-oriented country, a country in which language is straightforward, and people are classified in clear categories of victim/culprit, ill/healthy, or responsible/irresponsible. By not stowing Luna away in the well-defined category of illnesses, Pols demonstrates how critics all too easily disregard the socio-critical and psychological subject matter of the book:

> Luna is aware that this solutions-oriented country is a lie. She knows that it excludes, pretends, and murders and robs and destroys in order to keep the lie in place. This is why she repeatedly brings up 9/11, takes a Nigerian journalist to her father's villa, takes photographs of a semi-demolished district in Lelystad and, after the example of the *Bloomsbury Group,* wants to begin a literary salon.[59]

Pols claims that Joris is attracted by this radical pursuit of a reality in which real questions can be posed. When Luna does not succeed in executing these projects and seeks salvation in increasingly drastic methods of self-destruction, Joris is apparently "sensible" enough to retreat and seek his salvation elsewhere. According to Pols, the small references to the happiness Joris apparently found in the meantime also add a touch of hope to the book.[60] In his interpretation, Pols shows how nonfiction plays a role, in Anderson's words, "as a form in the cultural and ethical debate of our time."[61]

Most other critics berated the views described above: they talk about the (alleged) hypocrisy, speculate on the real names of the characters, and discuss the less than flattering way in which Van Casteren portrays his former colleagues. Van Casteren lets slip to Frans Oremus "that my method as I applied it in this book [*Lelystad*], as well as in my articles, is very highly acclaimed by the literary and journalistic world, but as soon as I turn my gaze to their small worlds they scream blue murder."[62] This might very well be a valuable argument, which should remind the reader in the first place of socio-political questions about authorship and readership. What does it mean that narrative journalism often focuses on marginal groups, and where is the line between pity, indignation, and voyeurism?

Wordlessness

These questions also reveal a critical difference between *Lelystad* and *Het Zusje van de Bruid*. Educated readers can easily sympathize with young Joris growing from a streetwise kid into a respectable journalist. The story about the same journalist who gets completely lost in a tragic love story is more difficult to digest, especially within a context that is difficult to define. Not only are Joris and Luna complex and ambiguous characters, but their families, friends, and colleagues are not always clearly defined. For example, Luna's well-heeled parents are not unequivocally portrayed or presented as the direct cause of her problems. And the critique of the solutions-oriented country has not been picked up by everyone. In contrast, the stories in *Lelystad* are clearly placed in a sociological context: the many characters can easily be viewed as examples and victims of the derailed society in Lelystad.

Yet, in both stories Joris is a powerless, rudderless, first-person narrator who keeps his motives mostly to himself. By leaving out interpretations and emotions, Van Casteren reveals the power of language and the underlying cultural assumptions of stylistic conventions. Interestingly, there is a striking coincidence with the principal theme of nonfiction, as it is formulated by Anderson and in the outline of Van Casteren's project. To Anderson, contemporary nonfiction is absorbed by its own rhetorical dilemma. This shows, for instance, in Van Casteren's metadiscursive elements, preoccupation with the limits of language, and fascination with wordlessness. Anderson writes:

> My central concern in interpreting this work is the relationship between style and theme. Form is the shape of content, Ben Shahn has said. In contemporary nonfiction, as in all literature, style is best understood as a reflection and enactment of a content and a point of view. In fact, I will try to show that the principal theme of contemporary nonfiction is its own rhetorical dilemma. The writing of Wolfe, Capote, Mailer, and Didion is profoundly metadiscursive, concerned with the problems of style and expression and language in America, and in this way it provides all the terms we need for understanding its internal workings and its cultural value. What preoccupies all four writers, whatever their ostensible subject, is the effort to convey in words the inexplicable energies, intensities, and contradictions of American experience. Though in very different ways, Wolfe, Capote, Mailer, and Didion each define their subjects as somehow beyond words—antiverbal or nonverbal, threatening or sublime; overpowering and intense or private and intuitive—and then repeatedly call our attention to the issue of inexplicability throughout their descriptions and expositions. A self-consciousness about the limits of language is the structuring principle of their work. Wordlessness can be positive or negative in these texts, energizing

> or threatening. It can be personal or communal. It is something to find and something to claim. Yet whatever its nature, it generates a rhetorical challenge for the writer. As they themselves define their task, Wolfe, Capote, Mailer, and Didion must push language to its limits, explore the edges of expression, intensify and expand the power of words to reach the level of a sublime and inexplicable object.[63]

In his work, Van Casteren doesn't really *discuss* his rhetorical dilemmas. Rather, they are enacted by the sometimes-disruptive silences of the narrator that result in an enigmatic style. Scenes and quotes are surrounded by a certain absence, a certain wordlessness. It is Van Casteren's way of exploring the edges of expression, the limits of language, and (therefore) the limits of the reader's thinking and understanding.

Conclusion

The search for meaning and importance is an existential theme for all (young) people, but it is extraordinary how Joris van Casteren, the boy from Lelystad, was able to express this escape from a stifling environment that was totally devoid of imagination. This search is consistent with the enigmatic style in which he rarely interprets or evaluates events and leaves questions unanswered. He does not adapt to the stylistic conventions of journalistic realism. He refuses to assume the obvious role of the self-assured and judging guide. He also refuses to engage in the socio-realistic tour, in which characters are presented only as pitiful victims and readers allow themselves to be overcome by the familiar and predictable feelings of indignation and compassion. And lastly, he refuses to adopt the all-too-comfortable ironic tone with which narrator and reader take pleasure in the floundering characters of a dismal city.

When Van Casteren recounts the story of a personal "impossible love," for which no clear sociological or philosophical context is provided, he violates apparently unwritten laws and crosses indistinct boundaries. Some critics feel the need to bring him back into line, using vague and dubious arguments. It is evident that literary nonfiction conjures up quite different expectations than does fiction, and that these expectations involve far more than the factual guarantee alone. Journalism, where reporting on the facts is paramount, is subject to all kinds of criteria that are imposed by this reality. Van Casteren's work challenges these criteria, because it reveals that language, meaning, and interpretation are subject to ambiguous and unspoken laws that are based on personal, historical, cultural, and social structures.

Van Casteren's more recent work also looks for these boundaries. In *Het been in de IJssel* (The leg in the IJssel)[64] the author is obsessed with his investigation of the origin of a human leg a fisherman found in the IJssel

river. Van Casteren talks to police officials and the court involved in the case, as well as relatives of the suspected victim. *Mensen op Mars. Relaas van een manmoedige poging* (People on Mars: the tale of an audacious endeavor)[65] is based on interviews with candidates for a planned reality show that would select a few people to take part in project Mars One, a megalomaniac mission to colonize the planet Mars, without any possibility of returning. Van Casteren visits the candidates and outlines the staggeringly intense way in which they experience the various selection rounds. The reality show in question never took place, and project Mars One is now dead and buried as well. Van Casteren's most recent book is about Piet Van der Molen, a hippie-like senior who managed to hide his dead mother's body for over two years "because she told him to" and because he didn't know how to start a new life without her.[66] Again, Van Casteren presents a true story about a situation most readers would rather not be confronted with. The VARA television interview with Van Casteren and Van der Molen can be watched on YouTube.[67]

In *Lelystad*, Van Casteren describes how his very first series of articles, about the atmosphere in the local pubs, was discontinued, due to angry pub landlords.[68] The book about his relationship with Luna, which appeared approximately seventeen years later, also stirred up ill feeling. Van Casteren clearly has found a way to probe some boundaries of literary journalism. His weapon is suggestion: by presenting a narrator who repeatedly seems to lose himself in the events, he succeeds in creating a world that consists of the quest for importance and meaning. It is precisely by refraining from predictable interpretations that he reveals their predictability and makes room for less comfortable perspectives.

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Notes

[1] Van Casteren, "De man die 2 ½ jaar dood lag," 175–91. About a man who lay dead for two-and-a-half years, this work was re-published as one chapter in an anthology of his original articles that bears the same title.

[2] Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 316 (from the 2017 edition. All translations by Griet Vercruysse, with many thanks for her help with the translation work).

[3] Van Casteren, *Het zusje van de bruid*.

[4] Borderline personality disorder is characterized by impulsiveness and by a long-standing pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, behavior, mood, and self-image, with symptoms often including intense anger and fear of abandonment. "Diagnostic Symptoms Explained: The essential feature of borderline personality disorder is a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts." American Psychiatric Association, "DSM Definition: Borderline Personality Disorder," para. 5.

[5] Gerson, "Journalistiek bederf van een relatiezwendelaar"; Etty, "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden."

[6] Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 14.

[7] Van Casteren, 180.

[8] Van Casteren, 72.

[9] Van Casteren, 182–84.

[10] Van Casteren, 79.

[11] Van Casteren, 86.

[12] Van Casteren, 124.

[13] Van Casteren, 316.

[14] Van Casteren, 166.

[15] Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," 370–96. In his now famous hierarchy of human needs, Maslow describes the hierarchy as moving from physiological needs to safety and security needs, social needs, esteem needs, and, finally, self-actualizing needs.

[16] Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 19.

[17] Luna (cf. lunatic?) is not her real name. The only real name used in the book is Joris's, the narrator.

[18] Van Casteren, *Het zusje van de bruid*, 7–9.

[19] Van Casteren, 9.

[20] Van Casteren, 119.

[21] Kregting, "Noem het dan ook geen liefde" [Don't call it love, then], 177.

[22] Gerson, "Journalistiek bederf van een relatiezwendelaar."

[23] Gerson, para. 1.

[24] Gerson, para. 1–2.

[25] Gerson, para. 7.

[26] Gerson, para. 10.

[27] Gerson, para. 7.

[28] The fact that Gerson bases her severe judgments about the relationship

solely on this book and not on other sources is another gap in her argumentation. In the assumption that it is so crucial to prove Van Casteren's guilt, Gerson might well have made an effort to interview authorities about the matter or even other characters in the book. However, she gives no evidence that she tried to do that. The omission puts her argument on shaky ground.

[29] Pauly, "The Politics of the New Journalism," 125.

[30] Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," 196–97, 196.

[31] Van Casteren, "Leg jij die pen maar neer," para. 15.

[32] Gerson, "Journalistiek bederf van een relatiezwendelaar," para. 10.

[33] Etty, "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden."

[34] Etty, para. 4.

[35] Etty, para. 6.

[36] Etty, para. 7.

[37] Etty, para. 8.

[38] Van Casteren, *Het zusje van de bruid*, 201, quoted in Etty, "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden," 14.

[39] Van Casteren, 201, quoted in Etty, 14.

[40] Etty, "Samen veilig een gevaarlijk leven leiden," para. 13.

[41] Etty writes, "*Het zusje van de bruid* is not fiction, not literary nonfiction and is in no form or fashion whatsoever, journalism," para. 13.

[42] Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 12.

[43] Van Casteren, "Leg jij die pen maar neer."

[44] Van Casteren, para. 2.

[45] Van Casteren, para. 6.

[46] Van Casteren, para. 7.

[47] Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 15.

[48] Anderson, *Style as Argument*, 2.

[49] Anderson, 2.

[50] Van Casteren, "Leg jij die pen maar neer," para. 12.

[51] To be fair, Van Casteren does take this interlinking of fiction and open-ended interpretability rather far. In doing so, he overlooks the paradox (or mystery) that readers can sometimes be moved more deeply by fictional stories than by real stories.

[52] Pauly, "The Politics of the New Journalism," 122.

[53] Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," 192–93.

[54] Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*, 246. From this perspective, Joris van Casteren would definitely belong to the group of interesting writers.

[55] Pols, "Requiem van een onmogelijk verzet," para. 2.

[56] Pols, para. 3. It is interesting that Pols does not speak about Van Casteren's role as a journalist and the standards outlined by Etty and Gerson. In the second paragraph he categorizes the text as an autobiography and reviews it as such.

[57] Pols, para. 7.

[58] Pols, para. 11.

[59] Pols, para. 12.

[60] Pols, para. 18, refers to the second paragraph of the book. See endnote 18, above.

[61] Anderson, *Style as Argument*, 3. Anderson's full quote reads, "The more important question is the role of nonfiction as a form in the cultural and ethical debate of our time."

[62] Oremus, *Joris van Casteren rekent af met De Groene*, para. 6.

[63] Anderson, *Style as Argument*, 4–5.

[64] Van Casteren, *Het been in de IJssel*.

[65] Van Casteren, *Mensen op Mars*.

[66] Van Casteren, *Moeders lichaam* [Mother's body]. On the back cover, Van Casteren is dubbed the "Truman Capote of the Low Countries."

[67] Joris van Casteren and Piet Van der Molen, guests in the talk show, "De Wereld Draait Door" [The world keeps turning on], on the Dutch BNNVARA-channel was published February 28, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KDrDv0ApkQ, retrieved July 9, 2019.

[68] Van Casteren, *Lelystad*, 206.

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Matthew Ricketson, prior to delivering his keynote address, Port Jefferson, New York, May 7, 2019. Photo by Pablo Calvi.

IALJS–14 Keynote Address . . .

Navigating the Challenges of Writing Book–Length Literary Journalism

Matthew Ricketson
Deakin University, Australia

Introduction: We are honored and delighted today to have Australia's Matthew Ricketson, professor of communication, journalist, and author of three books, address our literary journalism association. Matthew has written a biography of Australian author Paul Jennings, a textbook about feature writing, and a monograph about literary journalism entitled *Telling True Stories*. He is the editor of two books—an anthology of outstanding Australian profile articles and *Australian Journalism Today*. His textbook, *Writing Feature Stories*, was revised for a second edition with a coauthor, Caroline Graham, and published in 2017. Matthew has won awards for his journalism, including the national George Munster prize for freelance journalism. In 2011, he was appointed by the federal government to assist Ray Finkelstein, QC, in an independent inquiry into the media, which was reported in 2012. He is also a chief investigator on three Australian Research Council–funded projects. Currently, Matthew is chair, board of directors, for the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma in the Asia Pacific Region, as well as the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance's representative on the Australian Press Council. — Rob Alexander, IALJS Advisory Board Member, on behalf of the president, Tom Connery.

Good morning and thank you for the invitation to give the keynote address at the Fourteenth International Conference for Literary Journalism Studies. I feel honored to have this opportunity. Looking at the list of previous keynote speakers, I noticed that one was from France, one from Norway, one from Portugal, and there were eight from the United States. So I am the first keynote speaker to this conference from Australia, indeed the first from the southern hemisphere. That makes me feel good. But then I noticed that among my predecessors, ten were men and only two were women. That makes me feel less than good. Because whatever I bring to this conference—and I do aim to offer you something you'll find useful—I know there are a number of scholars in Australia who could well be standing here instead of me, and that most of them are women. So, at the outset, I would like to acknowledge the pioneering work and generous collegiality of some fellow Antipodeans: Bunty Avieson, Fiona Giles, Sue Joseph, Beate Josephi, Willa McDonald, Jennifer Martin, and Lindsay Morton.

The theme of this year's conference is "The Literary Journalist as Naturalist: Science, Ecology and the Environment." A long, important strand in the history of literary journalism has been writing about nature and the environment, of course, but since about 2000 we have been living in the age of the Anthropocene, in particular of anthropogenic climate change. Reducing the impacts of human-induced climate change is the most important environmental issue a literary journalist could write about; indeed, it is the most important issue facing the planet right now. Its scale and momentousness immediately raises the question: What on earth am I doing standing here talking about the ethical issues in writing book-length literary journalism; and, for that matter, why are you sitting there listening? Is it blind, Mr. Micawber-like optimism that "something will turn up"? Is it paralysis induced by our powerlessness in the face of evidence we feel daily on our skin that the planet is warming but that too little is being done to slow the trend to safe levels? Is it that we don't know how to communicate the urgency of the situation to persuade people to act, be they politicians, CEOs of companies in the fossil-fuel industry, or the broad mass of citizens around the world? Probably all of the above, and more, but given this is a conference about literary journalism I'm going to focus on issues to do with communication, because the science may be settled on the question of whether humankind's actions are the major contributor to global warming, but the politics aren't.

Bill McKibben, journalist, advocate and founder of 350.org, wrote in the *New Yorker* late in 2018 that since 1988 when climatologist James Hansen testified before the United States Congress about the dangers of human-

induced climate change, carbon emissions in the United States have increased every year except for 2009 (the height of the global recession).[1] "Simple inertia and the human tendency to prioritize short-term gains have played a role, but the fossil-fuel industry's contribution has been by far the most damaging."[2] He goes on to outline in detail how scientists working for fossil-fuel industry companies knew about the dangers of global warming as long ago as 1977, how companies began calculating how best to take advantage of the thawing permafrost in the Arctic Circle, and how that, soon after Hansen's testimony, an Exxon public affairs manager advised the company to "emphasize the uncertainty"[3] of the scientific data about climate change. This information is so alarming as to stupefy us into a "Did-I-really-just-read-that?" state. Why is it not being followed up in the news every day, you might ask?

It is a good question that goes to a complex set of issues familiar to communication scholars. One of those, more familiar to people here, is about the role literary journalism plays in exploring issues and contributing to public debate. Few literary journalists—with the possible exception of Tom Wolfe—have ever claimed the kind of mass influence that television anchorman Walter Cronkite enjoyed in broadcasting's glory years or even half as many twitter followers as the one million–plus following the *New York Times*'s Maggie Haberman. (Ted Conover, last year's keynote speaker, has 1,207 twitter followers.) That does not for a moment mean literary journalists lack impact. It is just that how and in what ways their work makes an impact—beginning with their readers and radiating outward—is subtler, and less often studied. A starting point might be to invoke W. H. Auden's poem, written after both the death of Sigmund Freud and the Nazis' invasion of Poland in September 1939:

> if often he was wrong and, at times, absurd,
> to us he is no more a person
> now but a whole climate of opinion.[4]

It is instructive, then, that when New York University's journalism department brought together a panel of experts to find the one hundred best works of American journalism of the twentieth century, they nominated a work of literary journalism as number one—John Hersey's *Hiroshima*.[5] It is hard to know how exactly you would measure *Hiroshima*'s influence but also hard to disagree that it created a whole climate of opinion. As literary critic Dan Jones has written, the atomic bomb attack demanded Hersey "provide forms for understanding what has been called history's least imaginable event."[6] Which he did, as is well known. "I had never thought of the people in the bombed cities as individuals," one reader, a university student, wrote to the *New Yorker* after it published Hersey's article a year after the bombing of Hiroshima (and

Nagasaki) brought an end to World War II.[7] If the reader's comment sounds odd, it underscores how easily we can cauterize our imaginations when we're faced with events of this kind, and highlights the chasm we need to cross to empathize with the victims. Hersey's rare achievement was to do that for millions of people, then and since.

We now face another of history's least imaginable events, though this time we face the prospect of destroying our planet slowly and in full knowledge we are doing so. And for that reason we need to not only empathize with the victims of human-induced climate change but find ways to create, if you'll pardon the pun, a whole new climate of opinion. That is a complex as well as urgent task, and one that many writers are engaged in. Bill McKibben I've already mentioned, and in Australia I would point to Jo Chandler, whose 2011 book *Feeling the Heat* invoked comparisons with the work of Rachel Carson, and Philip Chubb, whose 2014 book *Power Failure* recounted in dispiriting detail how Australia, a country heavily reliant on fossil fuel exports, failed to address climate change through a combination of political hubris, corporate greed, and union bastardry.[8] What I have looked at in my research, and what I believe aids works that create a climate of opinion, are the ethical issues that arise in researching and writing book-length literary journalism.

As you may have noticed I have referred so far to book-length works of journalism, and that is for a reason. When journalism is practiced in books, ethical issues arise, some of which are common to daily journalism but some of which aren't. Or the ethical issues take on a different form by dint of the journalism being written in a narrative style and published in book form. These issues are both intrinsically important and have received less scholarly attention than the many ethical issues in news journalism. Use of the word "literary" in the term literary journalism can confuse because it implies journalistic work that is art or literature. Which immediately invites the question: according to whom? By what criteria? This is a perfectly good debate to have, and I would happily argue for the artistic and literary merit of a long list of journalistic works, but using literary or artistic merit as the prism through which you look at journalistic work has the effect of clouding three key issues: first, the implications of the extent to which this field of writing is practiced at book length; second, the range and complexity of the ethical issues that are inherent in taking a narrative approach to writing about people and events; and, third, the way in which many conflate a narrative approach with notions of literary merit.

Taking the issues one by one, scholars have understated the extent to which journalism is practiced at book length. Journalism written in a narrative style can certainly be found in newspapers, in the English-speaking world, but

it is more likely to be found in magazines, and, it appears, most likely to be found in books. I say appears because without universal agreement as to what constitutes this field, and because what might be called book-length literary journalism is subsumed into the broad publishing category of nonfiction, it cannot be enumerated exactly. An early study of the New Journalism, which is what literary journalism used to be called in the 1960s and 1970s, noted that much of it was published in book form.[9] In 1996 Edd Applegate drew on seventeen anthologies and scholarly works to compile *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary of Writers and Editors*, which included journalists and editors working in newspapers, magazines, and in books. Even so, of the 172 people listed, 112, or about two-thirds, had written at least one work of book-length journalism.[10] In 2007, the Nieman Foundation collated contributions from journalists and editors who had shared reflections on their practices at its annual Narrative Journalism conferences. Of the fifty-three contributors to *Telling True Stories*, thirty-six had written at least one work of book-length journalism; many had written several.[11] In 2009, Sarah Statz Cords compiled a readers' guide to investigative nonfiction entitled *The Inside Scoop* that contains more than 500 book titles, most of them published in the United States since 2000.[12] These figures show the practice of book-length journalism is more widespread than has been recognized.

Book-length journalism is surprisingly well represented in lists of outstanding journalism. For the "Best American Journalism of the Twentieth Century," thirty-eight of the one hundred works chosen were books. Of these, twenty-three were created as book-length works and fifteen were long magazine articles published as books or magazines articles or newspaper series extended to book length. An example of the first is Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*; an example of the second is Lillian Ross's *Picture*; and of the third, Leon Dash's *Rosa Lee*. The list of thirty-eight does not include shorter magazine articles collected and published in book form, such as Joseph Mitchell's *Up in the Old Hotel and Other Stories*.[13] Book-length journalism was also included in the best Australian journalism of the twentieth century—"Century's Top 100"—a list chosen by a panel of industry and academic experts assembled by RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology) University's Journalism program, which at the time I headed. Of the one hundred chosen, fourteen were works of book-length journalism, and included Alan Moorehead's *African Trilogy*, John Bryson's *Evil Angels*, and Pamela Williams's the *Victory*, among others. (The full list was published in the Media section of *The Australian* newspaper on December 9, 1999).[14] The Pulitzer Prizes are well known as the most prestigious awards for journalism in the United States; less well known is the extent to which

one of the awards in the Arts and Letters section of the prizes, General Nonfiction, includes works of book-length journalism.[15] Acknowledging that the boundaries between various nonfiction genres are porous, by my count twenty of the winners since the award's inception in 1962 have been book-length journalism. Among them: Tracy Kidder's *The Soul of a New Machine*; Lawrence Wright's *The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda's Road to 9/11*; and Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction*. Finally, in Australia, since 2005 there has been a Walkley Award (the equivalent of the Pulitzer Prizes) for the best journalistic book, which each year attracts around seventy-five entries. Winners include: Chris Masters's investigative biography of shock jock Alan Jones, *Jonestown*; Stan Grant's *Talking to My Country*; and Louise Milligan's *Cardinal: The Rise and Fall of George Pell*.[16]

The importance of the extent to which journalism is practiced at book length is that books hold a different place in the cultural landscape, than newspapers, magazines, and online media. Most readers understand that news media are produced under unyielding deadlines, leading inevitably to at least some errors; they generally expect greater accuracy from a book that has taken at least a year and often more to produce and, accordingly, afford it greater cultural weight. Witness the volcanic impact in early 2018 of the first book–length journalistic account of the Trump presidency, *Fire and Fury*, by Michael Wolff.[17] Even now, after the internet has disrupted (or worse) most of the media and communications industries, sales of printed books continue to far outstrip those of electronic books, and, despite repeated predictions of the demise of such an old-fashioned form, sales of physical books are rising, albeit modestly, according to the Association of American Publishers.[18]

The second issue obscured from view by a focus on literary merit is that ethical issues are inherent in the finding and telling of true stories; this seems almost self-evident but needs to be stated explicitly because of the third issue, which is the conflating of a narrative approach with literary merit. My argument is not that scholars of literary journalism have ignored ethical issues, but they examine them within the context of work that they have already argued is literary.[19] This has led many critics to sidestep or excuse inaccuracies or embellishments or even downright inventions in work they judge to be literary, as I have discussed elsewhere.[20] Likewise, most critics have overlooked the question of whether the ethical issues inherent in representing actual people and events in a narrative style of writing are magnified or diminished by the practitioner's literary or artistic skills, or whether it is in the initial taking of a narrative approach that the ethical issues are triggered. This blind spot is evident in the differing critical receptions to the work of Bob Woodward, a newspaper reporter who has become a prolific, high-profile

practitioner of book-length journalism, and Truman Capote, a novelist whose "nonfiction novel," *In Cold Blood*, was published in 1966 and had a major impact on generations of literary journalists. Applegate includes both in his dictionary; but where Capote is mentioned in twelve of the seventeen sources Applegate cites, Woodward is mentioned by none of them.[21] Rather, Applegate's choice appears to be founded in equating the use of a narrative approach with literary merit. He writes that in *The Final Days* Woodward and his coauthor Carl Bernstein "used dialogue, interior monologue, and candid description to depict characters, scenes, and emotions. The book was an example of literary journalism."[22]

Yet Woodward's work has not been included in any of the seven major anthologies of either literary journalism[23] or creative nonfiction,[24] which may be understandable as no one, including Woodward, has ever claimed he is a great writer. "English was not Woodward's native language" is what he, and his reporting partner, Carl Bernstein, wryly remark on the third page of *All the President's Men*.[25] Woodward and Bernstein's newspaper work has, however, won a place in two anthologies of investigative journalism.[26] The notion that ethical issues would be present in a work of narrative nonfiction acclaimed by many literary critics—Capote's *In Cold Blood*—but not in the work of Woodward (and Bernstein), whose books are excluded from literary journalism anthologies, is, plainly, nonsense.

To sum up, choosing literary or artistic merit as the sole or primary criterion by which to analyze journalism can be misleading and suggests there is merit in examining what kind of ethical issues arise when journalism is produced in book form. I am thinking here not of ethical issues common to all journalism, which means not focusing, for instance, on whether Capote paid bribes to get access to the two convicted murderers in jail he was writing about for *In Cold Blood* or whether Woodward and Bernstein flouted Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure by trying to interview members of the Watergate Grand Jury.[27] When you start thinking about ethical issues unique to, or felt more urgently in, book-length journalism than in daily journalism, questions emerge: How do practitioners balance their need to maintain editorial independence with the closeness to key sources that comes from gaining a deep level of trust? Are there any limits to the kinds of narrative approach practitioners can take when representing actual people and events? Do some approaches to narrative, such as writing an interior monologue for an actual person, go beyond the bounds of nonfiction? And, how do readers read journalism in books as distinct from in newspapers, magazines, and online? If journalists present their book in a narrative style, is their work read as nonfiction or, because it reads *like* a novel, is it read *as* a novel?

I thought it useful to devise a framework in which to hold, articulate, and mull over the issues thrown up by the practice of telling true stories. Of course, I have drawn on and, I hope, built on the work of other scholars, including a number in this room, and others who aren't but whose work has been particularly helpful—Daniel Lehman's 1997 book, *Matters of Fact*, and Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel's 2001 book, *The Elements of Journalism*.[28] There are three stages of this framework, beginning with the research phase, moving on to the representation phase, and finishing with the reception phase. Writers working on book-length projects conduct their research by gathering and analyzing documents, whether in print or online; by interviewing people; and by observing events at firsthand. The time available to practitioners of book-length projects to immerse themselves in the culture of those they are writing about offers the opportunity to become closer to sources than is customary in daily journalism and develop a trusting relationship that enables the practitioner to present such people, who I call principal sources, not in snapshots but in a more developed portrait. To do this, the journalist needs to gather material about the principal source's appearance, dress, and habits. Journalists will want to know how the source felt; responded in situations that are highly personal, or extreme; and that may have revealed the source in a poor light. Literary journalists need to find a balance between maintaining their editorial independence and managing the hurt they may cause by writing honestly about their principal sources.

In the research phase, perhaps the most difficult issue is how literary journalists negotiate and manage the fine, sometimes porous boundaries between the professional and personal relationships inherent in becoming close to principal sources. Janet Malcolm famously exposed to view the hidden underbelly of journalist-subject relationships in *The Journalist and the Murderer*,[29] asserting that journalists first seduced, then betrayed their subjects. It was a brilliant insight into a key element of journalistic practice that few if any journalists had previously discussed publicly, though it actually applied less powerfully to news journalism than to book-length journalism. Hindsight and various scholars' work show that it applied precisely to the dangerously enmeshed relationship that Truman Capote developed with convicted murderer Perry Smith while he researched *In Cold Blood*, as I have discussed elsewhere.[30] Malcolm offered an insight, then, rather than a framework for understanding the range of possible journalist-subject interactions. To put it simply, as Errol Morris writes, after reinvestigating the case that was the topic of Malcolm's book, her characterization is "like creating a general theory of human relationships based on Iago's relationship with Othello."[31]

In recent years, numerous practitioners have shown that it is possible to enter into and maintain a relationship with principal sources that takes on elements of ethnography, such as informed consent, and that continues common journalistic understandings of editorial independence. This means that unlike the journalist in Malcolm's book, Joe McGinniss, practitioners are able to ask their principal sources difficult questions and write things that would anger or upset them even if that jeopardizes their access to the principal source. It is bracing, for instance, to see the lengths to which Gitta Sereny went to inform Mary Bell about the likely additional problems she would face if Sereny agreed to Bell's proposal that she give her version of how Mary Bell committed murder at the age of eleven.

> Did she realize, I asked her, that such a book was bound to be controversial? That people were bound to think she did it for money? That both of us would be accused of insensitivity towards the two little victims' families by bringing their dreadful tragedy back into the limelight and, almost inevitably, of sensationalism, because of some of the material the book would have to contain? Above all, did she understand that readers would not stand for any suggestion of possible mitigation for her crimes?[32]

Sereny has deep compassion for Bell—Bell's mother attempted to kill her daughter on four occasions and included her daughter in her work as a prostitute—as is evident throughout *Cries Unheard*, but Sereny does not hesitate from confronting Bell when she believes Bell is lying or being manipulative. Nor did she lose access to Bell. Published in 1998, *Cries Unheard* is an extreme case but it illustrates the extraordinary reporting feats that can be achieved by practitioners who are not only determined to pursue confronting topics but take seriously their ethical responsibilities to both their subjects and their readers. All the information above is from Sereny's book. It is not only possible, then, for journalists working on book-length projects to disagree with their sources and maintain a working relationship, it could be argued that openness between practitioner and principal sources about the project and a preparedness to discuss disagreements are barometers of good practice.

In the writing phase of producing book-length journalism, practitioners are attempting to represent in words on a page what they have found during the research phase. Representation necessarily raises questions of ethics as well as aesthetics. It is easy for readers to see that journalism written in the inverted pyramid form, with its rigid format, formal tone, and institutional voice, is about actual people, events, and issues. When journalism is written in a narrative style, it resembles fiction and so invites the question: How does the reader know whether they are reading fiction or nonfiction? The

answer, according to narrative theorist H. Porter Abbott, is that unless they are told, they don't.[33] This may sound odd, but actually isn't. For most people, journalism is what comes up in their news feed on their mobile device, or it may still be what they read in newspapers, hear on radio, watch on television, or do all three online. Nonfiction is associated with information and knowledge. When it is written in a narrative style, the same issue of knowing what it is you're reading is raised. For the past two centuries the novel has been a highly popular book form. For many, books are synonymous with novels. Certainly, many of my students think that.

Readers are accustomed to a high degree of playfulness about authors' claims for a work of fiction. There is less scope for such playfulness in book–length literary journalism, which makes claims to be representing actual people, events, and issues. Regardless of how careful they are, writers ultimately cannot control how people will read their work. Readers may read a work as the writer hopes they will, or they may well find other meanings and interpretations. That we are unable to control exactly what readers make of our work does not absolve us of obligations to them. In any case, because literary journalists aim to reach the broadest possible audience, they need to assume readers have less, rather than more, knowledge of the topic. To put it another way, it does no harm to assume this, but there may be harm if you don't.

Why? Because once the reader begins reading, there is a range of ways writers can signal the kind of book being offered. To the extent that they avoid endnotes, notes on sources, and the like, and write primarily in a narrative style, they increase the likelihood their book will be read as if it were fiction, especially given that the majority of readers conflate a narrative style with fiction. This prompts a key issue. When a writer seeks to present the world as it is, the narrative style resembles that of socially realistic fiction. In such works, writers want to fully engage the reader's mind and emotions. They want to induce in the reader a dreamlike state of mind, as the novelist and creative writing teacher John Gardner terms it in *The Art of Fiction*.

> If we carefully inspect our experience as we read, we discover that the importance of physical detail is that it creates for us a kind of dream, a rich and vivid play in the mind. We read a few words at the beginning of the book or the particular story, and suddenly we find ourselves seeing not words on a page but a train moving through Russia, an old Italian crying, or a farmhouse battered by rain. We read on—dream on—not passively but actively, worrying about the choices the characters have to make, listening in panic for some sound behind the fictional door, exulting in characters' successes, bemoaning their failures. In great fiction, the dream engages us heart and soul; we not only respond to imaginary things—sights, sounds, smells—as though they were real, we respond to fictional problems as though they were real.[34]

Gardner argues readers of fiction may feel powerful emotions and may vividly experience the novel's imagined world, but they know that the people and events as presented in the book are not real. There are novels that include actual people and places and events, but they do not purport to be a verifiably accurate account of those people, places, and events in their entirety.

The reader's experience of fiction stems from their imaginative engagement with a series of black marks on a page, or pixels on a tablet. But when readers talk about their experience of fiction and use phrases such as "I couldn't put it down," or "I lost all track of time," or "I was off in another world," or "I was lost in the book"—and these phrases are clichés today—they are not voicing resentment but happiness.[35] The experience of being deeply engaged in a novelist's imagined world is welcome and pleasurable. To say a novel is enthralling is to praise it, yet the word gives a vital clue to the ethical issue arising when literary journalism is written with the aim of inducing in readers Gardner's fiction dream state. The word enthrall carries two meanings in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "to . . . hold spellbound, by pleasing qualities" and "to hold in thrall; to enslave."[36] A reader in thrall, you would think, is in an inherently vulnerable state, but the "enslavement" to the fictional world is felt as pleasure precisely because it is confined to it. It is a state of mind freely entered into, and though some novels may be keenly felt and remembered long after they have been returned to the bookshelf or saved on a tablet, the reader knows that however sad they may feel about, say, the death of Anna Karenina, she is a character existing only in their imagination from reading Tolstoy's eponymous novel. When a reader gives themselves over to, or is drawn into, this state of mind for a work of literary journalism, ethical issues are triggered by the differing power relations between writers and readers. If you write in a narrative style, then, you have an obligation to readers because of your efforts to "enthrall" them. Should writers resort to invention or seriously misrepresent people and events in their work, they will have abused the trust readers place in them. This is why, to take a famous example, even admirers of *In Cold Blood* are troubled when they learn that Capote invented the redemptive final scene in the book featuring Detective Alvin Dewey and one of the murder victims' friends.[37]

Applying Gardner's fiction dream state is a powerful idea that can be expanded to take into account different readers' reading levels and the capacity of journalism written in a narrative style to engage us. Victor Nell, in his examination of "ludic reading," (that is, "reading for pleasure"), argues that what Gardner calls the fiction dream state, and he calls "reading trance," can be experienced by reading novels ranging from "trash"—his term—to those normally listed in literary canons.[38] Readers may differ in their abilities,

and novelists are free to pitch their works at any reading level they wish, but those writing book-length literary journalism have obligations to all readers, and once they understand the impact of the narrative style, the importance of their writing choices becomes clear.

The ethical issues in representation arise, then, because of the decision to take a narrative approach. The question of how well the book is written is a second, and in some ways a secondary issue. For instance, John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* about life—and death—in the deep South was intended as beach reading, while the work of much-awarded Polish literary journalist Ryszard Kapuściński has been effusively praised by literary critics; but both writers have been dogged by controversies over their blending of fact and fiction and whether they deceived readers.[39] Just because a work of literary journalism is superbly written does not necessarily mitigate or eliminate the ethical issues. It might be argued that a superbly written work intensifies them as it probably lodges deeper in the reader's consciousness. I don't want to argue for fixed links between ethics and levels of literary skill, as that connotes a mechanistic relationship between them, whereas the act of researching and writing is an organic as well as a mechanical process. It is possible for a practitioner to be a gifted wordsmith and unethical, and, too, for the reverse to hold. It is entirely possible that more complex interrelationships exist between any given practitioner's literary ability and the practice of ethical decision-making—a topic that invites further research. The key point is that the decision to take a narrative approach to writing about actual people and events triggers certain ethical issues in the writing that need attention before, or at the very least alongside, attending to literary issues.

Literary journalists, then, need to find a balance between their twin desire to write in a narrative style that deeply engages readers' emotions and one that engages readers' minds as well as their emotions. The former runs the risk of sensationalism; the latter more faithfully reflects people and events in their complexity. Whichever approach the practitioner favors, the work needs to be underpinned by a commitment to veracity. The demands on literary journalists to balance their twin desires is evident in a range of journalistic practices, such as the use of quotations, but it shows up most sharply in how literary journalists present their narrative voice, how they describe people, and when they reconstruct events as scenes. Practitioners need to consider whether some narrative methods are unsuitable for book-length literary journalism, such as trying to convey their sources' thoughts and feelings in interior monologues.

Writers and even scholars commonly talk about using the "techniques" of fiction in literary journalism; I've done it myself in a textbook, *Writing*

Feature Stories.[40] Such thinking, I now believe, perpetuates the mistaken belief that journalists deal always and only in objective, verifiable facts and that when they come to write books they will apply the techniques of fiction to facts. This in turn can encourage journalists to imagine dialogue or recreate scenes that the journalist did not witness. It is preferable when writing literary journalism to see that it is a practice requiring more extensive research than is possible in daily journalism and then representing what is found, not in the narrow form of the news report, but in a narrative conveying a broader, deeper account of people and events that takes in facts, atmosphere, emotions, context, texture, and meaning. This narrative approach will draw on elements of literary practice usually associated with fiction, such as characterization, dialogue, scenes, and authorial voice, among others, but they are not owned by fiction. As the award-winning literary journalist, Tracy Kidder, said in Norman Sims and Mark Kramer's anthology *Literary Journalism*: "They belong to storytelling."[41]

Novelists create their own fictional universe, but a literary journalist is confined to the actual universe. However much literary journalists may want to provide a compelling reading experience, they should be aware not only of Gardner's "fiction dream state" but of the limits of what they can know about any set of contested events and issues; whether it is, say, the mass killings by Anders Breivik in 2011 that Åsne Seierstad wrote about in *One of Us*, or the allegations of child sexual abuse against Cardinal George Pell that Louise Milligan investigated in her 2017 book, *Cardinal*.[42] For this reason, the idea of an omniscient narrator, which is common in socially realistic fiction, is dangerous in literary journalism, as John Bryson, author of the award-winning, respected reinvestigation of the disappearance of baby Azaria Chamberlain, has acknowledged.[43] *Evil Angels* is written in an omniscient authorial voice, with Bryson seemingly absent from the narrative even though he covered the trial of Lindy Chamberlain for the murder of her daughter Azaria and disagreed vehemently with the jury's guilty verdict. A scene describing two journalists arguing about the verdict and punching each other into the hotel swimming pool is written in a third–person narrative voice, but what is not stated is that Bryson was one of the journalists! The contrast between Bryson's coolly magisterial, authorial tone and the anger he felt at the injustice to the Chamberlains is stark. *Evil Angels* remains an important book, but the contrast illustrates how misleading an omniscient narrative voice can be.

Jack Fuller, a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist and author of five novels, advises: "I would *always* sacrifice literary effects to the truth discipline."[44] So, thinking about this issue in the context of reconstructing scenes, literary

journalists need to ask themselves several questions: How important is the scene to the book, is the scene straightforward or highly contested, is it every day or intimate, how many eyewitness sources does the practitioner have, and is there supporting documentation?[45] These questions go to the gathering of material; there are other questions concerning where along the continuum practitioners sit, in either drawing the reader deep into their narrative mode or signaling to them the limits of their representation. Australian writer, Helen Garner, for instance, is famous for drawing readers' attention to the limits of what any one person can know about complex, murky events.[46]

Let's consider a work that balances the tension inherent in reconstructing a scene; it is taken from Adrian Hyland's *Kinglake-350*, his account of the 2009 Black Saturday disaster that caused the worst loss of life from bushfires in Australian history. Hyland chose to make Roger Wood, the police officer on duty in the small country town of Kinglake, the person through whom we readers see, hear, and smell the fires that raged across the state of Victoria. Two-thirds of the fire's victims came from Kinglake. Hyland's is an inspired choice, and not simply because Wood and his fellow officer, Cameron Caine, won a police valor award for leading a convoy of fifty people out of Kinglake to safety, but because through him the reader sees just how little as well as just how much country cops can do to protect the community they serve in such a horrific event.

Mobile phones worked spasmodically that day; midway through a call home with Wood's wife Jo screaming at him that the fire had arrived at their home, the signal died. Wood furiously punched redial, but the phone rang out, the "ringtone tolling like a funeral bell."[47] From what he is able to see, the road to his wife and two young children is cut off by flames; not that he can even try to get home because there are so many others he is duty-bound to help. It is only after he and Caine have led their extraordinary convoy off the blazing mountain to safety that Wood tries his phone again:

> For the first time all night, it's answered.
>
> "Oh Rodge . . ." Jo's voice is drawn, weary. Enormously relieved. "I've been so worried about you. Been trying to call you all night."
>
> "Same here. Worried you were dead." He blinks back tears. "Kids okay?"
>
> "They're fine."
>
> He slumps forward in the seat: the long-held tension slackens like a cut rope, and he's suddenly aware of the terror he's been struggling with for so many hours.
>
> "It was that wind change that saved us." Jo is still talking. "It was only seconds away when it turned around." He is struck by the irony of that. The southerly buster that diverted the fire from St Andrews and saved his own

family had driven it up the escarpment to wipe out Kinglake.

"When are you coming home, Rodge? Everything's still on fire down here."

"Soon, honey," he says. A wrenching need to be there. "Not just yet."

"How's Kinglake?"

"Pretty much wiped out."

A brief silence. "You do what you have to, Roger."

"Love you."

"Yes."[48]

The scene vividly, poignantly conveys Wood's experience: his twin loyalties to family and community and the enormity of what he endured. It provides a glimpse of the fire's toll on him and his family, physically and emotionally. Thinking of the questions that a literary journalist should ask, the reconstruction is central rather than peripheral to the narrative, is intimate rather than mundane, and there appears to be no corroborating documents or eyewitnesses to the phone calls. The stakes, then, are high, but there are only two people in the scene and Hyland has interviewed them both at length. Notice, too, that the reconstruction goes no further than what the Woods experience. On the book's release, Woods and Hyland were interviewed on ABC Radio National's *Life Matters* program, and Woods praised the writer's account without qualification.[49]

Balancing the tension between veracity and creating a compelling narrative extends to what I think of as inculcating in readers an informed trust for literary journalism.[50] In addition to how literary journalists deal with issues of representation, they can build informed trust through what literary theorist Gérard Genette terms "the paratext," which is material outside the body of the text.[51] In *Paratexts* Gennette was primarily concerned with fiction and poetry, but applying his framework to literary journalism makes visible the value of setting out the nature and range of source material, which includes prefaces, endnotes, maps, acknowledgments, notes to the reader on methods, and so on. These paratextual elements provide transparency about how what is in the book came to be in it, which is what builds trust with readers.

There are few better examples of this than Lawrence Wright's account of the rise of Al-Qaeda in *The Looming Tower*, though *Going Clear*, his 2013 book about Scientology, comes close. Wright lists by name more than 550 people he interviewed, and in a detailed, extraordinary Note on Sources, he addresses directly the problem of writing about intelligence operatives and jihadis.[52] He notes the shoddiness of much early scholarship about Al-Qaeda and the unreliability of sworn testimony of witnesses who have proven themselves to be "crooks, liars and double-agents." He offers an example of a "tantalizing" piece of evidence that showed a high-ranking Saudi intelligence

officer providing to the CIA in 1999 the names of two of the eventual 9/11 hijackers but Wright did not include it because he could not verify it to his satisfaction. He conducted his research "horizontally" and "vertically," that is, by continually checking hundreds of sources against each other, and by interviewing people in depth, perhaps dozens of time. By outlining his methods, he hopes "the reader can begin to appreciate the murky nature of the world in which al-Qaeda operates and the imperfect means I have sometimes employed in order to gain information." Wright dislikes seeing anonymous sources used in books and "so I've dragged as many of my informants into the light as possible." Some sources habitually ask for an interview to be off the record, but Wright has found they may later approve specific quotations that he checks back with them. Wright always ensures his tape recorder and notebook are in full view of his interviewees, to "remind both of us that there is a third party in the room, the eventual reader."[53] The level of care and attention Wright pays to verifying highly sensitive material and his openness with sources, are a shining example of a literary journalist both enacting the virtue of truthfulness and carefully thinking his way through the complex, competing demands of his role.

Conclusions

There are several conclusions to draw from all this. First, there is a lot more journalism produced at book length than is commonly recognized. And that is a good thing. Second, it is important to ensure our choices about what is and isn't literary journalism do not obscure the fact that ethical issues arise in all areas of journalistic practice, and to read book-length work with this in mind. Third, when journalism is practiced at book length, ethical issues arise *in addition* to those arising in daily journalism. Fourth, these ethical issues arise at all stages of the process, from the research phase to the representation phase, to how the work is received by readers. Fifth, in the representation phase, ethical issues are triggered by the journalist's initial decision to take a narrative approach. Brilliant literary skill does not by itself resolve the ethical issues. Sixth, a lot of good work has been done, both by literary journalists, and those who study it, to find ways to resolve these ethical issues.

All this means that, seventh, a sizeable body of literary journalism about human-induced climate change has been produced in recent years that has created a climate of opinion that just may be bearing fruit. In an article published in May 2019, Bill McKibben argued for the importance of grassroots, or ground up, pressure for action on climate change given the abject, craven failure so far of governments.[54] Who knows exactly where this pressure, which he argues is close to a tipping point, came from exactly? I'd

wager, though, that at least one important source of this wellspring is the kind of literary journalism that cut through PR obfuscation with considered research and prompted thought about what is at stake for us and our children in prose that, as John Carey once wrote, contained "unusual or indecorous or incidental images that imprint themselves scaldingly on the mind's eye."[55]

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Notes

1 McKibben, "How Extreme Weather Is Shrinking the Planet," 46–55.

2 McKibben, 51.

3 McKibben, 52.

4 Auden, "In Memory of Sigmund Freud," 273.

5 "Best American Journalism of the Twentieth Century"; see also Stephens, "The Top 100 Works of Journalism."

6 Jones, "John Hersey," 214.

7 Natalie Moehlmann to *New Yorker*, September 3, 1946, quoted in Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience," 293.

8 Chandler, *Feeling the Heat*; Chubb, *Power Failure*.

9 Murphy, *The New Journalism*, 17, 26.

10 Applegate, *Literary Journalism: A Biographical Dictionary*.

11 Ricketson, *Telling True Stories*.

12 Cords, *The Inside Scoop*.

13 "Best American Journalism of the Twentieth Century."

14 "Century's Top 100," 6–7.

15 Pulitzer Prizes, "General Nonfiction."

16 "Walkley Winners Archive."

17 Wolff, *Fire and Fury*; see also Ricketson and Tiffen, "The Chronicler We Deserve?"

18 American Association of Publishers, "AAP StatShot."

19 Weber, *The Literature of Fact*, 43–55; Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, 3–34; Cheney, *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, 217–33. Gutkind, "The Creative Nonfiction Police?," xix–xxxiii.

[20] Ricketson, *Telling True Stories*, 62–67.

[21] Applegate, *Literary Journalism*, xvii–xix; see also, Applegate, "Truman Capote," 47.

[22] Applegate, 300.

[23] Sims, *The Literary Journalists*; Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*; Kerrane and Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*; Chance and McKeen, *Literary Journalism: A Reader*.

[24] Talese and Lounsberry, *Writing Creative Nonfiction*; Gutkind, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction*; Williford and Martone, *Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*.

[25] Bernstein and Woodward, *All the President's Men*.

[26] Serrin and Serrin, *Muckraking! The Journalism That Changed America*, 132–35; Shapiro, *Shaking the Foundations*, 368–72.

[27] Clarke, *Capote*, 343; Bernstein and Woodward, *All the President's Men*, 204–25; Christians et al., *Media Ethics*, 77–80.

[28] Lehman, *Matters of Fact*, 1–39; Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*, 47–68.

[29] Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer*.

[30] Ricketson, *Telling True Stories*, 62–86.

[31] Morris, *A Wilderness of Error*, 392–93.

[32] Sereny, *Cries Unheard*, 16.

[33] Abbott, *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 147–50.

[34] Gardner, *The Art of Fiction*, 30–31.

[35] Nell, *Lost in a Book*, 1–2.

[36] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), s.v. "enthrall."

[37] Clarke, *Capote*, 358–59.

[38] Nell, *Lost in a Book*, xiii.

[39] Berendt, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*; Domosławski, *Kapuściński: A Life*; Dufresne, "Why *Midnight* May Be Darker Than You Think."

[40] Ricketson, *Writing Feature Stories*, 228.

[41] Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, 19.

[42] Seierstad, *One of Us*; Milligan, *Cardinal*.

[43] Ricketson, *True Stories*, 134–37.

[44] Fuller, *News Values*, 143 (emphasis in original).

[45] Lorenz, "When You Weren't There," 74–80.

[46] Ricketson, *Telling True Stories*, 144-47.

[47] Hyland, *Kinglake-350*, 100.

[48] Hyland, 206–7.

[49] Ricketson, *Telling True Stories*, 175.

[50] Ricketson, 215–33.

[51] Genette, *Paratexts*, 1–15.

[52] Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 439–53; see also Wright, *Going Clear*.

[53] Wright, *The Looming Tower*, 447–49.

[54] McKibben, "Notes from a Remarkable Political Moment for Climate Change."

[55] Carey, *The Faber Book of Reportage*, xxxii.

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Students in Ryan Marnane's Introduction to Literary Studies course at Bryant University, in Smithfield, Rhode Island, use Google cardboard and HP VR Headsets to explore 360-degree immersive narratives. Concluding a unit on literary journalism, students explore how various media, such as print, podcast, HTML-interactive, and virtual reality, impact audiences' experience and understanding of information in narrative form, culminating with a series of 360-degree immersive narratives from the *New York Times*.

Teaching/Digital LJ . . .

From Print to 360-Degree Immersive: On Introducing Literary Journalism across Media

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Abstract: This essay explores the author's pedagogical approach to narrative and, in particular, literary journalism across a wide variety of media (print, podcast, HTML-interactive, and 360-degree immersive) in first-year literary studies courses, as well as upper-level American literature, environmental humanities, and critical theory seminars. The method for both this essay and the teaching is qualitative and interdisciplinary, drawing upon literary studies, critical pedagogy, and philosophy, as well as history of technology, media studies, and the environmental humanities. The essay begins with a brief overview of the first assignment for Introduction to Literary Studies, wherein students listen to their favorite musical album in its entirety. The essay then frames four media explored throughout the unit to both creatively experience and critically examine literary journalism. Each medium explored in the seminar (and this essay) is accompanied by worksheets students complete, with scholarly sources also brought into the conversation. After working through print-based literary journalism, audio, HTML-interactive, and 360-degree immersion, the conclusion comprises a brief overview of student survey responses that express both the positive learning experience that VR/360-degree immersion has provided, as well as students' expressed desire to learn how to create 360-degree narratives.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary – teaching – experimental pedagogy – narrative – literary journalism – mixed media

This essay is written from the perspective of teaching a wide variety of courses under the umbrella of interdisciplinary literary studies and the environmental humanities. The courses include Introduction to Literary Studies, English Composition, Introduction to Environmental Humanities, Environmental Justice, Studies in Narrative, Interdisciplinary Studies in Technology and Science, and Contemporary Literature. In each of these seminars, narrative functions as the main vehicle for exploring course content, with literary journalism built into curricula as both supplementary and primary exhibit texts—it is all just a matter of what the course goals and learning outcomes happen to be. The argument for this essay, informed by training in interdisciplinary humanities, is that regardless of course content—from English composition, nature writing, and the novel, to the philosophy of technology and bioethics—is that exhibit texts can and ought to be read in tandem with current news feeds and the collective cultural moment: "What are the stakes," students are asked to ponder, "of this particular text and its applications outside this classroom?" Literary journalism, as a form of reportage that employs narrative techniques more commonly associated with fiction, remains uniquely suited for bridging gaps between class content and contemporary, real-world applications.

A recurring concern for many teachers of the narrative arts is that reading comprehension appears quite low and often manifests as a resistance to sustained reading.[1] Because reading makes up the majority of the workload, focus must be kept on: (a) demystifying reading as a practice outside of everyday, non-academic life (framing close reading strategies and comprehensive narrative techniques as vehicles for success across disciplines and outside the classroom); and (b) presenting some practical reading strategies that students can adopt immediately.

Day One: "Reading Is Hard"

After students look over the assignments and grading criteria, there is a collective realization that the course has a substantial amount of reading. In literature courses, most students appear intimidated by the reading load (anywhere from thirty to sixty pages per week in Introduction to Literature, for instance). Once the readings, course goals, and objectives are outlined and discussed, there is the inevitable pause for questions about the curriculum. After a couple of seconds of silence, the tone becomes more direct: "Who here is concerned about the amount of reading?" Without fail, more than a third of the class's hands go up, no matter the students' major or the course. What concerns do they have?

"Reading is hard."

"I'm just not good at it."

"Boring. I get bored. Especially when I don't like what I'm reading."

"I read very slow."

"I have to reread a lot in order to understand what it all means."

The reply is firm, and the dialogue becomes personal: "This is all good. Because I agree with each of you: reading *is* hard. I too read slowly. And yes, I often have to reread to understand what it all means."

It takes a moment for them to realize no one is being facetious, followed by a discussion grounded in the overwhelming volume of stimuli our brains process at any given time, along with the paralyzing attention economy we are currently enmeshed in. Then comes the next question: "If you're not good at reading, what then are you good at?"

"Golf," says one student.

"Video games," another.

"Math," from the back corner.

"Sleeping!"

Responses are shouted and mumbled until, inevitably, one student utters the phrase this seemingly discursive discussion has been heading toward all along:

"I'm good at listening to music."

Collective nods of agreement.

Pause.

The air settles.

"Who else here is good at listening to music?"

Without a beat, most hands shoot up into the air.

"Okay, then. Let's start the semester off with an assignment you're all good at. Here's your homework for the night: listen to your favorite album. Okay?"

The response is mostly expressed with curious smiles and perplexed head tilts.

"I mean this quite literally. Instead of assigning a short reading for next class, you are required to listen to your favorite album in its entirety. No reading. Just listening. Pretty easy, right? Go to the library, sit at your desk, maybe lie on your bed or sit on a park bench—wherever you'd normally settle into reading—and instead of opening a page, simply put in your headphones and *listen* to your *favorite* album."

"But there's a caveat here. You must *actually listen* and do nothing other than listen. Put your phone on airplane mode, disconnect from Wi-Fi, and have no other electronic devices or media around: No Facebook, no Instagram, no social media whatsoever. No chatting with friends, no doing other homework. Simply sit and listen, from start to finish, to your favorite album. And come to class with a 200-word reflection on your experience: Was it difficult? Were you able to focus on the music and not be distracted?

At what point, if any, did you forget that you were supposed to be listening and find yourself daydreaming? How much of the album's content, after one close listen, can you recall?"

Most students struggle with the exercise and return disgruntled, frustrated, concerned. Reactions are mixed, but there's often a handful of students who admittedly did not complete the assignment, succumbing instead to the allure of their cell phones, social media accounts, or the anxiety of having additional homework to do, figuring they could do both in tandem. The lesson here is simple: If students have difficulties listening to their favorite album, how can they expect to be "good at reading" when most, if not all, the assignments they will receive throughout their tenure at university will seemingly not be nearly as captivating and personable?

"Reading, for many of us, is like going to the gym," they are told. "Both working out and reading are difficult, each requiring discipline and repetition to see the effects and reap the benefits of either. Second, the act of lifting weights does not build muscle but rather tears it; muscle is built in the recovery process, when one supplies the body with nutrients and slumber.

"Reading, like lifting weights, is surely difficult, but when done correctly—that is, closely and attentively and with sustained practice—will tear the muscles of the brain. This is good. Because reflection, discussion, and writing are the required nutrients for the heavy lifting of reading."[2]

As briefly demonstrated above and further detailed in what follows, this pedagogy is grounded in fostering intrinsic educational motives and active participatory learning—not merely teaching *to* students, but also thinking *with* and learning *from* them. The argument is that students will focus a bit more on close and sustainable reading practices, not because their instructor tells them it is important, but rather because they see for themselves the benefits of sustained, close reading in other facets of their lives: From actively listening to a lecture, to preparing for a meeting, to, well, perhaps one day being able to truly listen to their favorite album without being distracted.

Second, as this essay is about teaching literary journalism, the lesson plans and worksheets that follow demonstrate how literary journalism can be an active, fluid, and dynamic form that continues to ebb and flow in tandem with both current news cycles and advancements in digital reading technology—not so easily divided from students' own digital and personal lives outside the classroom setting. The courses are descriptive, not prescriptive, encouraging students to become part of the meaning-making process with hands-on, scholarship-grounded activities that challenge old assumptions about what is and is not literary while also remaining open, always, to new possibilities of what narrative and literary journalism *might* mean in an age of increasing re-

mediation (via audio and multimedia technology) of the written word. The seminars are not concerned with framing the ambiguity and nuances of the form and the varying terminology associated with literary journalism, because these are primarily non-specialist students. The objectives and goals differ from those for teaching a magazine feature writing class to a group of upper-level journalism students. In any case, the hope here is to suggest some new strategies to adopt—for introducing the form in the classroom via emerging digital reading, listening, viewing, and virtual-immersive technologies.

Teaching Literary Journalism across Media

For the past three years, a wide variety of immersive narrative media—print, audio, video, HTML-interactive, and 360-degree—have been introduced into the various classes mentioned above. Moving from print texts to 360-degree immersive, students set out to explore how both conventional and emerging media impact audiences' experiences and understanding of information differently. This is true of both fiction and nonfiction narratives. Moreover, when focusing on literary journalism, students explore how various media adhere to, expand, and outright omit the characteristics most commonly associated with the form.

Introduction to Literary Studies is one of a series of standard university first-year liberal arts courses wherein students strengthen their capacities to think critically, communicate clearly, and learn to harness the basic set of tools for reading, analyzing, and writing about literary texts. The course is divided into two major units: fiction and nonfiction, with the former split evenly between the novel, short stories, and drama, and the latter, while covering a wide variety of nonfiction forms, focuses principally on literary journalism across varying media. The learning objectives for the six-week nonfiction unit are: Students will obtain—

1. The capacity to differentiate between various modes of nonfiction narratives including, (a) conventional journalism, (b) literary journalism, and (c) creative nonfiction;
2. An understanding of literary journalism as a mode of narrative discourse fusing both reportage and rhetorical storytelling techniques;
3. An understanding of how conventional and emerging media impact audience experience and understanding of narrative—and information—differently;
4. An experience with 360-immersive literary journalism in tandem with critical insight into the medium's potential to draw upon narrative techniques while also maintaining the truth-telling covenants of conventional journalism.

- Literary journalism "is a form of nonfiction writing that adheres to all of the reportorial and truth-telling covenants of conventional journalism, while employing rhetorical and storytelling techniques more commonly associated with fiction. In short, it is journalism as literature."[1]
- "Among the shared characteristics of literary journalism are immersion reporting, complicated structures, character development, symbolism, voice, a focus on ordinary people…and accuracy. Literary journalists recognize the need for a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered."[2]

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i. Immersion reporting

ii. Complicated structures

iii. Character development

iv. Symbolism

v. Voice

[1] Joshua Roiland, "By Any Other Name: The Case for Literary Journalism," *Literary Journalism Studies* Vol. 7, No. 2, 2015, 71. (9/15/16 – http://ialjs.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/LJS-v7i2-60-89-Roiland_HYPERLINKED-1.pdf?6b8609)

[2] Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism* (Northwestern University Press, 2008), 6-7.

Figure 1. Characteristics of Literary Journalism Worksheet

The introduction to the form begins with readings of Christopher Wilson's *Reading Narrative Journalism* and select chapters from Norman Sims's *True Stories*.[3] Once the basic terms and a working historical context have been established, discussions dive into any one of the many print texts that align with section themes and learning outcomes: for example, from John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (both books are included in the Introduction to Literary Studies, Environmental Humanities, and American Literature courses) to David Foster Wallace's "Consider the Lobster," Kathryn Schulz's "The Really Big One," and Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah's "A Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylann Roof" (included in both Introduction to Literary Studies and Studies in Narrative curricula).[4] Students first read and annotate, and then collaborate on in-class group work, wherein they fill out worksheets (Fig.1) that ask them to identify how the authors use various characteristics of the form outlined by Sims (including complicated plot structure and character development, symbolism, voice, and accuracy) along with a working definition from Josh Roiland.[5]

Once the characteristics of the form and particular storytelling techniques used by author(s) via print have been identified, students are introduced to the next medium of exploration: podcasts. The initial listening experience is 2017's *S-Town*, which broke "new podcasting ground by being the first podcast to function much like a nonfiction novel," according to Nic Dobija-Nootens in the *LA Review of Books*.[6] Students work toward applying the characteristics found in print to this audio version of the form (Fig. 2). Released in its entirety on March 28, 2017, and downloaded a record-breaking ten million times in four days, *S-Town* tells the story of John B. McLemore, resident of Woodstock, Alabama (aka, "Shit Town, Alabama—hence the podcast's name), an antiquarian horologist and self-described "citizen of the world," nevertheless trapped in the static South: "I'm in an area that just hasn't advanced, for lack of a better word," McLemore tells Brian Reed, the narrator and guide through the podcast's divergent, seven-chapter narrative.[7]

While complicated plot structure and use of symbols are evident throughout *S-Town*, students struggle with the characteristics of voice and immersion, often conflating the literal voice of the narrator with the theoretical voice of Brian Reed himself, that is, how he *sounds* rather than analyzing his narrative approach to the story itself. Students then return to their engagement with any one of the print articles to discuss voice in greater detail. Moreover, as many readers of *LJS* are likely familiar with, students are quick to mistake immersion for their own inner-ear immersion of hearing a story unfold rather than, as immersion reporting is most often framed, via the narrator's being immersed in the very environment that is being reported on.

S-Town
Hosted by Brian Reed

Part I: Form and Nomenclature
"Among the shared characteristics of literary journalism," writes Norman Sims, "are immersion reporting, complicated structures, character development, symbolism, voice, a focus on ordinary people...and accuracy. Literary journalists recognize the need for a consciousness on the page through which the objects in view are filtered."[1]

- With the above definition in mind – in tandem w/ the license to apply the characteristics of the form to various mediums, including film and audio – would you situate *S-Town* as a form of audio narrative journalism? YES or NO
- Support your answer by exploring the below characteristics of the form

Immersion reporting:

Complicated structures:

Symbolism:

Character development:

Voice:

Focus on ordinary people:

Accuracy:

[1] Norman Sims, *True Stories: A Century of Literary Journalism*. Northwestern University Press, 2008, 8.

Figure 2. *S-Town* Literary Journalism Worksheet 1

Again, students return to previous engagements with print literary journalism to reorient to how they frame their exploration of audio, exploring both possibilities and limitations within the form and respective media. Students are warned that moving from medium to medium can feel like a roller coaster with loops, continually circling back to where they have been in order to advance forward.

Following an assessment of the podcast's structure, character development, and other characteristics of the form, students return to their engagement with Wilson's *Reading Narrative Journalism.* Wilson describes "Reading in 4-D," which stands for the four dimensions of analyzing narrative journalism, which are (1) reading for news content; (2) reading for the story form; (3) reading for the legwork (or, the journalist's own story); and (4) reading for the subject.[8] Students are required to connect this 4-D framework to any one scene from the podcast, as well as to both Lindsay Morton's "The Role of Imagination in Literary Journalism" and Sven Birkerts's "Close Listening: The Metaphysics of Reading an Audio Book"[9] (Fig. 3).

Morton's article, published in *Literary Journalism Studies* in Spring 2018, frames the historical and ethical dimensions of imagination (not to be mistaken for "invention") in the literary journalistic tradition. Students are first introduced to Morton's work during their engagement with print literary journalism and continue to apply her arguments to all media throughout the exploration of literary journalism. Birkerts's "Close Listening," published in *Harper's* magazine in 1993, is an epistemological exploration of audio hermeneutics in an age of increasing audiobook consumption. It provides students with a framework for thinking about (a) the relationship between oral storytelling and print narratives, with a focus on the continued growth and popularity of audiobooks and podcasts, and (b) shifting Morton's exploration of imagination *in* literary journalism toward a reflection of imagination in the *reception* thereof. Birkerts writes:

> Reading is different from listening, yes, but in listening's limitations I have found unexpected pleasures. When you read, both eye and ear are engaged; when you listen, the eye is free. Slight though the freedom may seem, it can declare itself resoundingly. The listener can attain a peculiar exaltation—a vivid sense of doubleness, of standing poised on a wire between two different realities.[10]

Participatory learning, as noted above, takes precedence in introductory seminars. And after providing insight into not only *S-Town*, but also Morton and Birkerts's varied arguments and frameworks, students are tasked with making new and innovative connections between all three to determine how to best engage with the exhibit text itself. Moreover, students are given agency

S-Town
Hosted by Brian Reed

Part II: Wilson, "Reading in 4-D," *Reading Narrative Journalism*
Reading for News Content
What's the journalism component of *S-Town*?

Reading for the Story-Form
What's the inner, stylistic architecture of *S-Town*?

Reading for the Legwork (or, the journalist's own story)
How does Brian Reed incorporate legwork into *S-Town*?

Reading for the Subject
Who is the "subject" of *S-Town*?

Part III: Connecting Arguments to Exhibits
Morton, "The Role of Imagination in Literary Journalism"
Choose one passage from Morton's article (w/ page #) and connect it to any one scene in *S-Town*.

Birkerts, "Close Listening Criticism: The Metaphysics of Reading an Audio Book"
Connect any one passage from Birkert's article (w/ page #) to *S-Town*.

Figure 3. *S-Town* Literary Journalism Worksheet 2

to decide, for themselves and based on their own framework, whether or not *S-Town* qualifies as a work of literary journalism. However, as posed to students early on, the answer to the question "Is *S-Town* a work of literary journalism?" depends on both one's understanding and approach to the form itself (in this case via Sims, Wilson, and Morton) as well as the working framework of what is and is not literary (in this case, via Birkerts). The framework is left open for students to interpret for themselves. The pedagogical concern here is not whether a documentary film, or podcast, or 360-degree narrative should be deemed literary journalism or not, but rather how students argue and support said claims one way or another. What texts are they drawing conclusions from and, moreover, how has the chosen framework informed their position? Is the imaginative capacity to listen and allow one's eyes to roam freely unfavorable or constructive for information literacy and narrative engagement? What about when a transition is presented from audio alone to audio and video and text with HTML-interactive narratives concurrently, wherein reader agency ebbs and flows, based on the level of multimedia integration?

Once the *S-Town*/audio journalism segment concludes, students are presented with a series of HTML-interactive narratives, some of which have been explored in detail by David Dowling's exceptional work on digital narrative journalism.[11] Students compare and contrast previous lessons in print and podcast to the addition of digital images and video, from the *New York Times*'s groundbreaking 2012 publication of "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek" and 2015's "Greenland Is Melting Away," to the *Guardian*'s 2013 "Firestorm," and the European Journalism Centre's choose-your-own-adventure reportage game, "ReBuilding Haiti."[12] To best frame the engagement with interactive literary journalism, and to provide students with additional materials to weave into their basket of literary journalism terminology, history, and applications, students then read Fiona Giles and Georgia Hitch's "Multimedia Features as 'Narra-descriptive' Texts: Exploring the Relationship between Literary Journalism and Multimedia,"[13] which introduces students to the multimedia spectrum of literary journalism, comprising three levels of multimedia, each differentiated by the level of intrusion on reader's imaginative autonomy (connected back, once again, to Morton's work).

Giles and Hitch's three terms are (1) multimedia enhanced, (2) multimedia integrated, and (3) multimedia interactive. Multimedia enhanced (for instance, "Snow Fall"), is when multimedia is secondary to the story; that is, when nonwritten media are not part of the story but rather situated alongside it (if removed, the narrative would remain intact).[14] In multimedia integrated (for instance, "Firestorm"), multimedia does not intrude on the

(Please circle select Exhibit)
"The Fight for Falluja," Ben C. Solomon
"The Displaced," Ben C. Solomon and Imraan Ismail
"A Shifting Continent," Graham Roberts
"Remembering Emmett Till," Audra D.S Burch

Part II: Wilson, "Reading in 4-D," ***Reading Narrative Journalism***
Reading for News Content
What's the journalism component of select exhibit?

Reading for the Story-Form
What's the inner, stylistic architecture of select exhibit? Is it told via a complicated structure?

Reading for the Legwork (or, the journalist's own story)
Is legwork incorporated into select exhibit? If so, how?

Reading for the Subject
Who or what is the "subject" of select exhibit?

Part III: Connecting Arguments to Exhibits
Morton, "The Role of Imagination in Literary Journalism"
Choose one passage from Morton's article (w/ page #) and connect it to any one scene from select exhibit:

Giles and Hitch, "Multimedia Features as "Narra-descriptive" Texts: Exploring the Relationship between Literary Journalism and Multimedia"
Connect any one passage from Giles and Hitch's article (w/ page #) to any one scene from select exhibit:

Figure 4. 360-Degree Immersive Literary Journalism Worksheets

(Please circle select Exhibit)
"The Fight for Falluja," Ben C. Solomon
"The Displaced," Ben C. Solomon and Imraan Ismail
"A Shifting Continent," Graham Roberts
"Remembering Emmett Till," Audra D.S Burch

NAME: _____

> Given the continuing changes in technology, multimedia literary journalism will further evolve. Hybridity might itself become a characteristic of multimedia literary journalism, and where there is a critical current of written narrative, finer distinctions between sub-genres of multimedia literary journalism could be identified.
> — Giles and Hitch, "Literary Journalism and Multimedia"

WORKING QUESTIONS: Can Virtual Reality journalism adhere to Giles and Hitch's framework of multimedia narrative journalism? Does multimedia storytelling enhance the narrative experience or deter the experience insofar as too much information blocks the imaginative processing integral to certain forms of storytelling?

Part I: Form and Spectrums
Does exhibit draw on narrative techniques while also remaining factual? If yes, what narrative techniques in particular? (e.g., emplotment, scene, characterization, symbolism, dramatic tension, etc.)

Grounded in Giles and Hitch, does exhibit source empower viewers imaginatively or does the multimedia intrude on one's imaginative autonomy?

With your above responses in mind, would you situate your select VR narrative on Giles and Hitch's spectrum? If not, why not? If yes, where:

Literary Journalism Writing ←----------X----------X----------X---------- → ***?***
Enhanced *Integrated* *Interactive*

- Please explain your answer (w/ Giles and Hitch as support)

reader's imaginative autonomy. Multimedia integrated, opposed to enhanced, includes media for which, if removed, the narrative would no longer make sense.[15] And lastly is multimedia interactive (for example, "ReBuilding Haiti"), for which, unlike enhanced or integrated, readers do not have agency to move freely around the narrative.[16] At this point in the seminar's engagement with both literary journalism and the various media in which one may encounter reportage of this style and range, more nuanced questions can become part of classroom discussions, even as the pedagogy moves toward 360-degree immersive narrative journalism:

1. What are the promises and perils of advancements in digital technology and, by mere extension, methods of both production and reception of narrative?
2. Does multimedia storytelling enhance the narrative experience or deter from the experience, insofar as too much information blocks the imaginative processing integral to certain forms of storytelling?
3. How might augmented and virtual reality challenge and reconstitute how a person receives both conventional and narrative journalism?

Exploring VR and 360-degree narratives, the first day begins with Google Cardboard, the virtual reality platform whereby a personal smart phone is placed inside a box and then worn over the user's face. Students bring their own headphones and fully charged cell phones. Whether Google Cardboard or high-tech HP headsets and backpack workstations, now that students have been immersed in four weeks of exploring how the form translates from print to audio, and from print/audio and print to HTML-interactive, they are prepared to examine how the form is being expanded from HTML-interactive to 360-degree immersive.

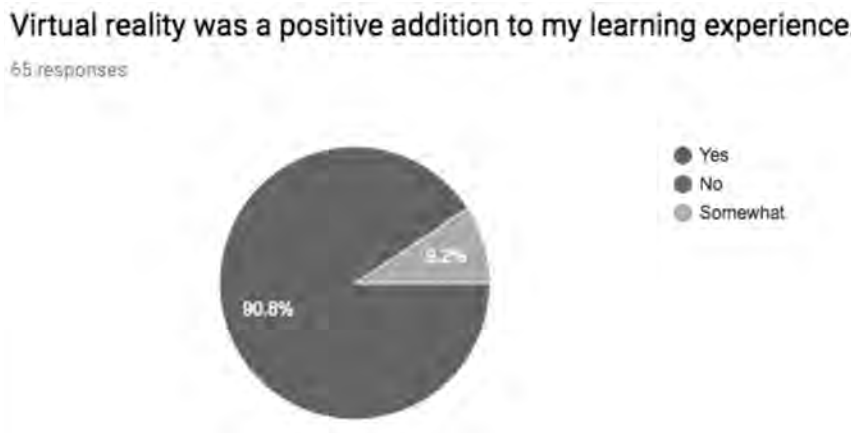
The main objective is to investigate how (and if at all) 360-degree immersive narratives can draw upon narrative techniques while also maintaining the reportorial and truth-telling covenants of traditional journalism. Students assess both the burdens and blessings of 360-degree immersive storytelling and compare the two forms to previously explored media and scholarship. Students are encouraged to look over four *New York Times* VR/AR narratives and choose one to experience in the full VR headsets. These narratives include: (1) "The Fight for Falluja" by Ben C. Solomon; (2) "The Displaced," cowritten and directed by Ben C. Solomon and Imraan Ismail; (3) "A Shifting Continent" by Graham Roberts; and (4) "Remembering Emmett Till," narrated by Audra D. S. Burch.[17]

Once a text is chosen, students decide how they're going to frame and engage with their selected narrative and, as their first task, to use Giles and Hitch's spectrum as a guide for interpreting how reader agency functions with

full-immersion narratives (as opposed to, as Giles and Hitch's article explores, HTML-interactive narratives). This is an opportunity for students to take an existing theoretical framework and apply it to something other than its intended content—to create something new, original; that is, to be on the cutting edge of not only new technology but how they might engage with it on a critical and scholarly level.

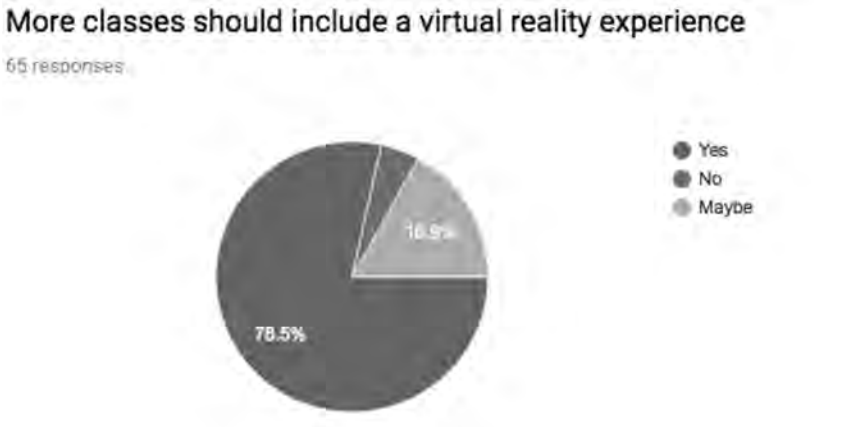
As with HTML-interactive, audio, and print, following the experience of 360-immersion, the students proceed to fill out the VR Literary Journalism Worksheet (Fig. 4), which begins with the following questions: Does exhibit draw on narrative techniques while also remaining factual? If yes, what narrative techniques in particular (emplotment, scene, characterization, symbolism, dramatic tension, etc.)? Once students have explored the basic characteristics of the form as applied to 360-degree immersive narratives, they are then asked to situate 360-degree immersive narrative journalism on Giles and Hitch's spectrum of multimedia literary journalism (Fig. 4). As a working question: "Grounded in Giles and Hitch, does exhibit source empower viewers imaginatively or does the multimedia intrude on one's imaginative autonomy?"

The most common observation from students and subsequent class discussions is grounded in the lack of imaginative agency a viewer has when immersed in 360-degree narratives. In other words, as the culminating lesson from experiencing 360-degree narrative journalism, students can deduce for themselves the peculiar promise of print literary journalism as it relates to reader engagement levels. It is not that one medium is superior to another but



Graph 1. Virtual reality as a positive learning experience where 90.8% of 65=59, Yes; 9.2% of 65=5.98, Somewhat (Google Form survey, 05/02/19).

Graph 2. Virtual reality experience leading to a desire to learn how to create virtual reality, where 56.9% of 65=36.9, Yes; 29.2% of 65=19.98, Maybe; and 13.8% of 65=8.97, No (Google Form survey, 05/02/19).



Graph 3. Virtual reality experience creating a desire to have similar experiences for learning in other academic areas. 78.5% of 65=51, Yes; 16.9% of 65=10.9, Maybe; and 00.0% of 65=00.0, No (Google Form survey, 05/02/19).

rather, as students conclude as well, that each medium functions differently and carries with it a wide array of problems and possibilities for present and future storytelling.

A brief survey passed out after the 360-degree lesson shows that of the sixty-five student responses more than ninety percent of students found VR to be a positive addition to the learning experience (Graph 1), with less than fourteen percent of students *not* interested in learning how to create VR themselves (Graph 2). And an overwhelming majority of students thought VR ought to be further incorporated into curricula across disciplines (Graph 3).

Conclusions: On the Subjunctive

The concluding argument is that, amid growing environmental crises in tandem with the increasing digitalization of the written word, teachers of narrative must not dismiss nonwritten narrative forms such as film, audio, and mixed media, but work to further incorporate various media of storytelling into an ever-widening field of study within the form of literary journalism. Literary journalism can play a major role in whatever medium the characteristics of the form present themselves, especially when addressing a wide variety of ecological and, by way of mere extension, escalating humanitarian crises.

As a thematic backdrop for most of the courses mentioned above, the effects of global warming, the vehicles and corporations that drive it, and those who are displaced, distressed, and traumatized in its wake, take precedence. It is through literary journalism, semester after semester, that students most palpably respond to growing concerns of global warming and its second-order effects on both human and non-human species. Whereas environmental journalism, by mere professional and industry practice, shies away from the subjective, literary journalism remains well suited for framing the precarious place life in a threatened world rests by embracing the nuances of human subjectivity and emotion. Turning to Connery's "A Third Way to Tell the Story": "[Literary journalism does not] simply present facts, but the 'feel' of the facts . . . 'a rendering of felt detail'."[18]

Students are reminded that while the sciences provide data framing what *is*, the humanities—and in this particular instance, literary journalism—renders these data into felt detail, framing what this *is* might *mean.* If the sciences and conventional journalism are thought of as embodying the grammatical mood of the indicative (the facts—the what *is*), then the humanities can be thought of as the grammatical mood of the subjunctive (how these facts might feel—what this *is* might *mean*). The humanities have a vital role to play in the fragile place life holds in a threatened world, and literary journalism remains

uniquely suited for telling the tale. The above reflections are not merely literary concerns, nor environmental concerns alone, but rather a fusion of the two, culminating as a moral imperative stance concerning all disciplines and life—the humanities and STEM, human and nonhuman species alike—each together inhabiting this stark, ecologically threatened world.

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Notes

[1] The question of developing reading skills is similarly explored (via first-year writing skills) in research that shows the increasing number of students who enter college without the needed writing skills to succeed. Neely et al., "The Write Stuff." 141–58.

[2] And, in a final moment of metaphorically driven, dad-joke humor, I tell them, "That's right, this class is your protein shake. Let's blend."

[3] Wilson, *Reading Narrative Journalism*; Sims, *True Stories*.

[4] Hersey, *Hiroshima*; Carson, *Silent Spring*; Wallace, "Consider the Lobster"; Schulz, "The Really Big One"; Ghansah, "A Most American Terrorist."

[5] Sims, *True Stories*, 6–7; Roiland, "By Any Other Name," 71.

[6] Dobija-Nootens, "*S-Town*: When a Podcast Becomes a Book," para. 3.

[7] Reed, *S-Town*, Chapter 1, 00:07:01. https://stownpodcast.org/chapter/1.

[8] Wilson, *Reading Narrative Journalism*; See also, Wilson, "Reading in 4-D," 174–89.

[9] Suggested lesson pairs Schulz's "The Really Big One," 51–59, with Morton's "The Role of Imagination in Literary Journalism," 92–111, and Birkert's "Close Listening," 86–91.

[10] Birkerts, 91.

[11] See Dowling, "Toward a New Aesthetic of Digital Literary Journalism," and his 2019 *Immersive Longform Storytelling.*

[12] Branch, "Snow Fall"; Davenport et al., "Greenland Is Melting Away"; Henley, "Firestorm"; Maurin et al., "ReBuilding Haiti."

[13] Giles and Hitch, "Multimedia Features as 'Narra-descriptive' Texts," 74–91.

[14] Giles and Hitch, 78–81.

[15] Giles and Hitch, 81–83.

[16] Giles and Hitch, 83–86.

[17] Solomon, "The Fight for Falluja"; Solomon and Ismail, "The Displaced"; Roberts, "A Shifting Continent"; Shastri et al., "Remembering Emmett Till."

[18] Connery, "A Third Way to Tell the Story," 6.

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Photo of Elinor Burkett by Loli and Rex Productions.

Scholar–Practitioner Q+A . . .

An Interview with Elinor Burkett

Callie Long
Brock University, Canada

Keywords: literary journalism – narrative journalist – history – storytelling – truth – facts

Mark Kramer's "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists" may very well have been written with an Elinor Burkett in mind. A U.S. journalist with nine books to her credit, Burkett's narrative journalism tackles social and cultural taboos with rigor, integrity, and a good dose of investigative reporting that serves as a study in how to intimately tell a story, while grounded in facts that are, as Kramer suggests, comprehensive and detailed.[1] I interviewed Burkett recently over WhatsApp (an in-person meeting wasn't possible), shortly after she arrived back in the United States from a visit to Zimbabwe, where she has made a second home and where I first met her nearly a decade ago.

Burkett's journalism has also led her into other media-related areas: documentary filmmaking (one of which, *Music with Prudence,* earned her an Oscar in 2010 in the best documentary short subject category),[2] longform journalism, general and specialized reporting, and the odd disquisitory op-ed. She made the switch to journalism in the 1980s. Already in possession of a PhD in Latin American history, and on faculty for thirteen years at Frostburg State University in Frostburg, Maryland, she went back to school to earn her master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. This resulted in her somewhat cautious, by her own admission, entry into journalism in the late 1980s as an intern for the *Miami Herald*. The internship paid off, and she was hired by the newspaper, writing features for five years. Since then, Burkett has written for any number of publications, including the *New York Times* and

Rolling Stone, while also holding Fulbright professorships in Zimbabwe and Kyrgyzstan, seamlessly blending scholarship and journalism.

Burkett is no stranger to controversy. Some would argue that she courts it quite intentionally as a journalist. Her first foray into narrative journalism, coauthored with Frank Bruni, was their 1993 book *A Gospel of Shame,*[3] which focused on the sexual abuse of children in the Catholic Church. Two years later saw her excoriation of the AIDS industry that highlighted how politics and greed rode roughshod over the prevention of what was still very much a deadly disease. In 1998, she turned her gaze both inward and outward, trying to make sense of why women would subscribe to conservative politics. The result was her 1998 book, *The Right Women: A Journey through the Heart of Conservative America*.[4] Burkett's most telling (and perhaps prescient) narrative journalism is her 2004 text, *So Many Enemies, So Little Time: An American Woman in All the Wrong Places*.[5] This is a story that provides insight into how at least one part of the world (the different -stans of the old Soviet Union, as well as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Russia, China, and Mongolia) viewed the United States, and how Burkett navigated the tensions and politics of a post-9/11 world that harked back to the Reaganesque views of the old evil empire, even as the term *axis of evil* became the new shorthand for places cast in the roles of villain by a good portion of the Western world. At the same time, she seems to relish the messiness that must come with having a big heart and being compelled to tell a complex story with integrity. Because Burkett, for all her toughness, tenaciousness, and contrarianism, is someone with a heart as big as the sky—ask the many young people from Zimbabwe who have gone on to great things academically with her support. She somehow always has place for one more person who wants to learn. With this in mind, I asked Burkett what propelled her into giving up academic tenure to pursue a career in journalism. [The interview was edited lightly for clarity.]

Elinor Burkett: When I turned forty-five, I realized that I was bored. At that point I had been in the classroom eighteen years, teaching pretty much the same thing every fall and spring. I felt like I was getting stale. I had a sabbatical year coming up and decided to try out something new. I wasn't sure what, so I asked everybody I knew what they thought I should do instead of academia, and a friend of mine, who was a journalist, said, "You're curious about everything and like to do research. Give journalism a try." I had no sense at that point that that's where I would wind up. I just went to journalism school to try it out. But I liked it and then took an internship at the *Miami Herald*, which I loved. I don't believe in burning bridges, so I took leave from my academic job and quit only after I'd been at the *Herald* for a

year. Friends in academia were horrified. Who gives up tenure? But tenure felt like a trap. Too many people stay teaching because they have tenure, and it gives them job security, not because they love it. I no longer did. So why would I keep teaching just because I had job security?

Callie Long: Your Wiki page describes this move as a dramatic turn. Is that how you would describe it?

Burkett: No. I don't know who wrote that, but I didn't. It felt almost like a natural progression. I am a storyteller. That's what a historian is. That's what a teacher is. So, becoming a journalist wasn't a dramatic break. It just led me to tell different kinds of stories—more immediate ones—in a different way.

Long: In *So Many Enemies, So Little Time*, you write that journalists at heart are storytellers. But what I really like is that you own up to the fact that stories tend to get messy on you. What do you mean by that?

Burkett: What I mean is that journalism is the first draft of history. But it's only the first draft. It's time sensitive, so you can't do the wider research. You don't—you can't—know where the story is going to end, which is the great advantage historians have. You're just capturing a moment. So, for example, just after the U.S. pushed the Taliban out of Afghanistan, I flew into Kabul. There was a moment—I write about it in *So Many Enemies*—where I was going to interview a woman for the fifth or sixth time. I'm walking up the steps of her apartment building with my interpreter and another woman in the building opened her door and quietly asked my interpreter whether or not it was true that I was an American. When he said yes, she came out and kissed my hands in gratitude.

In the very first draft of the American invasion of Afghanistan, women were really grateful. But the story doesn't stay stuck there. The story developed. People came to resent the United States. To be angry with the United States. Six months later, that same woman might have spit at me. But I was capturing an early moment that was true for its time. When I'm writing history, I'm working from documents that tell me what happened after the moment a journalist would have captured.

Also, as a historian, I work from material that is not changed by my intervention. When I'm interviewing a real human being, that person has emotions towards me as the interviewer, and that changes what the story is. Maybe the person wants to please me. Maybe the person is angry with me because of my nationality. Maybe the person just doesn't like the color of my hair, or whatever. So, it's harder to account for the prejudices that can creep in either by time or by personal intervention when you're doing journalism.

Long: You have this narrow window in which you are crafting the story. If you're doing regular reporting, that narrow window isn't such a constraint. In

longform journalism—and I'm thinking for instance of your opinion piece in the *New York Times*, "What Makes a Woman?"[6]—you still have a big enough window to get the story done. But when you set out to write a book, and time just marches on relentlessly, then that window opening is very narrow. Can you talk me through the transition from regular reporting to writing a book?

Burkett: Any journalist who goes into a story without personally accepting the possibility or even the likelihood that you might be overtaken by events, and thus be wrong and have egg on your face, is being ridiculous. Because it will happen. And there's nothing you can do about it. So, the most you can do is do the best you can do and grin and bear it if you if you're overtaken by events. Think about all the people writing journalism who anticipated that Hillary Clinton would become the president of the United States and then they got a dramatic egg on their face because every poll was wrong. You just have to accept it as something that happens.

Long: Has that happened to you?

Burkett: Has it ever happened to me? Not that I can recall, but if my memory serves me well, it's an accident. It's not because I'm the world's greatest journalist. It's because I'm lucky. Avoiding being overtaken by the movement of history is not necessarily a matter of being good or persistent, which is what gets you great stories or interviews. Things happen. You cannot do anything to insulate yourself from that reality. My attitude always has been, you do the best you can, you make the best call that you can, and sometimes the call is going to be wrong.

Long: Listening to you, there's a good dose of the historian in there, not just the journalist talking.

Burkett: That's one of the things that's always been different for me. When people interview journalists for jobs, they [the journalists] are often asked if they think of themselves more as writers or as reporters. I have always objected to this question, because my answer is, neither. I think of myself as a thinker. When I am asked to estimate how long a piece will take me, I always put in thinking time. Not just writing time and reporting time, but thinking time. So, any time that I am working on something, I give myself a good amount of time to think about it, to reread, to reconsider it. And that's the historian in me. And the academic in me, too.

Long: You mentioned earlier the notion of emotions in play and how people respond to you, and it reminded me of Mark Kramer's "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," in which he discusses eight rules, one of which is that "literary journalists develop meaning by building upon the readers' sequential reactions."[7] Do you have your readers' [reactions] in mind when you're writing and not only the people you are interviewing or writing about?

Burkett: Absolutely, as a narrative journalist. My goal is to serve my readers. If I am writing something and don't consider who they are, then I am not serving them very well. So, for example, when I worked in Miami, I was dealing with a group of pretty conservative readers, and I needed to make sure that I wrote to them in a way consistent with who they were. If I know what your prejudices are, then I am in a better position to elicit the reaction that I want.

Long: What would you say to those who say that it's manipulative, given the trend to disparage mainstream journalism?

Burkett: What's wrong with manipulation? No, I'm sorry. That's a little too facile. My goal is to communicate. If I speak French to a Greek speaker, I am not communicating. Why is what I do any more manipulative than speaking French to a French speaker? All I am talking about is using language and techniques to communicate more effectively with people. I have a real example. When I was writing my book about Golda Meir,[8] I had to decide going in whether I was writing for people who knew a lot of Israeli history or people who knew nothing about Israeli history, because Golda is the history of Israel. Is it manipulative to make sure that I'm writing in a way that will make sense to people? I was very careful in that book to balance how much I told readers about Israeli history because I didn't want to bore them. Or, if I'm writing for people whom I know will be instinctively anti-Israel, I'm going to be a little bit more thorough in explaining things in a way that might make them more sympathetic to what I'm writing about because I know that they have prejudices that they might not even know about that need to be addressed. That's being hyper-conscious of who your audience is and communicating in a way in which they can understand you.

Long: Is this about keeping faith with your readers?

Burkett: They might not see it as keeping faith with them, especially in this new hyper-partisan era in journalism where keeping faith with your readers seems to mean telling them only what they want to hear. But it's not my job just to tell people things that they want to hear. I am a kind of contrarian—both by nature and professionally. My job of keeping faith with them is often to show them that their views are too narrow or show them where they are wrong. I don't know whether or not readers will always consider that I'm doing them a favor. But that's my definition both of my job and of keeping faith with them.

I experienced that most keenly when I was writing about conservative women—conservative intellectuals, militia women, ordinary right-wing women for *The Right Women*. How was I—a New York Jewish leftie—going to gain their trust? And I did it by telling the truth. I introduced myself,

opened up about my background and beliefs, and explained that I didn't get how, in the twenty-first century, a woman could be *not* be a progressive. Then I asked them to help me understand. And these women opened up and spent hours with me, not trying to convince me but trying to help me understand. And they succeeded to a remarkable extent. That doesn't mean they brought me around to agreeing with them. But they opened up a window into their lives, their world view, their thinking. And my job was to record and transmit that.

I don't think I could have done any of this if I weren't confident enough in my own beliefs to be able to move past them and if I didn't believe in my very core that their stories have the right to be told.

Long: You identify yourself as a contrarian. One of the questions that I had for you is that you're absolutely not afraid to touch and even of grab hold of the third rail when it comes to contentious topics. Are you compelled to do this? And I'm thinking specifically about your narrative journalism on HIV, on consumerism, and on the sexual abuse in the Catholic Church. These are all third-rail concerns.[9]

Burkett: It just feels to me that if I am not trying to make the world a better place, then what is the point of being a journalist? Why not just go out and, like, find some job making a lot of money? I am from a family tradition where the notion of doing something to better the world was actually important. So, I guess I could write about fashion, if I knew anything about fashion, which I don't. But who would that help? What would that change? And I know that at the end of the day, when I'm [lying] on my deathbed, I need to be able to say to myself, well done. And I am not sure how I could wind up saying that if all I'd done was report about fashion.

And it's not just about the topics I hone in on. I am a lifelong kind of lefty liberal, but it annoys me and always has when people come up with facile assumptions about things or come to facile conclusions. I have always thought that it was my job to disabuse them of facile thinking. That's what makes me a contrarian in the eyes of many.

Long: And opting for narrative journalism certainly isn't the easy road to follow, because it is hard work.

Burkett: It is a huge amount of work . . . if you do it well. If you're intent on being thorough, it's a gigantic amount of work. But I need to add that it is also immensely, emotionally rewarding; and it's really, really, really fun. We don't talk a lot about fun. But if you look at my life and the things that I've done, and the places I've gone and the people I've met, who's had more fun than me?

That overwhelms the moments when I wondered whether I would get

out of Afghanistan alive or my days being followed by the secret police in Mauritania or the gazillion times I've been blasted by readers of so-called experts for not crafting my work in keeping with their agendas.

Long: If you have to recount one particular story that stands out above all other stories, do you have a story like that? What is that that one story that just kind of makes your heart race?

Burkett: That's a good question. I don't think there's one. There is the AIDS story I did in Cuba. There was a professional satisfaction to it of having been able to do something that no journalist had done, which was talk the Cubans into letting me go into a sanatorium for HIV patients. It was both that kind of ego satisfaction, the fun of meeting very interesting people, and because the story itself was morally and politically complicated. Here was a situation where, as an American with my American prejudices, I was horrified that they were locking people up just because they had HIV. But then I got to Cuba and couldn't help but feel that things were complicated. It wasn't just that there were many people in the sanatorium who agreed with what the Cuban government had done to them, but that in the context of a relatively poor island with few resources struggling to contain a potential epidemic, it actually made sense, especially given that the patients were living much better than most Cubans on the streets and being cared for better than most Cuban-American HIV patients I knew in Miami. So, I wound up thinking that the answer to my question about what this all meant wasn't easy. That was extremely gratifying, and it was an important article.

I guess the other story that stands out was Afghanistan. Just after the Taliban left, I went to interview educated women who had been trapped behind the burqa. I wound up spending an extraordinary afternoon with a woman who'd been a news anchor on TV before the Taliban took over. She admitted to having gone a bit crazy after she was forced off the air and into isolation at home. But she told the story of waking up the morning that the Taliban left. Music was playing, which was shocking. But she didn't quite believe the nightmare was over until an engineer from the radio station knocked on her door and said, "They're gone and there's no one to announce it on the air. Do you dare?" And she said, "Let me get my coat." Giving voice to the realities these women lived was a real privilege.

Long: Both these stories speak to what you said earlier, that there are no easy answers, and that they both push back against what you term "facile thinking," given how complex they are.

Burkett: Yes. No easy answers [is] important to me. You really have to buck the tide to get them in print. They demand more reporting time and more length for writing. So, complexities are a real battle these days.

Long: How would you describe your voice for the scholars and journalists who may read this Q&A? I can think of some adjectives. But how would you describe it?

Burkett: *How* would I describe my voice? It's pretty personal. I have friends who are journalists who try to have a very impersonal voice—to as much as possible not be there. I have never tried to do that. I, as a person, am in a sense very present.

I also think my voice is nuanced and that over time, I got better and better at making things complicated. I have had many editors who criticized me for this. But I like complications because they are essential to the truth. Readers are not stupid, and we do sense that if something's complicated that it's probably more likely to be true, because they know that [everybody's] life is messy.

Long: It strikes me as a deeply reflective voice, one that is underpinned by courage. I'm thinking specifically about your book about the AIDS industry, *The Gravest Show on Earth*.[10]

Burkett: That's a lovely compliment.

Long: I do think it takes enormous courage to write about the kinds of things that you write about.

Burkett: Neither the topics, nor my take, was likely to win any popularity contests in certain circles. But if you want to win popularity contests, don't become a journalist.

When I moved to Miami to work at the *Miami Herald*, I knew before I got there as an intern that I wanted to report on AIDS. I had done a lot of work reading the newspaper and I thought that they were undercovering AIDS, and Miami was, as you know, hit hard by the epidemic. It took me two years to convince them to let me do this. So, it was not exactly a great career move. And then I wrote plenty of things that people within the world of AIDS would have preferred I ignore. But I had the advantage of age. I wasn't a twenty-two-year-old just starting in journalism. It's easier to be courageous when you're a little older and don't care whether you are popular, either internally or externally. Obviously, I had to keep my bosses happy enough that they would let me do my work. You do that by excellence rather than by pandering.

The greatest challenge for a journalist like me has always been sussing out and then conveying the truth. But the question always is: Whose truth am I looking for, since the Truth, with a capital T, rarely exists. In Afghanistan, I wasn't looking to tell the truth of the male leaders of the Taliban. I was trying to tell the story of educated women trapped behind their burqas. I told *their* truth. But that wasn't the Truth of the men, or even of many other women.

And then there's the problem of keeping *my* truths from overwhelming the truth of the people whose stories I am trying to tell, and that's both a problem of my own personal biases and my cultural biases. I've been lucky to have lived and worked in numerous different cultures. That experience, in addition to my training as a historian, makes me keenly sensitive to the difficulty journalists from a given era or culture have in keeping the prejudices of their times and backgrounds out of their work. So, when I was writing about the AIDS camp in Cuba, for example, I felt a typically American revulsion at the idea of treading on individual liberty. But my job was to overcome that revulsion because I was dealing with a society in which the collective good weighs much more heavily than it does in my society. What, then, did the decision of the Cuban government look like to Cubans? How did that decision affect Cuban society? Those truths had to weigh more heavily than my prejudices.

Getting to those truths, obviously, isn't always easy because people don't necessarily know what their truths are, or they have more than one truth, or because they are suspicious of interviewers. I've been successful because I believe that people like telling their stories and feel that I am really interested, which is not a pretense on my part. I really am interested. And people sense that I really want to tell their stories, not their stories filtered through my biases.

Long: Does this still hold true for you?

Burkett: There are things I'd like to write about but can't. For example, I would love to be writing about Zimbabwe since I've spent much of the last fifteen years there. But courageous or not, I cannot do it because it has implications for too many people. In Zimbabwe you could get hurt. There are times that I cannot be courageous. So, I am not doing a lot of reporting now.

But I still write some opinion pieces, and I'm perfectly content if they make me unpopular. I am thinking of my op-ed about Caitlyn Jenner, "What Makes a Woman?" I knew I would get blasted for it, and I didn't care. Too many journalists and opinion writers are not willing to say things they believe because it's politically incorrect. And political correctness is dangerous both for journalism and for society.

But this is a terrible time to be a journalist. Everything is so ugly at the moment that I don't know how I would be responding if I were writing daily journalism now. I watch my friends who do it, and it's pretty ugly. It is not unusual for my friends who are working journalists to get death threats from readers. Or just vile emails. Heaped with vile emails. Or, I hope you die. I don't know how you work in that environment. I'm not doing a lot. I mean, I do the occasional piece if I feel strongly about something, but I'm not doing much anymore.

Long: But you're still training journalists? What do you tell them, given our so-called, and still-contended, post-truth society that relies and appeals to emotion at the expense of truth and facts?

Burkett: I'm pretty much retired, but I still, in an ad hoc way, train and teach journalists. I get many calls from young people, or I meet them, and some say they want the life I've had and ask how to get it. And my response to them—because I'm a person of brutal honesty—is you can't. The world has changed too much, and journalism has changed too much, and I don't think I do anybody any favors by encouraging them to think that they can have the kind of career that I had. It's not open to them. Outlets simply don't have, or won't spend, the money necessary to do my kind of work.

When it is a more formal situation, talking about how you do journalism, I preach old-fashioned values. The truth has gone out of fashion in journalism—you're not supposed to talk about the truth because there is no one truth. But you strive for the closest thing you can possibly get to it. That is the biggest thing that I emphasize. I'm not sure that we are doing ourselves or anyone else any favor by giving in to the difficulty of finding the truth. We have to try.

My other major piece of advice for young people is: Shut up and tell the story. Stop worrying about crafting things to emphasize your perspective. Trust your readers. So, get out of the way of your story and let its power rise.

Ultimately, what has guided me is an abiding belief in the power of well-told stories to move the world. They move ordinary people to change their attitudes, to donate money, to pressure their political representatives. They reshape how individuals think about themselves. That power is why those with political agendas try to censor stories or rewrite history. Stories can be dangerous, after all.

Not all journalists think of themselves as storytellers, of course. A growing number are entrenched in advocacy journalism, which I don't think of as journalism. I'm also trying to change the world, but I do it by showing readers how complicated the world is and by taking them inside the lives and the realities of people they don't know and experiences they haven't had.

Long: And where does narrative journalism fit into this picture?

Burkett: To my mind, narrative journalism is the best vehicle when properly done. I can write a story that includes every fact about HIV, from how it spreads to how many people have died and the current medical thinking. But bland information doesn't move people. On the other hand, if I take you inside the life of one person, then I can give you all that information and simultaneously help you identify with people who are struggling. When I was in Miami, I spent a lot of time writing pieces about populations of

people with HIV that my readers hadn't thought about. I did a piece about young people struggling with HIV by focusing on a single young man named Pedro Zamora who went on to be quite a famous person because he was on the first season of the *Real World* [MTV's reality television series]. I did a piece about elderly people struggling with HIV. And those people, those pieces, had an enormous impact. Those were forms of narrative journalism that not only give people information but help reshape their attitudes. It's the same reason that people like novels. Narrative journalism gives people the chance to experience somebody else's life and thus to feel empathy.

Callie Long is a second career PhD candidate in the Interdisciplinary Humanities program at Brock University in St. Catharines, Canada. Working with people living with HIV, first as a journalist, and later as a media development practitioner, as well as a communicator in the field of global HIV advocacy and policy, led to this academic career shift. Long's research focuses on the stigma associated with pan/epidemics. She is a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Doctoral Studies fellow and in 2018 was awarded the IALJS Norman Sims prize for best student research paper in literary journalism studies for her essay on Jonny Steinberg's Three Letter Plague.

Notes

[1] Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," 21–34.

[2] *Music by Prudence*, directed-produced by R. Williams and produced by E. Burkett, available from the Library of Congress Catalogue, https://catalog.loc.gov/vwebv/holdingsInfo?searchId=84406&recCount=25&recPointer=0&bibId=18247741. Also available on YouTube, Short Film Winners: 2010 Oscars Announcement. Best Documentary short announcement of nominees Starts at 04:14. Announcement of nomination of *Music by Prudence* by Roger Ross Williams and Elinor Burkett starts at 04:42. The winner, *Music by Prudence,* is announced starting 04:56. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QaHEj3agOYA.

[3] Burkett and Bruni, *A Gospel of Shame*.

[4] Burkett, *The Right Women*.

[5] Burkett, *So Many Enemies, So Little Time.*

[6] Burkett, "What Makes a Woman?"

[7] Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," 31.

[8] Burkett, *Golda*.

[9] The use of the term "third rail" as metaphor is typically associated with contentious issues—ones that are so risky to tackle publicly that they invariably result in failure. It is a phrase most closely associated with politics in the United States and refers to the actual third rail of some electric railway systems that come with a high-voltage charge that can result in electrocution when touched. See Safire, "Third Rail," 20.

[10] Burkett, *The Gravest Show on Earth.*

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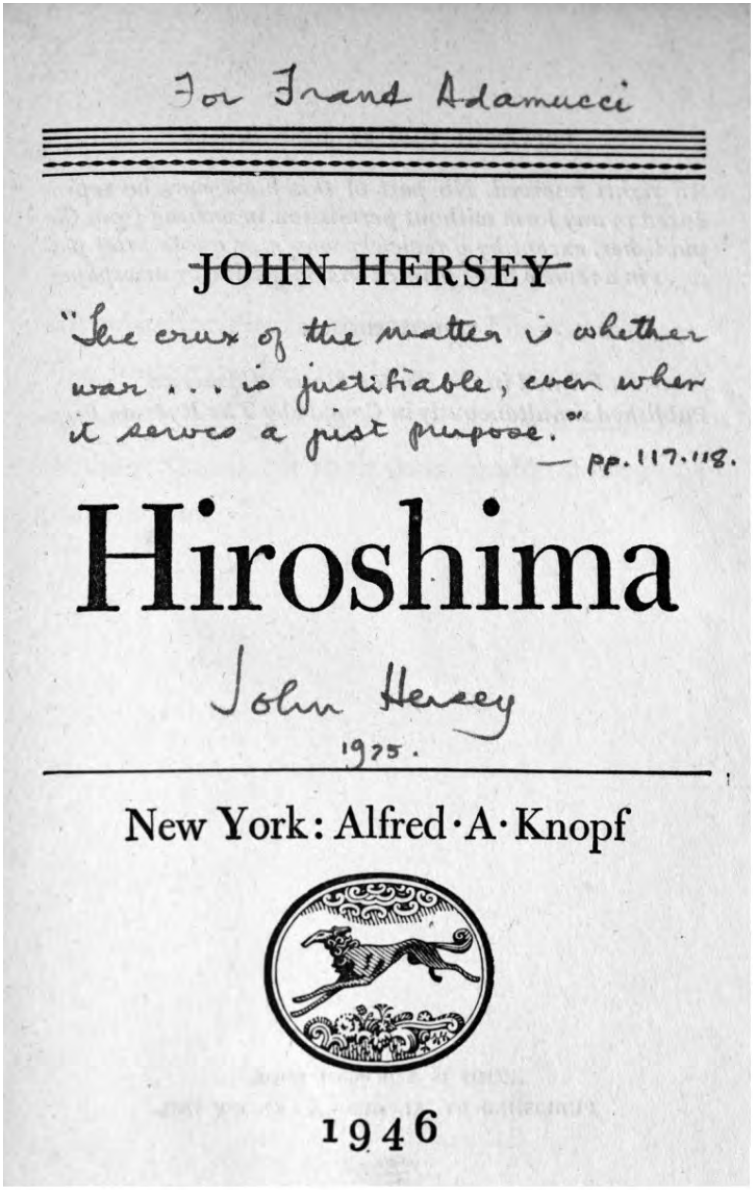
Book Reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

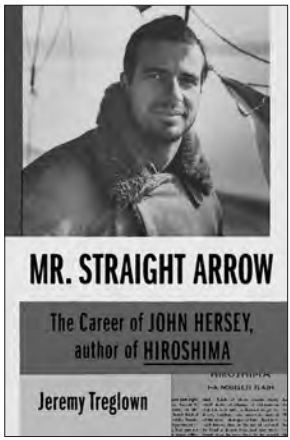


Title page of *Hiroshima* with a quotation from the report of Father Johannes Siemes, SJ, and autographed by John Hersey. Photo by Susan E. Swanberg.

Crux of the Matter: Renewing an Acquaintance with John Hersey

Mr. Straight Arrow: The Career of John Hersey, Author of Hiroshima
by Jeremy Treglown. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019. Hardcover, 384 pp., USD$28.

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



Mr. Straight Arrow: The Career of John Hersey, Author of Hiroshima is "a study of John Hersey's career, not a full biography," notes author Jeremy Treglown (343). In spite of this disclaimer, Treglown's affectionate, sprawling take on Hersey's literary achievements (and pivotal events in Hersey's life) is much more than a curriculum vitae. The book is replete with carefully-documented, noteworthy particulars—as well as gossipy minutiae that would likely have irritated the reserved Hersey. Because Hersey disliked giving interviews and refused to "flog his wares," as his son has been quoted as saying (Russell Shorto, "John Hersey, the Writer Who Let 'Hiroshima' Speak for Itself," August 31, 2016), fans and scholars alike will appreciate Treglown's wide-ranging book, whether they think its revelations are gossipy, over-solicitous of Hersey's reputation, or spot-on.

"Mr. Straight Arrow" is the not-so-affectionate nickname bestowed on Hersey by an unnamed "*New Yorker* staffer" (196). Treglown describes the nickname as an unkind comparison of Hersey with his second wife's eccentric former husband and *Addams Family* cartoonist, Charles Addams. In his review of *Mr. Straight Arrow*, Ben Yagoda identifies the late Gardner Botsford, a *New Yorker* editor (not a "staffer") as the party who gave Hersey the nickname (" '*Mr. Straight Arrow*' *Review*: The Good Example," 2019; Linda H. Davis, *Chas Addams: A Cartoonist's Life*, 106). But Treglown uses the moniker without irony, portraying Hersey as a model of civic virtue for an era when civic virtue is fast becoming an anomaly. By most accounts, Hersey *was* in fact the modest, honest, decent neighbor with whom you might have enjoyed a sailing excursion up the Eastern seaboard.

At its best, *Mr. Straight Arrow* delivers perceptive insights into Hersey's journey from "mishkid" to war correspondent, author, public intellectual, dedicated educator, and civic activist. ("Mishkid," a term Hersey used to describe himself, refers to the fact that he was the child of missionary parents.) At times, however, Treglown's appreciation of Hersey's virtues leads him to soft-pedal Hersey's literary shortcomings.

In the book's introductory chapter, "A Sentimental Journey," Treglown recounts a 1982 visit Hersey made to Tianjin (Tientsin), China, to explore his childhood haunts, reconnect with friends of his family, and research a novel to be based upon his parents' experiences as missionaries with the YMCA. When Hersey made the trip, more than forty years had passed since his first book, *Men on Bataan*, was published.

Less than a page into "A Sentimental Journey," Treglown confides that "For reasons we'll come to, Hersey would be embarrassed by *Men on Bataan* . . . ," a book that "used journalistic sources to give a ringside view of the United States' earliest efforts to fight back against Japan . . ." (3–4). Hersey's embarrassment is not explained until Chapter 3, where, under the subhead, "Grand Larceny," Treglown reveals that Hersey had not, in fact, had a "ringside view" of events on Bataan.

In fairness, Treglown acknowledges that "Little of Hersey's [*Men on Bataan*] material was his own" (63). The journalists who'd had a ringside view of events on Bataan sent their dispatches to *Time* and *Life* magazines. Hersey relied upon these dispatches to write *Men on Bataan*. Many years later, author Ann Fadiman, in *Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader* (110–11) complained of Hersey's alleged appropriations of her mother Annalee Jacoby's work.

Hersey's bemused dedication to *Time* correspondents Melville and Annalee Jacoby and *Life* correspondents Carl and Shelley Mydans suggests that Hersey, the neophyte writer, had a rather casual attitude toward his use of their dispatches:

> As for the sections on the Philippines, I have used dispatches which appeared in the press, in *Time*, and in *Life.* I have drawn heavily on the magnificent cables to Time Inc. from Melville Jacoby, *much of whose material has not previously been published* [emphasis added]. And I have also used the early cables of Carl and Shelly Mydans, the *Life* team who were captured by the Japanese in Manila. By their work on Luzon, Melville Jacoby, his wife Annalee, and the Mydanses have put themselves on par with the bravest and rightest reporters of the war. This book is dedicated to them partly so they won't charge me with grand larceny, but mostly out of sincere admiration (Hersey, "Thanks and a Dedication," *Men on Bataan*, 1942. Following the dedication, the publisher noted that in April 1942 Melville Jacoby was killed in an airplane accident near Darwin, Australia).

In defense of Hersey, Treglown suggests that journalism tradition encouraged pooling, rewriting, and "authorial anonymity" (65). In addition, according to Treglown, Hersey paid some of his sources, the *Men on Bataan* narrative was Hersey's, and Hersey had "put a fair amount of work" into the book (66). *Men on Bataan* (along with *Into the Valley*: *A Skirmish of the Marines*) made Hersey's name as a war writer. *Into the Valley* was based upon Hersey's personal experiences as a war correspondent, which is perhaps why the masterfully written account of a skirmish on Guadalcanal rings so true.

During the course of the battle, Hersey's deeply inculcated humanitarian impulses led him to put aside his pen to assist several wounded marines, acts for which he was commended by the Navy Department (73–74). Years later, the mature writer added a foreword to *Into the Valley* in which he explained why he had chosen not to revise a number of minor "untruths," such as his self-censoring of strong language used by the battle-weary marines (1989, xxvi–vii). He also considered and

rejected revising his references to the Japanese as "animals," writing that retaining his "shameful words" might "help to show what warfare could do to a young mind that thought it was in pursuit of truth" (xxviii–xxx).

Throughout *Mr. Straight Arrow*, Treglown's narrative consists primarily of an entertaining stream of events from Hersey's life punctuated with mini-reviews of books or articles published at each stage of Hersey's career, including: *A Bell for Adano*, a fictionalized version of the American occupation of Sicily, which was made into a popular movie released in the summer of 1945; Hersey's later attempts at writing fiction, some of which succeeded and others that fell flat; the articles Hersey wrote for *Time* and *Life* until his relationship with Henry Luce broke down; and Hersey's long, productive career as a writer for the *New Yorker*. It was, of course, the *New Yorker* that published "Hiroshima" in its entirety on August 31, 1946.

In what is regarded as his crowning literary achievement, Hersey described the aftermath of the August 6, 1945, atomic bombing in a detached tone that "let 'Hiroshima' speak for itself." In passing, Treglown mentions Father Johannes Siemes, a German Jesuit priest whose eyewitness report of the aftermath of Hiroshima was one of Hersey's sources (127–28). Later, Treglown compares a paragraph from *Hiroshima* to a paragraph written by the priest—ostensibly to illustrate how much better Hersey's writing was (129).

What Treglown misses is the overall importance of Siemes's eyewitness report and the way in which some of the events recounted in *Hiroshima* were arguably derivative of Siemes's report in tone, tenor, reportage, and chronology of the narrative, not to mention the cast of characters. Siemes's eyewitness account was so important to Hersey that he frequently included an excerpt from Siemes's account when he (Hersey) autographed copies of *Hiroshima*. The quotation from which the excerpt is drawn reads, in part, as follows:

> Some of us consider the bomb in the same category as poison gas and were against its use on a civilian population. Others were of the opinion that in total war, as carried on in Japan, there was no difference between civilians and soldiers, and that the bomb itself was an effective force tending to end the bloodshed . . . The crux of the matter is whether total war in its present form is justifiable, even when it serves a just purpose. Does it not have material and spiritual evil as its consequences which far exceed whatever good might result? (*Hiroshima*, 1946, 117–18)

Hersey's complex relationships with fact and fiction, war and warriors, morality and amorality cannot easily be summarized, nor can Treglown's book, which readers will call a biography, notwithstanding the author's assertions to the contrary.

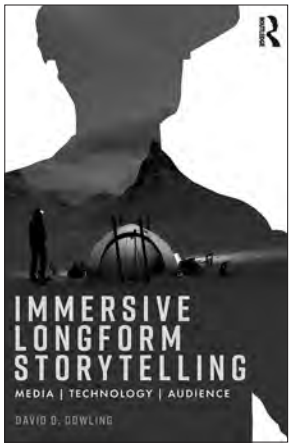
The ambiguously provenanced nickname that Treglown chose as part of his book's title is a tantalizing embodiment of the Hersey mythos. While Hersey, the son of missionaries and a civic-minded humanitarian himself, might indeed have made an excellent neighbor, he was a much more nuanced individual than his respectable image intimated. Was Hersey merely following the journalistic conventions of the day when he committed his "larcenies" and was his behavior, therefore, excusable? Is it true, as Treglown suggests, that during Hersey's era things were better than they are now, or is Treglown's view of Hersey's world—and Hersey—overly rosy?

To form a well-founded opinion of the matter one must not only read and reread Treglown's substantial account one must also acquaint (or reacquaint) oneself with the *Hiroshima* author's many works. Hersey's fiction and his nonfiction; his chameleon-like shifts of genre and style; his proximity or lack of proximity to the events about which he wrote; his commitment to social justice; as well as the highs and lows of his abundant output—are all well worth revisiting.

Longform Storytelling: Multi-Media Perspectives

Immersive Longform Storytelling: Media, Technology, Audience
by David O. Dowling. New York: Routledge, 2019. Paperback, 208 pp., USD $39.95.

Reviewed by Robert S. Boynton, New York University, United States



Economic and aesthetic goals rarely converge, especially in journalism. But technological developments both in the production and consumption of news have raised the importance of immersive experiences for journalism. The more immersive the journalism, the higher its quality, and the more profitable it may be, especially in this disaggregated world that has taken the "mass" out of mass media. As David O. Dowling writes in *Immersive Longform Storytelling: Media, Technology, Audience*, quoting Henry Jenkins, "old media do not die; they converge" (50).

Dowling argues that we are experiencing what Dwayne Bray describes as a "golden age of documentary" (1), which literary journalism is particularly well positioned to take advantage of. Dowling conceives of literary journalism as encompassing more than books and magazine articles; it is "at the nexus of cinema, radio, and print, spawning newly minted genres capable of immersing mobile audiences in ways previously imaginable only in IMAX theaters" (2). He rebuts those, like Nicholas Carr, who decry what Dowling summarizes as the shallow, "manic Twitter-driven news cycle and its attendant superficial online reading practices" (1), using studies showing that "digital journalism has sparked a renaissance in deep reading and viewing associated with the literary mind" (3). Further, Dowling makes the stronger claim that "the digital ecosystem now . . . fulfills the promise of the New Journalism" (10) by reporting on "subjects and events from a deeper perspective, anatomizing them scientifically and psychologically, driving home both fact and the drama of lived human experience" (15). As long as you have a broad conception of literary journalism, Dowling argues that today is the best of times.

I've long held that much of today's most deeply reported, best told literary journalism is being produced in audio, so I was intrigued to see Dowling extend that claim to multimedia forms like online reading, interactive texts, on-demand television, native advertising, and 360 video. Each gets a chapter, the combination of which provides the reader an excellent overview of the way each form is testing journalism's technological, ethical, and aesthetic limits.

Chapter one focuses on the *New York Times*'s 2012 publication of "Snow Fall: Avalanche at Tunnel Creek." Although it was the most high-profile work of enhanced digital journalism (it won a Pulitzer and a Peabody), it was hardly the first. Dowling explains the differences between "Snow Fall" and clunky, earlier efforts, which were little more than the conventional print article ("shovelware") combined with the flashy tech du jour. "Unlike the conventional news template, its multimedia were not indiscriminately tacked on, but carefully integrated into the narrative world as a system of mutually reinforcing referents" (32). He uses "Snow Fall" to explore the way the latest iteration of multimedia immersion has upended conventional assumptions, such as the "lone wolf reporter." Dowling elaborates on "the increasingly collaborative nature of online narrative journalism" (29), which he likens to "film production" (30). In the new workflow, one often *starts* with the "multimedia elements and digital design" (34) rather than the writing. For example, the *Guardian* began its feature, "NSA Files: Decoded," by assembling the "multimedia elements first, leaving the writing of the text for last" (20).

In chapter two, Dowling takes on the claim that the internet and other technology have dumbed-down journalism content and diminished consumers' attention spans. In fact, he argues, the opposite is the case, and that "the latest wave of online reading communities has harnessed hypersocial participatory internet culture for sustained focus on long immersive works" (49). Social media between the distribution and discussion of longform stories (55), as well as new modes of media consumption, such as "radial reading," Jerome McGann's term for readers "delving deeply within the text and re-surfacing to access supporting data to aid and enrich interpretation" (59). Dowling contends that the new online reading experiences are more immersive than distracting, a " 'cognitive container,' "which holds the reader's attention through embedded multimedia elements rather than hyperlinks that send the reader out of text" (57). He cites eye tracking studies (58) showing that users are as drawn to text as they are to video—a claim that will surprise an industry increasingly turning toward video. Dowling reminds us of an essential truth: for all the chaos of the journalism business, there has never been a time when more people have consumed and discussed more journalism and literature. It is a phenomenon "reminiscent of the learned exchanges at coffee houses and bread-and-cheese clubs of the seventeenth century, carrying on the legacy of intellectual discussion and spirited debate with the benefit of online access to the richest data resources in media history, perhaps the most supreme gift of the digital age" (67–68).

Chapters three and four, about on-demand television and so-called native advertising, or advertorials, are weaker than the others. It is less clear how the explosion in the amount of available on-demand video via Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, and Apple represents an advance in immersive strategies. There is a lot more stuff to watch, but I'm not convinced that the ratio of good to bad quality has changed. Dowling's suggestion that "television narratives were shallower in the pre-digital era and evolved toward increasingly complex interwoven plot lines toward the end of the twentieth century" is intriguing, but never really explored (77). The *binge-watching* phenomenon says more about the consumer's ready access to content than the content

itself. And Dowling's claim that we shouldn't be concerned by brand-sponsored advertorial—"editorial content was always mediated by promotional discourse" (4); "much of the best journalistic reporting and writing now bears promotional functions" (5)—dismisses a complex issue too quickly. Simply employing the techniques of immersive journalism doesn't make the product journalism. The fact that longform marketing projects are "so well disguised as editorial content that they can commend viewer payment" (113) says more about economics than journalism.

The chapter on longform audio immersion is more satisfying because it addresses both the aesthetic and economic success of the medium. There was always plenty of nascent creativity in audio, but recent technical hardware innovations drive the podcast revolution. Digital recording and editing dramatically lowered production costs, the internet freed producers from radio stations, and Apple's iPod, iPhone, and iTunes allowed listeners to consume audio when and where they like (122–23). "With podcasting's dramatic growth, the once staid and remote bastion of public radio now finds itself at the epicenter of the digital ecosystem," he writes (117). It isn't just that there is so much more audio available, the form itself is in a "state of radical experimentation" (121), combining "traditional elements of news writing for longform radio with more latitude than ever for narrative creativity" (121). Like the best literary journalism, audio capitalizes on its qualities of voice and intimacy. "Passionate content renders a personal connection to establish a level of knowledge and trust between listener and narrator," writes Dowling, "one not seen since the unabashedly subjective work of such luminaries as Tom Wolfe and Joan Didion" (134).

The confluence of these developments allowed the 2014 podcast *Serial* to reach five million listeners in four weeks, compared to *This American Life*, the show that launched *Serial*, which took four years to reach one million listeners (116, 118). In 2017, *S-Town*, created by the producers of *Serial* and *This American Life*, reached ten million listeners in four days (124).

Immersive Longform Storytelling's last two chapters cover, in sequence, interactive online documentary, and then, virtual reality and 360 video. These technologies have lagged behind streaming video and podcasting because they tether the viewer to equipment, whether it is a computer or an unwieldy set of virtual reality goggles. True, VR can transport and immerse the viewer to an unprecedented degree. But without subsidies from the manufacturers of the technical interfaces (Samsung, Facebook), few journalism organizations have made good use of them.

Dowling celebrates the autonomy these technologies grant the consumer, who is granted the freedom to ignore conventional journalism's narrative and explore. "The interactive user is immersed in the process of production, rather than consumption, of spatially oriented online media" (166); "the camera is in the hands of the user, as it were, who is free to view every shot of the film from any angle they choose" (170). Dowling discusses *Bear 71*, an online documentary that allows one to track grizzlies in Banff National Park. Engaging it, the user is as much the "creator" as those who designed the software. "While audio maintains narrative trajectory, open-world design encourages autonomous exploration through hundreds of thousands of pictures, clips, and images captured by motion-detector web cams revealing how

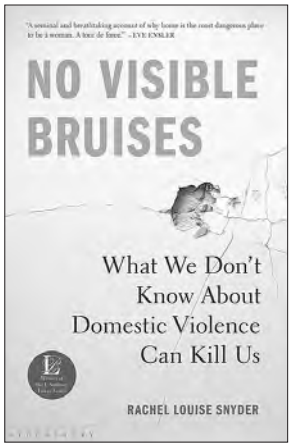
other tagged animals and humans encroach on the bear's territory and affect her life" (158). I don't doubt *Bear 71*'s immersive qualities, but I wonder whether it should be considered journalism, or even the "storytelling" in Dowling's title. At what point are the storyteller's intentions no longer relevant? When does a narrative—immersive or not—disintegrate into a snarl of dead-ends and databases?

In his conclusion, Dowling turns from the consumer's immersion to the producer's. Echoing arguments in favor of immersion journalism like Ted Conover's in *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep*, Dowling celebrates the technique's transparency. "Rather than concealing the journalist's methods to render the subject from an omniscient perspective, storytelling from the vantage point of the immersed journalist brings the audience into the world of their subjectivity" (183). It is a needed reminder that a world that doesn't support reporters' ability to immerse themselves will have trouble convincing consumers to dive in alongside them.

Immersion Journalism and Insights on Intimate Partner Terrorism

No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know about Domestic Violence Can Kill Us
by Rachel Louise Snyder. London: Bloomsbury, 2019. Hardcover, 309 pp., USD$28.

Reviewed by Barbara Selvin, Stony Brook University, United States



The eight years Rachel Louise Snyder spent reporting on intimate partner violence have produced a work of devastating personal histories and hard-won insight, told in lyrical language. Hard-won: The time Snyder spent with frightened women, grieving families, remorseful batterers, police officers, researchers, and advocates left her so drained emotionally that at one point she stopped to regain her equilibrium. "There was a period of time when it took a force of will for me to not look at every man I met as a possible abuser and every woman as a possible victim," she writes. "This is not the way one wants to walk through life. I knew that. I know that. . . . I took an entire year off from anything having to do with violence. I worked out, and I read, and I painted, and I went to therapy, and I avoided abuse and homicide and police reports" (98).

Snyder's book is not one immersive account, but several. She probes domestic violence (or intimate partner terrorism, a phrase she finds more accurate but less widely used and thus less useful) from many perspectives, offering a dozen or more detailed portraits drawn from the hours, days, or months she spent with her sources. Its value as literary journalism emerges, too, from the beauty, passion, and skill of her writing—Snyder's chapter kickers alone are worthy of study for how to propel readers through a book-length reporting project—and from her reflections on the impact of the reporting on herself.

These profiles and perspectives offer models of how to conduct and synthesize sensitive in-depth interviews. They also elucidate the complexity of domestic violence, showing that abuse has no single cause but is a product of multiple influences: economics, education, or the lack of it, abusers' clinical narcissism, a "male role belief system" that teaches men to nurture anger rather than empathy; and a profound failure of agencies and institutions, from police to the courts to social services, to share their information in a way that would protect women at risk. The layered stories build Snyder's argument that better communication among the many institutions that intersect with victims is critical to preventing domestic abuse and, chillingly, intimate partner homicides and familicides.

For what became the first part of the book (called "The End"), Snyder made repeated trips to Billings, Montana, to report the death and life of Michelle Monson Mosure, whose husband killed her, their two children, and himself in 1993. Snyder uses Michelle's story to explore the confounding question of why victims stay with their abusers. For Snyder, this is the wrong question. One of her insights is that, often, victims recant accusations of abuse and return to their partners because they don't think they—or they and their children—would be safer outside the home; they fear their abusers could find them, or they fear that in leaving they would be isolated from friends, family, jobs, and other support, or they are trying, cautiously, to lay the groundwork for an eventual departure. "[W]e don't know what we're seeing," she writes; "the question of leaving versus staying disregards the cavalcade of forces at work in an abusive relationship" (16).

> Look at Michelle Monson Mosure. Look at any intimate partner homicide anywhere in any given year and it will be the same: she tried every which way she could. She tried and tried, but the equation, or rather, the question, isn't a matter of leaving or staying. It's a matter of living or dying.
>
> They stay because they choose to live.
>
> And they die anyway.
>
> Michelle Mosure stayed for her kids and for herself. She stayed for pride and she stayed for love and she stayed for fear and she stayed for cultural and social forces far beyond her control. And her staying, to anyone trained enough to see the context, looked a lot less like staying and a lot more like someone tiptoeing her way toward freedom (73).

Other sections of the book portray abusive men seeking transformation and the "changemakers" (16) whose work is saving lives across the United States. Insights emerge: that abusers rarely use women's names, omitting not just their victims' names but also their mothers' and sisters'; "bitch" is the usual substitute. That batterers may need multiple attempts to complete intervention programs before succeeding, just as addicts or gamblers do. That mass shootings often have roots in domestic violence: Adam Lanza prefaced his massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School by shooting his mother, as did Charles Whitman (along with his wife) the day before he killed sixteen people at the University of Texas at Austin in 1966. Snyder shows how small changes from responders can save lives: a laminated order of protection stays legible longer than a paper one; a bag of diapers and some grocery money can give a victim the caesura that enables her to make better long-term decisions for herself and her children. The data Snyder gathers refute common assumptions, proving that despite the constraints of privacy regulations, agencies can work together, can share enough information, such as the existence of prior restraining orders or a history of threats or arrests, to engender effective protective measures.

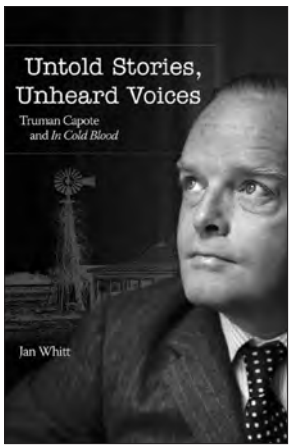
Snyder approaches one of her conclusions almost gingerly: that the manifest availability of guns in the United States vastly increases the likelihood of domestic abuse becoming domestic homicide. She broaches the subject in describing a two-day meeting of Montana's Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission, then barely mentions it again for several chapters until she summarizes the ride-alongs she

conducted with local police in each jurisdiction she visited for reporting. Every cop, she recalls, said he or she wished civilians had fewer guns, and Snyder spends four pages exploring the intersection of gun safety and domestic violence. Perhaps she uses a light touch because the issue of gun control can be so toxic in U.S. culture; perhaps she wants to avoid certain readers rejecting all of her work because they reject her conclusions on gun access. Though understated, her position is clear. And sometimes, as here, an insight quietly uttered comes through with unmistakable clarity.

Another Look at Truman Capote and *In Cold Blood*

Untold Stories, Unheard Voices: Truman Capote and In Cold Blood.
by Jan Whitt. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2019. Hardcover, 335 pp., USD$35.

Reviewed by Matthew Ricketson, Deakin University, Australia



Truman Capote remains an important, even iconic, figure in literary journalism studies whose reputation rests primarily on *In Cold Blood*, published first as a four-part series in the *New Yorker*, in 1965, and as a book by Random House in January 1966. The book became an instant bestseller, swiftly garnering for Capote the then—and even now—astounding sum of US$2 million for paperback, foreign, and movie rights. Confusingly labelled by its author a "nonfiction novel," *In Cold Blood* won an Edgar award for best factual crime book, but, unlike any of the award's previous seventeen winners, it legitimized a sub-genre—true crime, as it is now called. Since 1966, *In Cold Blood* has been released in 250 editions, translated into thirty languages, and remains easily available today in the Penguin Modern Classics edition.

Capote, along with Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Tom Wolfe, is one of the most prominent writers identified with the New Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Collectively, their works have spurred much critical attention, both at the time, and in a second wave, as the term literary journalism began to come into critical usage in the 1980s.

So, a classic work, a pioneer, a bestseller, and an influence on later generations of writers: *In Cold Blood* is all of these. It is also a contested, controversial work, and, importantly, has been since its release. Soon after publication, Kenneth Tynan, the English theatre and literary critic, attacked Capote's ethics and said the book's title could well have referred to the author's choice of doing less than he could to help save the two convicted murders, Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, from the gallows. Phillip K. Tompkins, writing in *Esquire* in June 1966, attacked Capote's oft-stated claims to factual fidelity. Tompkins returned to Holcomb, Kansas, the location of the murders of the Clutter family that had sparked Capote's interest in 1959, and documented errors of fact and interpretation. Some were small but a worryingly large number weren't.

In the decades since, various scholars, biographers, and journalists have uncovered more problems with Capote's work. Some scholars have delved into Capote's papers

held at the New York Public Library to show, among other things, the extraordinary access to case materials that Detective Alvin Dewey gave Capote or how much unattributed work Harper Lee contributed to *In Cold Blood*. Gerald Clarke, Capote's first and most comprehensive biographer, has revealed that the final scene of *In Cold Blood* is entirely invented and, in 2013, a journalist from the *Wall Street Journal* dug into a cache of old documents held by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to show Capote distorting facts to suit his narrative purpose.

This does not for a moment mean students and scholars should strike *In Cold Blood* from their list—it remains a compelling reading experience—but they should read it with their eyes open to the many questions that have been raised, and proven, about it. One of the curious features of critical scholarship about Capote and *In Cold Blood* is how often critics, in the face of strong evidence, have excused Capote's practices on the ground that he was an accomplished writer with literary ambitions. Granted, the term nonfiction novel opens the door to misreadings (one critic, Sven Birkerts, tartly observed that it was an oxymoronic phrase and a moronic idea), but *In Cold Blood* was ineluctably an account of an actual rather than a fictional multiple murder and its consequences (Birkerts, "Docu-fiction," In *An Artificial Wilderness: Essays on Twentieth Century Literature*, 265–70. New York: William Morrow, 1987). To avoid facing this reality, or to wave away questions about Capote's journalistic and literary practices, undermines the years of careful work done by scholars and practitioners to define the elements and boundaries of literary journalism.

Do we need another book about Capote when there is so much literary journalism being done in the United States and many other countries that merits attention? Probably not unless it offers either a fresh reading of the book or fresh information about its creation or its consequences. *Untold Stories, Unheard Voices* does not offer the former but does provide the latter. Some of this draws mainly on the work of other scholars, such as a 2012 doctoral dissertation by T. Madison Peschock that demonstrates the extent to which Harper Lee, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and childhood friend of Capote, contributed to the research of *In Cold Blood* and how Capote failed to acknowledge her work. As promised in the book's title, the voices of other players in the orbit of the Clutter murders have been included by Whitt. They include a memoir about the Clutter family by the niece of Herbert and Bonnie Clutter (278–84), a memoir about Perry Smith by Donald Cullivan, a former army acquaintance (288–302), and a memoir by Dick Hickock, ghost-written by local journalist, Starling Mack Nations (184–203).

These morsels of new information are moderately interesting, adding a modicum to our understanding of *In Cold Blood*. It would have been good had the author more actively engaged with how these additional accounts intersect with earlier ones. To take one example, Capote writes in *In Cold Blood* that Hickock intended raping the fifteen-year-old Nancy Clutter but was stopped by Smith. The Reverend James Post, chaplain at the prison where Smith and Hickock had been on death row, told Capote's oral biographer, George Plimpton, that Hickock was not the "sex fiend" that Capote portrayed and, indeed, there is no mention of Hickock having sex with underage girls in the mini-biography Capote compiled of Hickock that is among his papers in the

New York Public Library. However, there is evidence in his ghost-written memoir (192) that Hickock intended to rape Nancy Clutter. Nations's account, then, appears to be the source for Capote. Needless to say, this information goes unacknowledged in *In Cold Blood*. Capote regarded Nations as a rival and did all that he could to undermine Nations's attempts to produce a book about the Clutter murders, which Whitt documents in *Untold Stories, Unheard Voices*.

No one, including Nations's son, Michael, who found the ghost-written memoir, regarded Nations as an artist: "He wrote like a sledgehammer," Michael is quoted as saying (Whitt, 181). It is another piece of evidence, though, if any were needed, of Capote's unethical behavior. Whitt is aware of what Capote did to Nations but could have worked harder to bring out the implications of some of the material in her newly unearthed accounts.

Untold Stories, Unheard Voices would have benefited from a good editor. It is repetitious; the structure of the book is outlined early on in some detail, then repeated on pages 174–76. Why? Early in the book, Whitt writes that *In Cold Blood* "has outlasted negative criticism and will endure as a fusion of fiction and nonfiction and as a stylistic masterpiece." This phrase, or something like it, is repeated throughout the book with the regularity of a journalist adding an autofill background par to a developing news story. Whitt appears to have been so impressed by a lengthy quotation on page 269 from Madelaine Blais, a literary journalist and professor of journalism, that she repeats it on page 315.

The book contains basic errors that should have been picked up. The pulp true crime magazine, *Male,* is described as "extant" on page 183 but "defunct" on the following page. On page 30 Capote is quoted discussing the news item in the *New York Times* that piqued his interest in the Clutter case. "Eisenhower Appointee Murdered" is the headline he cites, but this is wrong; the correct headline, "Wealthy Farmer, 3 of Family Slain" is actually cited earlier, on page 16. Ironically, in a paragraph on page 21 discussing Phillip K. Tompkins's criticisms of inaccuracies in *In Cold Blood*, a well-known quote of Capote's—"One doesn't spend almost six years on a book, the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions"—is wrongly attributed to Tompkins.

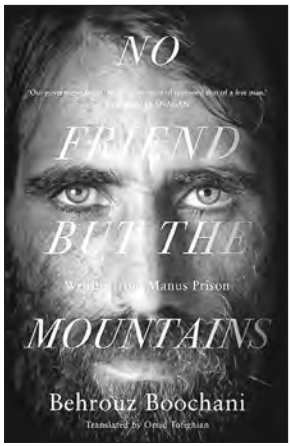
The book's index is a bare two and a half pages, and its organization is unhelpful. Various authors, such as Albert Camus, Thomas Mann, and William Shakespeare, are listed, even if they have been mentioned only once, and are peripheral to the book's argument. Conversely, few if any of the literary critics and biographers, upon whose work Whitt regularly draws, are listed in the index.

This lack of attention to detail in a scholarly book casts a pall over the interesting material the author has amassed. For literary journalism scholars and for students, then, *Untold Stories, Unheard Voices* is a work to be consulted and added to rather than relied on.

Stark Observations on Life inside Australia's Manus Detention Center

No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison
by Behrouz Boochani. Translated by Omid Tofighian. Sydney: Picador, 2018.
Paperback, 374 pp., USD$13.37.

Reviewed by Varunika Ruwanpura, University of Adelaide, South Australia



Kurdish-Iranian writer, journalist, scholar, and filmmaker Behrouz Boochani in his book discusses an increasingly controversial Australian topic—the Manus Island regional processing center for asylum seekers. This book convincingly demonstrates that Boochani's writing is on par with some of the world's best prison literature, which includes U.S. journalist Ted Conover's book, *Newjack*, on New York State's infamous Sing Sing prison. The Australian author, Richard Flanagan, who wrote the foreword to *No Friend but the Mountains*, compares Boochani's writing to prison stories written by renowned authors like Oscar Wilde and Martin Luther King, Jr. Prestigious Australian literary awards that Boochani's book has won include the Prize for Literature and the Prize for Non-Fiction at the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Shortlisting for other national awards is further proof of its merit.

Boochani was a detainee on the original Manus Island Regional Processing Centre when he wrote this story and remains a detainee at another processing center on the island. The story was laboriously written on a mobile phone and smuggled out of Manus as thousands of text messages. It is an autobiographical account of daily life inside the original detention center, which was closed in 2017. Boochani's descriptions of severe mental trauma sustained by inmates are highly confronting: "The prison landscape is so violent that it is likely that out of a few hundred there could be at least one angry and disenfranchised prisoner who could decide to commit a violent act—and enact it during the night—in the dark, behind the bathrooms, or alongside the obfuscating coconut tree trunks . . ." (177). Most detainees have no idea when they will be released, and many are not welcome back in the countries from which they have fled. These issues have already been widely covered by Australian and international media, so instead, this review focuses on the exceptional quality of Boochani's writing.

Drawing on Norman Sims's description of the five characteristics of literary journalism, as immersion, structure, accuracy, voice, and responsibility in *The Literary*

Journalists (1984) may illustrate how Boochani's book can be considered literary journalism. Boochani was literally immersed in the subject of his book because he was an inmate of Manus detention center. But he is also immersed in the book's topic in a metaphoric sense. At times his prose gives the impression that he is almost observing life at the center from afar: "There are so many times the prisoner is forced to straddle the border between human and animal. One has to decide whether to uphold human values or live life like The Cow. . . . When a person is hungry, they rush anything that smells like food. And if there's competition, they attack with even more ferocity" (232–33). The book is also artfully structured as a series of prose chapters interspersed with stanzas of poetry, for Boochani is also a poet. The way poetry is woven into the narrative creates a lyrical reading rhythm.

Sims's characteristic of accuracy in literary journalism is always difficult to assess when reviewing a nonfiction book, as views on accuracy can be subjective. This review's analysis of the accuracy of Boochani's account is a based on three factors. First, Omid Tofighian, the academic who translated Boochani's book from Farsi (also known as Persian) to English, is a well-regarded scholar who spent extended periods of time on Manus conversing with Boochani. Second, Tofighian's meticulous explanation of his translation approach, which is found at the beginning of Boochani's book, notes the author's collaborations with leading Australian academics, authors, and human rights activists. Third, Boochani's evocative and humble acceptance speech, conveyed via video link from Manus, when he won the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Award, provides the strongest evidence of the book's accuracy. In this speech Boochani says, "Literature has the power to give us freedom." His book is testament to the power of literary journalism to lift our senses and bring true stories to life.

Boochani's voice is authentic, drawing attention to his Kurdish heritage as much as it exposes the tragedy of life as a Manus refugee. An excerpt, in which he reflects on the mountains of Kurdistan, is an example: "Grand mountain peaks covered with snow, full of ice, abounding in cold/ I am there/ I am an eagle/ I am flying over the mountainous terrain" (30). Having visited Kurdistan in my youth, I can clearly visualize from reading this passage Boochani's longing to return to his homeland.

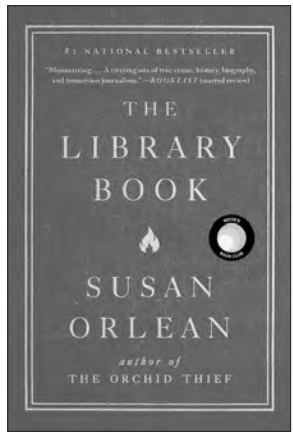
Sims's final characteristic of literary journalism is author responsibility. There is no doubt that Boochani takes absolute pride in and responsibility for his writing. This is evident in his own reflections on how he conceptualized and wrote *No Friend but the Mountains* and in the content of the book itself.

Overall, this work of literary journalism is one of the most important to emerge from Australia in recent years. For literary journalism scholars, the book provides a rich subject of study. *No Friend* offers not only stark insights into the unfortunate lives of Manus detainees, but also commands appreciation that such a highly evocative and creative work of literature could be produced under such dire circumstances. Reading *No Friend but the Mountains* reminded me of Viktor Frankl's having conceptualized his theory of logotherapy during his imprisonment at Auschwitz. For me, the extraordinary way this book was written is what is most meaningful about this book and why I highly recommend it to other scholars.

The Burning and Rebuilding of the Los Angeles Public Library

The Library Book
by Susan Orlean. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018. Hardcover, 335 pp., hardbound, USD$28.

Reviewed by Lisa A. Phillips, SUNY New Paltz, United States



The morning of April 29, 1986, the Los Angeles Public Library caught on fire. The seven-hour blaze destroyed four hundred thousand books, damaged seven hundred thousand more, and shut down the library for seven years. The fire, as Susan Orlean reconstructs it in *The Library Book*, started with smoke "as pale as onionskin" and escalated into a conflagration that spiked to 451 degrees, the ignition point of paper, as we know well from Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel *Farenheit 451.* Book covers "burst like popcorn" and pages "flared and blackened and then sprang away from their bindings" (23).

Library fires are not unusual. Libraries burn because of arson, still the presumed cause of the LAPL fire. They burn because of human error: a cigarette tossed in a waste basket, or faulty wiring. And they burn in wartime, because they are located in city centers that fall victim to fire bombings and aerial attacks, or because the enemy specifically wants to destroy books. The Nazis, Mao Tse-tung's Red Guard, the Khmer Rouge, the Taliban, and Islamist jihadis all targeted libraries. It's not an efficient way to bring down a nation, but it is a devastating blow to a nation's spirit. "Destroying a culture's books is sentencing it to something worse than death," Orlean writes. "It is sentencing it to seem as if it never lived" (103).

What we do to resist the existential nightmare of being forgotten is one of the primary themes of *The Library Book.* Orlean confesses at the outset that before she started researching the LAPL fire, she thought she was "done with writing books" (92). This line made me smile—I've heard the same from almost every author I know who is over forty-five, worn out from the soul-scraping effort of wrestling a topic into a coherent narrative, and many of them *do* go on to write more books. Her words also made me wince, because the literary world would be a lesser place if she had kept to the resolution. Orlean was moved to write about the LAPL fire after taking her young son there and being reminded of her own childhood trips to the local library with her mother. Orlean's recollections are bittersweet, as her mother was suffering from dementia and could no longer remember these trips herself. Orlean finds the idea of

being forgotten "terrifying," because it threatens to make life meaningless (93). Keeping a record of existence—what both libraries and authors do—allows us to make meaning out of the past: "Writing a book, just like building a library, is an act of sheer defiance. It is a declaration that you believe in the persistence of memory" (93).

Orlean, a longtime *New Yorker* writer and one of the most acclaimed literary journalists publishing today, interweaves the high narrative whodunnit story of the library fire with the cultural history of the Los Angeles Public Library and the larger public library movement. Orlean can write the hell out of any subject, and she's particularly good at finding unusual ones: taxidermy, origami, orchids. With *The Library Book*, she takes on a subject that isn't obscure. Libraries are right under our noses. They are everywhere (one of the many thrilling facts Orlean tosses out is that libraries outnumber McDonald's [289]), and they intersect with a wide swath of humanity in emotionally, intellectually, and socially significant ways. The ubiquity of libraries makes them no less a perfect vehicle for Orlean's literary journalism, which, as Jan Whitt describes in *Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism,* is "the lens by which news . . . becomes an extended look into the human psyche, into the universal truths of being human" (149).

The Library Book showcases other Orlean trademarks. She fashions complex, irresistible characterizations of quirky people: accused arsonist Harry Peak, an aspiring actor, charming space case, and compulsive liar; Mary Jones, the innovative and effective head city librarian who refused to stop coming to work after she was replaced in 1905; Charles Lummis, the far less qualified and far more colorful journalist and adventurer who replaced her, sparking a petition drive and street protests led by Los Angeles society women. Orlean immerses herself in the everyday life of the LAPL, guided by her keen radar for paradox. In *The Orchid Thief*, Orlean renders the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve as both an inhospitable, unpleasant, wild place and one that harbors the Ghost Orchid, a thing of delicate, ephemeral beauty. The LAPL, through Orlean's immersive gaze, is noble, the walls covered with philosophical declarations and bas-relief stone figures of Virgil, Leonardo da Vinci, and Plato. Yet it is also revolting, thick with body odor and the "vegetal smells of dirt embedded in clothes that were advancing in the direction of compost" (241), worn by the library's homeless clientele.

Orlean's reporting is relentlessly, deliciously fascinating. We learn that mid-twentieth century movie studios dispatched emissaries to the library to steal the books they needed for movie research rather than be beholden to a due date; the library in turn would send an employee out to the studios to get the books back. We meet the "Art, Music, and Recreation" (266) librarian who, sensitive to the competition and secretiveness among the classical music ensembles in the greater Los Angeles area, delicately steers one ensemble away from borrowing a score if she knows another is programming the piece that season. We journey to the spacious, light-filled library in Aarhus, Denmark, which features a marriage license bureau, an excellent coffee shop, and a wide main staircase where toddlers like to play.

The Library Book is also an account of how libraries are changing. They are increasingly less about physical books. I found myself struck by the strenuous efforts

made to restore the thousands of volumes soaked by firefighters' hoses in the 1986 fire. McDonnell Douglas engineers put a batch into their space simulation chambers in an attempt to dry them out. I couldn't help but muse (and please forgive me) how much easier it would have been to buy a cheap replacement from Amazon's endless used book selection, had it been available back then. Some books wouldn't have needed hard copy replacements at all. Near the end of *The Library Book,* Orlean tours the Cleveland headquarters of OverDrive, a digital content catalog for libraries and schools. She finds herself enraptured by a wall map that pinpoints the moment one of their ebooks is borrowed, the name and location of a library, along with the book's title.

The LAPL does not lack for corporeal patrons, though. They hover at the entrance before the doors open and are reluctant to leave at closing time. But many are not there for the books. They want computer time, Wi-Fi, heat, a clean bathroom. They attend English language conversation classes and a crowded one-stop-shopping type event that connects them to social service agencies from around the city. The LAPL illustrates wider library trends. In my community and elsewhere, librarians train to administer NARCAN to reverse opioid overdoses and assist patrons with filling out the online census. I found myself wondering, as one forthright LAPL staff member does, where libraries should draw the line. Is the mission of libraries today becoming impossibly broad?

Perhaps I'm just being nostalgic. I, too, had a mother who took me on weekly trips to get stacks of books at my local public library. I got my first job there, making minimum wage as a teen clerk. It was the least demanding job I have ever had. The early evening shift was slow, and I would disappear into the stacks, ostensibly to reorganize the nonfiction books into proper Dewey Decimal order. Much of the time, I sat on the floor in an empty aisle and read, on the taxpayer's dime, giving myself quite an education with *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality*, *The Cinderella Complex*, and other books about feminism and sex. Today in that job, I'd likely be kept busy monitoring computer stations, giving out the Wi-Fi password, and straightening up meeting rooms for Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, resumé writing sessions, and teen manga clubs. Just like the patrons, I'd spend a lot less time sunk in a book.

Looking in New Ways at Frontiers for Literary Journalism

At the Faultline: Writing White in South African Literary Journalism
by Claire Scott. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2018.
Paperback, 208 pp., USD$27.

Reviewed by Lesley Cowling, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

The study of nonfiction writing in its variety of forms has not had an established disciplinary home in South Africa and, indeed, the very definition of what is being studied, where, is still open to discussion. As other writers in this journal have noted repeatedly over the last decade, English literature departments in many countries have studied fiction, poetry, and theater, with nonfiction rarely given the nod. This has been true of South African universities too, where, as Leon de Kock wrote in *South Africa in the Global Imaginary* in 2004, literature departments until the late 1970s had been "smugly Anglophile and dismissive of the 'local' " (6).

Journalism programs, a potential disciplinary home for literary journalism, have tended to focus on preparing students for work in the media sector. With South Africa having so few platforms for literary and longform journalism, little attention has been given to these forms beyond feature writing and magazine courses. Nonfiction writing must necessarily find its way into the academy through other disciplines. It has done so through African literature, history, library sciences, and the more recently emerging creative *writing* programs. It is also being ushered into local scholarship via the particular research interests of individual scholars.

Thus, although South Africa historically has had a rich set of writers of literary nonfiction, some of whom have been internationally recognized, their study is fragmented over academic disciplines. For example, Olive Schreiner's novel, *Story of an African Farm*, might be studied in English departments, but not her many nonfiction works, which received wide attention when they were published in the 1900s. The nonfiction of journalist/writers such as Sol Plaatje, Bessie Head, Noni Jabavu, and Ezekiel Mphahlele might be studied in an African literature department or find their way into history reading lists. The ways in which their works are journalistic is overdetermined by the focus on how they are literary, or historical, and, I would argue, the emphasis on the *literary* in literary journalism over the journalistic continues. So does the fragmentation across disciplines.

Claire Scott's book, *At the Faultline: Writing White in South African Literary Journalism*, comes, therefore, at an interesting time. She establishes her book firmly as a study of literary journalism, a nod to the emerging courses, studies, and programs that are starting to explore literary journalism as a potential area of interest. She locates her work also in whiteness studies, a growing area of scholarship in South Africa.

Scott proposes to investigate representations of whiteness through looking at four key texts—Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* (1990), Kevin Bloom's *Ways of Staying* (2009), Jonny Steinberg's *Midlands* (2002), and Antjie Krog's *Begging to Be Black* (2009), the last book in a trilogy that started with *Country of My Skull* (1998). Simultaneously, she seeks to examine the ways in which the writers attempt to find new narrative forms to address these complexities (5).

The intersection of literary journalism and whiteness studies extends recent debates on the question of whether the genre of literary journalism can deal better than other writing forms with the racial divides still painfully operative in South Africa in the post-apartheid democracy. This question arises in turn from debates in South African literary studies over the last thirty years, cutting across the fiction/nonfiction divide, about the role of literary writing in telling "the South African story." Thus, concerns about racial division, writing the "frontier," white identity, and the subaltern position of local and black writers have long informed discussions of South African writing.

Scott opens her book by referencing one highly publicized discussion between two of the writers she looks at—Malan and Krog—at the annual Franschhoek Literary Festival in 2010, where each argued a different position on white South Africans in the post-apartheid era. "Malan argued that white South Africans were excluded from the national conversation due to their white skin, while Krog countered that South African whiteness continued to enjoy unwarranted privilege and protection" (2). Their debate was picked by the news media and continued to reverberate in talk shows and opinion pages.

As Hedley Twidle noted in 2012 in *Safundi* ("In a Country Where You Couldn't Make This Shit Up?"), the claim has also been made that nonfiction had outstripped fiction as a cultural phenomenon. It was *the* genre from which to write post-apartheid South Africa. (Do we hear an echo of Tom Wolfe's similar claim for journalism written like fiction in his 1973 writing of *The New Journalism*?) The question was also asked whether nonfiction was a way to cross the boundaries that still exist between communities in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa. Steinberg, Malan, Krog, and Bloom have often been heralded as frontrunners of this *new* literary nonfiction.

Scott designates the nonfiction books produced by these writers as literary journalism and argues for the importance of the choice of genre for the negotiation of whiteness. Her most basic claim is that the writers were all journalists, and—in the case especially of Krog and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—thus witnessed and reported critical events in the transitional period. This may seem at first glance an obvious point, but given the assiduously policed separate worlds created

by apartheid, and the regulated veil drawn over the horrors committed in Black communities, the act of going to *what really happened,* reporting it, and reflecting on it, has an emotional charge and authenticity for readers.

The argument that literary journalism attains its power from the reader's knowledge that *this is a true story*, combined with the use of literary tactics to bring that story alive, is a relatively simple idea. Scott's thesis, however, goes further: she argues that it is the intersection of storytelling forms, such as fiction, history, and journalism, which provides "moments of indeterminacy [that] destabilize accepted notions of identity and belonging," thus allowing new forms to emerge (2). For Scott, it is "the form of narration" itself that provides possibilities for white South Africans to make sense of the changing social and political milieu and to renegotiate their identity. She suggests that "the literary journalism of Rian Malan, Kevin Bloom, Jonny Steinberg and Antje Krog . . . represents attempts to find this 'form of narration' that will open new rhetorical spaces in which South Africans can learn to converse" (5).

I find this an optimistic perspective; there are other motivations for writers to turn to nonfiction. Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee's novel, *Disgrace*, tells—in part—the story of a farm attack, including the rape of a white woman, and was widely criticized as representing Black South Africans as violent and primitive. However, as Scott points out, Steinberg, Malan, and Bloom describe similar violent events in their work, but have not been similarly attacked. Fiction writers are vulnerable to the criticism that the works they produce come from an imagination filled with white fears and racial stereotypes, what Krog calls "the preoccupations, perceptions, and prejudices of the writer" (quoted in Scott, 29). Nonfiction writers, choosing *actual events*, are more insulated from such critique, even though selecting such stories to tell is a way of setting the agenda for discussion.

What literary journalism offers these writers is the opportunity to put themselves in dialogue with the difficult events that are being discussed. Scott notes the ways in which each text makes use of first-person narration in order to reflect and comment on the environment. For Malan, writing in the apartheid era, this meant a reckoning with both the violence of his own *tribe*, Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, and the violence (endemic, in his telling) in communities across the country. Krog, some years later, turns the focus fully, in *Country of My Skull,* on the violence committed by white men in the name of the apartheid state. This inaugurates a trilogy of books that reflect upon the place of white South Africans in the new dispensation, their inability to assimilate in a larger "African" culture, and their complicity with the deeds done to privilege them in the society.

Kevin Bloom reflects on violence too, both through the personal loss of a family member to violent crime and the recounting of other stories of violence. He uses this as an occasion to reflect on whether whites can *stay* and under what conditions. And Jonny Steinberg investigates the murder of a white farmer in an area of the country charged with the historical significance of colonial dispossession and frontier wars. Seemingly an outlier, with a book that appears at first to be a meticulously reported story of a white community feeling under threat rather than a set of personal reflections, Steinberg also explores the condition of no longer feeling at home that

white communities experience, and finds himself unable to enter Black experience of this ancient frontier conflict.

Scott thus shows, as others have before her, the ways in which white identity has, in these books, become uncertain, how complicity is surfaced as an important issue to be dealt with, and how whites struggle with ways to narrate a place for themselves in South Africa.

However, the question of whiteness that she poses in her work seems harder to parse. If whiteness is the invisible, taken-for-granted landscape from which white South Africans operate, a landscape powerfully connected to global whiteness, then these texts confront the same conundrum of whiteness studies, in which the very focus on making visible the deep assumptions and entitlement of whiteness can move Black experience once again to the margins.

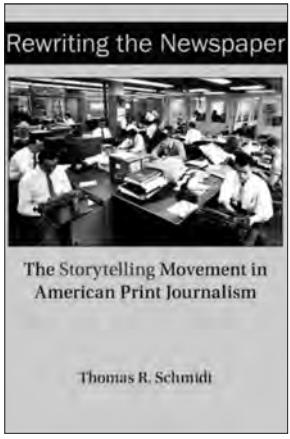
The recent proliferation of nonfiction books by Black writers—some identifiably journalism, some generically closer to memoir and personal life writing—provides an opportunity to imaginatively cross the boundaries that have prevented South Africans from knowing each other's lived experience. But before white South Africans can properly engage with such narratives, whiteness must be destabilized and—in Scott's words—"move out from under the umbrella of its global sanctity and into 'folded-together-ness' with its many 'others' " (179). Scott argues that Bloom, Malan, Krog, and Steinberg have managed to use literary journalism to create "narrative instability"—to reveal the "anxiety and possibility of 'in-between' " (179).

I am not as optimistic that these texts have the liberating potential Scott sees in them, but she raises important questions around the ways in which literary journalism can deal with South Africa's intractable whiteness. Such questions may also be relevant to other former colonies and their settler nations.

The Rise of Narrative Journalism in the Newsroom

Rewriting the Newspaper: The Storytelling Movement in American Print Journalism by Thomas R. Schmidt. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Hardcover, 180 pages, USD$35.

Reviewed by Jeffrey C. Neely, University of Tampa, United States



In his new book, *Rewriting the Newspaper: The Storytelling Movement in American Print Journalism,* Thomas Schmidt provides a detailed account of the rise of narrative journalism in newspapers in the last half of the twentieth century. In doing so, he offers an invaluable record of the men and women who pioneered storytelling as a cultural and institutional movement in the newspaper industry, situated within historical contexts that simultaneously shaped and resisted narrative innovation in the industry.

After an introduction in which he provides a brief overview of the book and establishes the theoretical lens of his research—a synthesis of institutionalism and cultural analysis that he refers to as "cultural institutionalism" (101–18)—Schmidt begins with a deep dive into the *Washington Post*'s innovative transformation of the "For and about Women" section into the Style section, beginning in 1968. Under the leadership of iconic editor Ben Bradlee, the section shifted from what had been home for gendered coverage of "women's interests" into a holistic lifestyle section that responded to and reflected the changing social mores of the late 1960s. Central to all of this, Schmidt shows, was the adoption and adaptation of narrative to the professional culture of the *Post*. In an era when the media landscape, too, was being transformed by factors such as the dominance of television and migrating audiences, the *Post* was the first to break with institutional tradition and experiment with narrative structures and storytelling techniques, which had captured cultural cachet in the New Journalism movement and many popular magazines of the day.

This transformation was not, however, without its detractors. From readers, to reporters, editors, and even then-publisher Katharine Graham, many people in and outside the newsroom resisted the new editorial style with expressed feelings ranging from apprehension to abhorrence. Through robust examples of archival research (e.g., letters to the editor), Schmidt notes that it was not that these people categorically objected to the use of storytelling in journalism, but that they did not expect to see it in the *newspaper*. "They would probably not have been so surprised had this been a magazine

story or a fictional narrative. Apparently, their expectations of *what* a newspaper should report, and *how* it should report, were upset" (37). In spite of this resistance, Schmidt shows, the wager on the new Style section paid off for the *Post*. Moreover, Schmidt situates the influence of Style into the broader institutional context of journalism history in noting that it was largely due to Bradlee's insistence that in 1977 the advisory board for the Pulitzer Prizes voted to create a new category for Feature Writing.

In Chapter 3, Schmidt broadens his study to the broader adoption of narrative journalism in newspapers across the United States. Specifically, he notes the pivotal role played by Eugene C. Patterson, who had formerly worked as managing editor at the *Post* under Bradlee, and his hiring of Roy Peter Clark as a full-time writing coach for the *St. Petersburg Times*. This decision, and Patterson's overarching effort to make the *Times* a "test case for demonstrating what improved writing in a newspaper could look like" (51), would prove to serve as a model for the narrative movement in newspapers across the country in the years to come. Clark's goal, writes Schmidt, "was to teach a critical vocabulary so that reporters and editors would have a shared understanding about how to construct good stories, both as reports and narratives" (54). Through a variety of initiatives, Clark emphasized that narrative, when appropriate for the subject matter, could enhance both the informational content and the reader's experience of a story. But it required not only a different approach to writing, but also how journalists collected their information. Telling a story that readers found both richly informative and deeply engaging required writers to approach their reporting with an eye for detail and a feel for the humanizing elements of the people involved. It required that these journalists seek not just the facts but also their importance. Schmidt notes that Clark's arrival was initially met with skepticism in the newsroom; however, in time, reporters at the *St. Petersburg Times* would come to describe their experiences with him as "the most important thing that's ever happened to me in my four years as a pro" and one that "raised the consciousness of the staff to good writing" (57).

In 1978 Patterson became president of the American Society of News Editors (ASNE). After the association's conference that year, more than 1,500 copies of a special report written by Clark were sent through the association's secretary to editors and reporters around the country. ASNE also began that same year to organize annual awards contests for the best examples of newspaper writing. While many publishers and editors saw narrative newswriting as a practical way of combatting readership decline, advocates like Patterson and Clark championed the idea that it was more than mere attractive marketing; good storytelling about substantive news topics, in Clark's words, "has important political implications for a democracy" (61). At the same time, Schmidt notes that the narrative movement in newspapers had its critics and internal challenges, the most visible being the Janet Cooke scandal and her fabricated story of "Jimmy's World," published in 1980 in the *Post*. While such journalistic iniquities and other abuses of narrative journalism's stylistic affordances undoubtedly stained the movement's reputation, it also provided an opportunity for its practitioners and proponents to honestly and carefully consider their ethical obligations and the limitations of journalistic storytelling.

In Chapter 4, Schmidt follows the history of the storytelling movement as it progressed into the mainstream in the 1980s and 1990s. Along with a case study of the (Portland) *Oregonian* in the early 1990s—another success story for the movement—Schmidt chronicles the rise of narrative journalism conferences, professional trainings, and academic programs outside the newsroom. In 1991 the National Writers Workshops began in Wilmington, Delaware. Shortly thereafter, the Poynter Institute began organizing local writing weekends. In 2001, Harvard University held the Nieman Conference on Narrative Writing, a milestone in marking the credibility of the craft. Likewise, top journalism schools at the University of Missouri, the University of Oregon, and Boston University also began developing sustained programs focused on training current and future journalists in the art of storytelling. Textbooks and anthologies dedicated to narrative news writing were published and sold. Newsletters on narrative from organizations like Poynter grew in circulation to professionals across the country, and the storytelling movement was legitimized through articles in publications like *Columbia Journalism Review* and *American Journalism Review*.

In the midst of this blossoming literary press movement, Schmidt notes, newspapers also began targeting more affluent niche audiences. While Schmidt acknowledges that industry pressures certainly played a role in shaping the storytelling movement in newspapers, he argues that critics who suggest such macro-level influences were the only compelling factors in driving the adoption of narrative techniques in newspapers fail to acknowledge the importance of individual journalists during this time. While it is true that declining readership, the rise of television, and the changing tastes of the U.S. public forced newspaper owners and executives to reconsider how they viewed their product, it is also true that reporters and editors were shaping the topography of narrative in ways that defied traditional hard/soft, serious/fluff, news/features dichotomies.

As noted earlier, Schmidt has provided the field of literary journalism studies with an invaluable historical account of the narrative movement in newspapers over the last half of the twentieth century. Moreover, he has situated this account in a rich and useful theoretical framework of "cultural institutionalism" (10–11) that reconciles the macro-, meso-, and micro-level variables that gave rise to the phenomenon. If there is a shortcoming in his analysis, it is that the theoretical considerations could be woven more fluidly throughout the work. Schmidt lays his foundation clearly in the introduction. He also returns to it in the final chapter with a cogent, concise (yet thorough) conclusion that identifies the implications of this "narrative turn" (105–18) with three primary takeaway concepts: 1) narrative journalism as news logic, 2) narrative journalism as a media regime, and 3) narrative journalism as a cultural institution. However, most of the book is dominated by straight historical accounts that comprise the narrative movement, and it is easy to feel disconnected at times from the underlying theoretical framework. This is not to say that the theoretical framework is absent from the discussion; it is *implicit* throughout the text. However, moments of explicit theoretical articulation feel a bit fleeting, leaving the reader to wait until the final chapter to realize the full value of Schmidt's "cultural

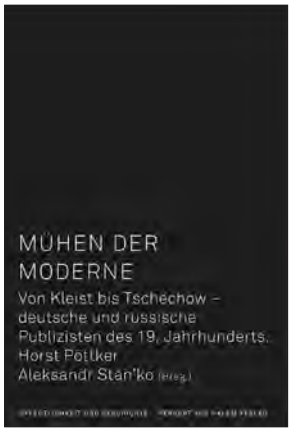
institutionalism" applied to the narrative movement in newspapers.

Schmidt is to be commended in providing both a detailed, robust chronicle of this important era in daily newspapers and a thoughtful, nuanced contribution to theoretical scholarship in the field. It is likely more theory packed throughout the chapters could have risked diminishing Schmidt's own rich storytelling of narrative journalism's history in daily newspapers. *Rewriting the Newspaper* is a rigorous work that is academically enlightening and a genuine pleasure to read.

The Hard Work of Modernity

Mühen der Moderne: Von Kleist bis Tschechow—deutsche und russische Publizisten des 19. Jahrhunderts. Edited by Horst Pöttker and Aleksandr Stan'ko. Cologne: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2016. Paperback, 544 pp., €34.

Reviewed by Kate McQueen, University of California Santa Cruz



In 1810, Heinrich von Kleist—that troubled luminary of German letters—fell into journalism in an old, familiar way. Financially desperate and hungry for an audience, the then-little-known writer launched *Berliner Abendblätter*, the city's first daily newspaper. Kleist served as publisher, editor, and reporter, barely able to avoid the censor while courting a skeptical public and enduring critique from his literary peers (Wilhelm Grimm dubbed it "die ideale Wurstzeitung"—the ideal wrapping for sausages) (42). The paper lasted five months. Still, Kleist managed to anticipate trends that would help define the press in the modern era. This included a "feel for the boulevard," which manifested in "authentic, fact-oriented, and detailed" coverage of local crime (40).

Kleist is revered today as a literary modernist *avant la lettre,* whose haunting fiction thematized the crisis of order and meaning nearly one hundred years before its time. But it is the curiosity, if not outright irony, of Kleist's foresight in the realm of journalism that makes him worthy of the opening chapter in *Mühen der Moderne: Von Kleist bis Tschechow—deutsche und russische Publizisten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, a collection of essays recently published in Halem Verlag's scholarly series Öffentlichkeit und Geschichte [Public and history].

As its title suggests, the volume chronicles the journalism of influential nineteenth century German and Russian authors. These range from writers well known as journalists in their home countries (Heinrich Heine) to authors primarily famous for their fiction (Lev Tolstoj). What unites the fourteen freestanding chapters is a shared animating idea: that this journalistic activity might serve as a sign of burgeoning modernity in Germany and Russia, nations late to the social, political, and technological advancements already underway in neighboring countries to the west.

Edited by Horst Pöttker, professor emeritus of journalism at the Technische Universität Dortmund, and Aleksandr Stan'ko, professor of journalism at Southern Federal University in Russia, the collection is the fruit of a long-standing multidisciplinary collaboration between scholars in both countries. "[T]he book," the editors explain in their foreword, "should bring German readers closer to nineteenth

century Russian culture, and Russian to German" (14). Indeed, intercultural understanding drives many aspects of the collection. This includes, most noticeably, its unusual bilingual format. Each article appears in both languages, the German version printed on the left side of every page, and Russian version on the right.

The impulse for outreach also means that readers new to nineteenth century Russian and German literature will gain the most from this volume, less so experts in one or both. The chapters serve as introductions to individual authors, and the methodology in play is primarily philological, combining biography digested from of longer works of secondary literature with brief textual analysis. As with all volumes of collected essays, *Mühen der Moderne* exhibits some unevenness in the depth between contributions. The chapters offering more sustained analysis of sample texts are the most satisfying to read, largely because they are able to better show the link between the featured author's journalistic contribution and the coming modern world. Of particular note are the chapters by coeditor Horst Pöttke—on Heinrich Heine and Georg Büchner—which are longer, argument-driven, and clearly speak to the collection's thesis.

If the broad sweep across one hundred years, fourteen authors, and two countries loses depth, it certainly gains horizon. The book as a whole provides a wide-angled view to various intersecting constellations of figures and publications, all advocating in their own way for the public sphere during a deeply undemocratic moment. A sense of common struggle comes across, in pointillist fashion, against repressive laws, heavy-handed censorship, arrest, and exile. Some of these figures moved in the same circles; Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne, and Karl Gutzkow, for instance, are all affiliated with the Young Germany movement. These Young Germans, and later others like Aleksandr Gercen and Georg Weerth, fled to London and Paris, inspired, and ultimately disappointed, by the revolutions of 1830 and 1848.

The volume also makes clear how often literary strategies served as political protection, especially for those who were unable, or chose not to leave their home countries. This aspect of the collection will no doubt be of most interest to literary journalism scholars. "Times of censor are times of camouflage," Gunter Reus points out in his piece on Kleist (48). Those who opted to openly use their polemical skills faced consequences, as plenty of anecdotes in the book show. Some are amusing, like Ludwig Börne's censor offering stylistic critique in addition to policing content. Some are heart wrenching; the idealistic and morally scrupulous Vladimir Korolenko spent years under constant arrest and banishment. Many learned to work around the censor by cloaking social and political critique in satire, historical narrative, pastiche, blends of fact and fiction, or by cloaking themselves in *noms de plume*. Especially diverting is Aleksandr Puškin's politically strategic use of fantasy, from pastiche to imagined conversations with the czar, as described by coeditor Stan'ko.

In this respect, although *Mühen der Moderne* was not conceptualized as a piece of literary journalism research, scholars in the field with reading knowledge of German or Russian will find this book to be a handy introductory guide to key players in nineteenth-century journalistic practice, and a useful springboard for detailed future study.

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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