

Note from the Editor...



Engage: to connect, to share, to rub shoulders. I'm having my Saturday morning cup of coffee and thinking how I might define the verb "engage." I put down the cup and reach for the closest dictionary at hand, *Webster's Seventh* (I know, dated, but closest at hand): One definition resonates: "to induce, to participate." Two synonyms: "involve, entangle."

What is impressed upon my mind is how much the verb "engage" is at the center of what literary journalism attempts to do—to engage, to involve, to entangle. And if, as suggested elsewhere, literary journalism is (among other things) about cultural revelation, then it is about engagement of the cultural, the social, the civic in their different colors, shades, degrees, and gradations. I especially like the synonym "involve" because it suggests another central quality to literary journalism. Alan Trachtenberg, in his discussion of Stephen Crane, identified that quality of the genre as the ability to *engage* "in an exchange of subjectivities," when contrasted with the mainstream models of journalism extant at the end of the nineteenth century and which dominated much of the twentieth, models that in their claims to "objectivity" objectified experience and alienated readers.

It is that sense of alienation that has contributed to the rise of the "civic journalism" movement in the United States (among other places) in recent years, the sense that readers and viewers were separated or alienated from the larger world out there that is the subject of journalism. Certainly there has been a response: Newspapers, for example, have created citizen focus groups. They invite citizen authors and journalists as regular contributors in an incremental evolution beyond the old-fashioned letters-to-the-editor sections of newspapers. And, they routinely offer blogs on their web sites in cyberspace where the citizenry can comment on issues of civic concern, much as did the good citizens who gathered in the *Forum Romanum* when news from the Senate was posted on the *alba* ("What's black and white and re[a]d all over?" goes the tired, worn out *Forum* joke. "The *alba*, of course"). The result, to be sure, was civic engagement in the discussions that followed while drinking a good cup of the best Falernian vintage, or perhaps some fine imported from Lesbos.

There are, of course, different ways to realize civic engagement in journalism—including in the discussions over wine or beer at the local tavern. But what has struck me across the years is how what has been missing from the discussion of civic journalism is the contribution literary journalism can make precisely because the genre's *sin qua non* is the attempt, however imperfect, to close the gap or distance between alienated subjectivities—even if the full exchange of subjectivities is ultimately impossible, a I have long insisted. At the least, one gains a better understanding or insight or empathy into those once alienated subjectivities so often consigned to the cultural Other.

6 *Literary Journalism Studies*

At last May's conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies in Brussels, John J. Pauly, provost at Marquette University in Milwaukee, but, more important, one of the pioneers of literary journalism studies, served as the keynote speaker. And it was the contribution literary journalism could make to civic engagement that was his theme. It is a discussion long overdue. Indeed, it is one Pauly has been making for years. But the civic journalism movement has been largely deaf to his entreaties. After his eloquent presentation, when we opened up for questions, I asked him why the civic journalism movement has long ignored the possibilities of what literary journalism can offer. A perplexed look spread across his face, along with a gentle if somewhat defeated smile, because it was something he, too, had long pondered, and, as he said, an issue he had long raised, and yet one to which the civic journalism movement has been largely blind.

Why? I'm back to my cup of coffee (although I wouldn't mind if it were some Falernian), as perplexed as Pauly by what should seem a natural for the civic journalism movement.

Something else strikes me: The journalism establishment has long been dominated by a professional group who believed that they were to be separate from their audience—that their professionalism required them to be separate in order to be judges—or make news judgments. That's why they have been described as “gatekeepers,” which distinguishes them from the non-gatekeepers. In other words, alienation is unquestioningly built into the professional ethos. I won't dispute that there can be advantages to this. But what are the liabilities? Much the same could be said of the scholars who advocate for civic journalism. After all, they are scholars who implicitly must separate themselves from their subject if they are to have suitable scholarly distance to weigh and evaluate. Thus, the alienation of the journalism profession and the scholars tends to be mutually reinforcing—Heaven forbid that they should be *engaged*, or *involved*, or *entangled* with the *hoi polloi* who gawk at but can't read the *alba*. That would be like exchanging bodily fluids resulting in morganatic offspring.

It seems to me that what's been missed from the civic journalism movement is what I have always found inherent to literary journalism. It is that the genre helps to reestablish what English cultural critic John Berger ably described as the “relation between teller, listener (spectator) and protagonist(s). . . .” Particularly missing is the relationship of the journalist-as-teller to the listener and the subjects or protagonists (in fairness, some advocates of civic journalism have advocated for the engagement of the journalist, but, and I may be wrong, I don't hear calls for a literary journalism which invites such engagement). This is where the integrity and power of literary journalism comes in. These derive, I think, from the arsenal of language as an aesthetic practice that literary journalists draw on in order to *engage* the subjectivities of reader and subject by means of the journalist's subjectivity. It is based on the fact, as Berger's observation implies, that to some degree we all have experiences we can share (the “common sense-appeal of the shared common senses,” I like to call it), even if we may have different interpretations of those experiences. It is here we can come together and understand each other better in an act of civic engagement.

These are the thoughts that Pauly's keynote address prompted in me as the discussion continued afterwards, courtesy of the wonderful—and delicious—hospitality

of the Université Libre de Bruxelles, and later at a delightful café where we gathered in the spring air to quaff rich Belgian ale (but no Falernian) as we considered the import of Professor Pauly's observations.

It is for these reasons that I decided his eloquent keynote address should be a part of this issue, so that readers could understand its implications. Accompanying it, too, is a thoughtful appreciation by Richard Lance Keeble of the University of Lincoln, U.K. and one of the leading (if not the leading) scholar of literary journalism studies in his country who has done so much in his volumes as editor and author to marshal greater recognition of the genre there. His insights remind us of the ends to which literary journalism is written—as both a journalism and as a literature seeking engagement of Other's subjectivities.

But there is a further consideration, I think, as I take another sip of coffee. I always find it remarkable when putting out this journal how themes emerge and coalesce. While looking at literary journalism through the critical prisms offered by Pauly and Keeble, I began to realize how they tie together the other contributions to this issue. This is by accident. But it serves as one measure of why the keynote in Brussels makes such a powerful contribution to the study of literary journalism. Take, for example, "The Underwater Narrative: Joan Didion's *Miami*," by Christopher P. Wilson of Boston College. After reading it, I realized that what he examines is how one civic engagement fails because of self-serving and self-protecting institutional rhetorics—in this case, not so much that of mainstream journalism although that is a part of it, but rather that of the *gobblegobble* of bureaucratise. This is what Didion with her usual acuteness of observation reveals in the culture clash between the Cuban community in Miami and the Anglo establishment in Washington, D.C. Then there is "Radio and Civic Courage in the Communications Circuit of John Hersey's 'Hiroshima'" by Kathy Roberts Forde and Matthew W. Ross of the University of South Carolina. Forde and Ross recover the lost memory of the role radio played in introducing the American people to Hersey's "Hiroshima" when it was first published in the *New Yorker* in August 1946, a year after the atom bombing of the Japanese city. Publication and radio's coverage of publication would prove a watershed event, one in which the American people first began to learn of the terrifying consequences of nuclear war, something the *gobblegobbles* of Washington would prefer Americans not know—after all, America was to be a charitable Christian nation. The roles Hersey, the *New Yorker*, and radio broadcasting played in informing the American people proved a signal act of civil engagement—and courage—as you will see when you read the article. Finally, but not least, "Making Overtures: Literature and Journalism, 1968 and 2011—A Dutch Perspective," by Thomas Vaessens of the University of Amsterdam, examines, one, why the leading Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* turned to novelists and other litterateurs to write journalism about the 2010 elections in that country, and, two, how the late Harry Mulisch of the 1960s and Arnon Grunberg of our contemporary period share much in common, but also reflect how literary values have shifted in the intervening years so that the literary today gains more credence by embracing journalism in the attempt to engage citizens in the civil polity. Hence, we have returned to civic engagement.

But, I leave it to readers to decide for themselves. Read the articles first, then Pauly's keynote, and Keeble's appreciation to see if you agree that one important critical prism through which to read and gage and engage literary journalism is through the prism of civic engagement. In that we have a civic journalism.

With that, my cup is drained.

Farewell, Tom

With considerable sadness I announce that Thomas B. Connery, our book review editor from the beginning, is leaving us. This is his last issue. As a colleague in more ways than one, Tom has been critical to the success of this journal. He stepped into a new enterprise when we began publishing in 2009 and immediately brought his considerable experience to bear, experience much needed. He was, after all, the former book review editor of *American Journalism*. Thus, he could rapidly bring the book review section up to speed. But as I mentioned, he is a colleague in more ways than one. Like John J. Pauly, Tom is one of the pioneers of the study of literary journalism. Indeed, my own work is hugely indebted to his *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism* (1992), a seminal work in the field. At a time when the genre was widely ignored by the academy, Tom demonstrated considerable courage (might we characterize it as a civic courage?) when he brought out his book. Scholars who engage in scholarship largely ignored by the academy take tremendous professional risks. Hence the courage.

I will miss Tom and he shares some parting words with us in the book review section. That said, I am pleased to say that he has assisted with his succession in identifying our next book review editor, Nancy Roberts of the University at Albany of the State University of New York. Nancy is an established scholar in her own right, one whose contributions to journalism history and literary journalism have long been acknowledged as exceptional. I look forward to working with her, and I know she will continue to build on the strong foundation that Tom established.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce that we have posted our inaugural bibliography of scholarship on literary journalism at the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies website: www.ialjs.org. This was a project we began in our last issue, to provide a clearing house for research and scholarship on the topic to readers. At the end of this issue, our associate editors for bibliography, Miles Maguire and Roberta Maguire of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, discuss the latest bibliographical developments, and provide their latest entries to the bibliography. These will be added to the online site in the near future.

Should anyone have contributions they believe are appropriate to the bibliography, I invite them to contact Miles and Roberta. Their contact information can be found at the end of their discussion, which starts on page 123.

— *John C. Hartsock*