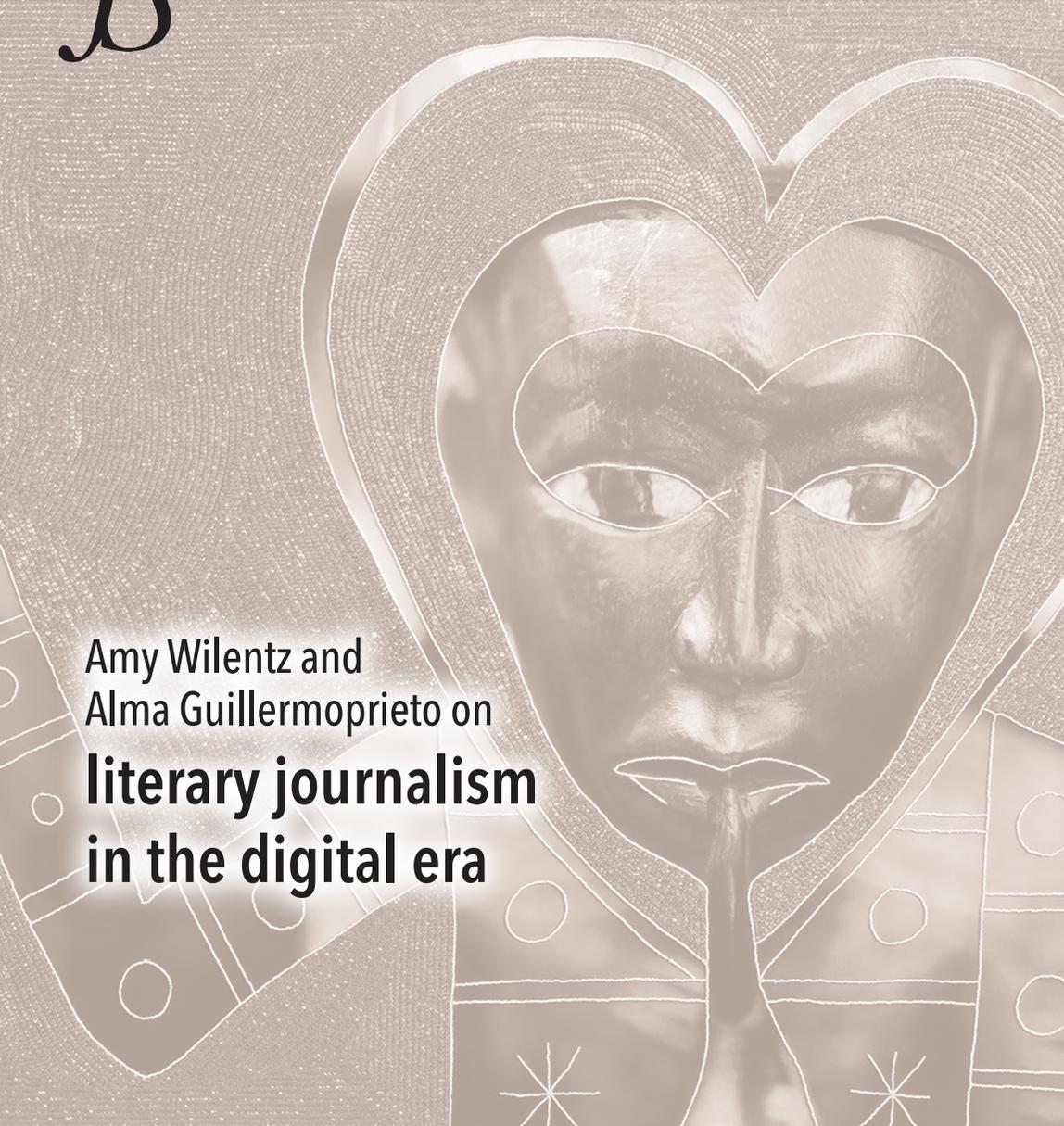


■ Charles Bowden, academic, beat reporter, literary journalist, 1945–2014 ■

# *Literary Journalism Studies*

Vol. 6, No. 2, Fall 2014



Amy Wilentz and  
Alma Guillermoprieto on  
**literary journalism  
in the digital era**

*The Journal of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies*

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Information for Contributors	4
Note from the Editor	5
<hr/>	
Charles Bowden's Anarcho-Biotic Poetics	
<i>by Martha Nandorfy</i>	8
The Role of the Literary Journalist in the Digital Era	
Keynote Address, IALJS-9, Paris	
<i>by Amy Wilentz</i>	32
Amy Wilentz, excerpt from <i>Farewell, Fred Voodoo</i>	
"Ghosts by Daylight"	44
Finding Emma Larkin	
<i>by Christopher P. Wilson</i>	50
"Just as I Am"? Marshall Frady's Making of Billy Graham"	
<i>by Doug Cumming</i>	76
Mapping Nonfiction Narrative: Towards a New Theoretical	
Approach to Analyzing Literary Journalism	
<i>by Fiona Giles and William Roberts</i>	102
SCHOLAR-PRACTITIONER Q+A	
Mileta Roe interviews Alma Guillermoprieto	120
BOOK REVIEWS	133
<hr/>	
Mission Statement	142
International Association for Literary Journalism Studies	143

2 *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 3,000 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 (50–100 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](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)>. All submissions will be blind reviewed. Send submissions to the editor at <[literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com](mailto:literaryjournalismstudies@gmail.com)>.

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**B**OOK 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](mailto:nroberts@albany.edu)>

## Note from the Editor...



This issue of *Literary Journalism Studies* marks a changing of the guard. John C. Hartsock, former editor of this journal, and author of the scholarly work *A History of American Literary Journalism*, has, after five-plus years of extraordinary service to our beloved field of study, moved on.

I have been entrusted with building on his venerable service. These are rather large shoes to fill, and I can only strive to continue his excellent work. The issue you are now holding in your hands (or reading online) will, I hope, be seen as a continuation of that excellent work.

We have some fascinating essays in this issue, ones that challenge and maybe widen the scope of literary journalism. Martha Nandorfy's essay on Charles Bowden was written, reviewed, revised, and readied for publication before the news broke of Bowden's shocking death on August 30 of this year. Bowden had become something of a growing study among literary journalism scholars in the IALJS. His method—which metamorphosed from telling horrific stories of American hubris in plain style to telling horrific stories in metaphorical realism, graduating in its final incarnation to an imagined meeting of the New Journalism and Magic Realism—is explored here.

We are also delighted to be able to publish Amy Wilentz's keynote address to the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies annual congress in May of this year. Wilentz's deep consideration of what it means to be a literary journalist in an era whose pace is altogether too fast for literary journalism is both sobering and valuable. Mileta Roe's interview with the great *New Yorker* writer Alma Guillermoprieto only reinforces this trepidation. We are also pleased to publish an excerpt from Wilentz's National Book Critics Circle Award-winning *Farewell, Fred Voodoo*.

We are also honored to have the opportunity to publish Christopher P. Wilson's essay on the ever-elusive Emma Larkin, his rumination on literary journalism, George Orwell, *Nineteen Eight-four*, and Burma all rolled into one. Wilson's article, by the way, was awarded best research paper at IALJS-9 in Paris.

A research piece that has been a long time in the works and now finished is Doug Cumming's assessment of the New Journalist Marshall Frady. Cumming's is a targeted work, focusing on Frady's elongated literary pursuit of the evangelist Billy Graham. Cumming ponders Frady's relation to his subject as he recounts Frady's elusive quest for a true version of the famous man's reality, and the consequences of getting (perhaps too) close to one's subject.

Finally, for those of you in the literary journalism universe who are inclined toward theory, I hope you find much to digest, and perhaps even argue with, in William Roberts and Fiona Giles's essay on classification in literary journalism. What Norman Sims has often called taxonomy is still very much at issue in some quarters, and Roberts and Giles, in their ingenious update of David Eason's early literary journalism work from the 1980s, will I'm sure spur a new round of debate over classification.

As mentioned above, Mileta Rose graciously interviewed Alma Guillermoprieto for *LJS* in what I hope will be a continuing series of scholar-practitioner interviews.

Happy reading.

*Bill Reynolds*

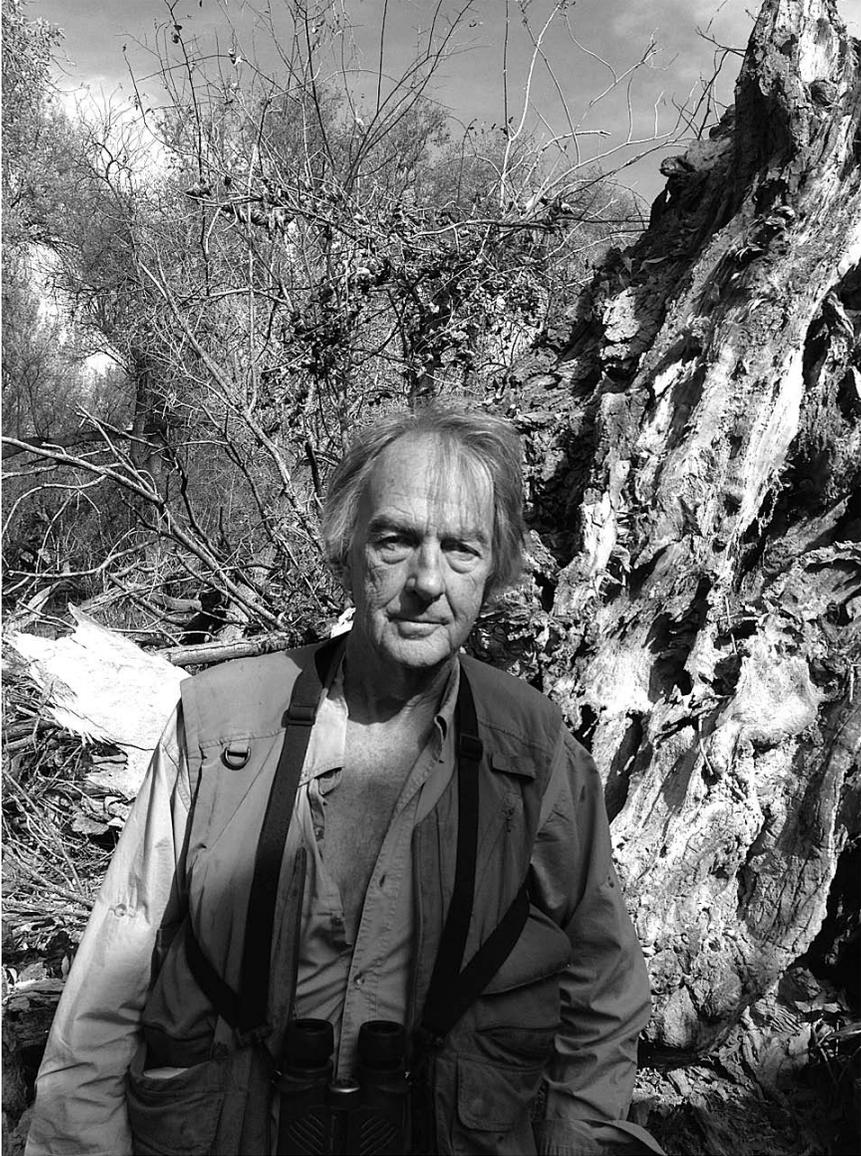


Photo by Molly Molloy

# Charles Bowden's Anarcho-Biotic Poetics

Martha Nandorfy  
University of Guelph, Canada

**Abstract:** Charles Bowden's literary journalism thrives on the traces of stories buried in the desert he walks as sacred text. His connection to the desert and the Sunbelt in the United States is a paradox of despair and hope. Bowden rejects theories and calls for imagination as a poetic and performative deconstruction of Western abyssal thinking. His poetics signal the limits of language and reason and cultivate instead an intimate testimony about his suffering and ecstatic body dragging itself along the earth's body in non-Christian communion. This paper explores how through Bowden's self-representation he bears witness in accordance with the indigenous principle of nonjudgmental storytelling. His literary persona as the solitary anarchist without a tribe expresses a type of *nepantla* consciousness, and enacts transcultural visions about how stories determine who we are and where we are heading. His solitary end-of-the-world ethics envisions apocalyptic retribution to the "staying land," but Bowden's world-turned-upside-down is seen through the gaze of a fragmented and deracinated self, whose distrust of community pushes him not to cynicism but to radical association with the nonhuman. Much of Bowden's writing is closer to poetry than to journalism and is informed by a sense of justice that is posthumanist and too radical to be called environmentalist, since that term separates the one who utters it from the land. Bowden's elaboration of contradiction moves from the disorderly fashion he ascribes to his early writing in *Blue Desert* (1986) toward contradiction as desert, abyss as foundation, and paradox as truth.

The literary journalism of Charles Bowden (who died at age sixty-nine on August 30, 2014), thrives on the traces of stories buried in the desert he walks as sacred text throughout his work from *Blue Desert* (1986) to the recent trilogy comprising *Inferno*, *Exodus*, and *Trinity* (2006–09). These stories are the testaments of those who have fallen, many of them Mexican, during their attempts to cross the border. Other stories are pre-Colombian,

dating back over 2,000 years, when ancient tribes that belonged in the desert perhaps died less violent deaths, until the genocide began. Bowden's walking becomes a form of bearing witness to the deaths of individuals and entire cultures. "The night," he says "the delicious night, denies such stories. The night insists on beauty. But we hurt. Our bodies whisper: Yes, the stories are here."<sup>1</sup> These telegraphically terse lines express the nucleus of his affective thinking. He constantly affirms beauty, especially in wild places (on the land and in the imagination) but also our suffering, and how we must face it instead of anesthetizing ourselves, how the body, not the rational mind, holds some fundamental insights, and that in human culture these insights are storied.

The sheer number of Bowden's books, some of them collaborations with photographers, artists, and other writers, not to mention essays and articles—would suggest that he must repeat himself or at least revisit the same themes often. Yet in each text he selects a new and fascinating cast of characters whose stories he interweaves with his own in a recombinant poetics of endless possibilities. And while Bowden's voice and affect are immediately recognizable, his method of telling others' stories makes them unique in how they ring true. It is impossible to do justice to this prodigious oeuvre here, and so I have decided to leave aside texts about drug trafficking and migration, and instead to focus on a manageable selection for examining Bowden's poetics and post- or even antihumanism.<sup>2</sup> A consideration for us as literary critics and theorists is to respond to Bowden's work with the respect he infuses into telling others' stories. My challenge is to perform a reading of his work worth sharing, and that doesn't betray his conviction that the truth cannot be captured in theory but only through the senses. So my orientation through his texts follows Bowden's feelings about how to live fully in a culture of death.<sup>3</sup> This sounds like my theme is the ethical thrust of Bowden's writing but his poetics are wary of abstract and universal discourses like those of ethics, and much more expressive of the thrust:

I want something very simple: to be that mesquite root found alive at one hundred and seventy-eight feet in hard rock, a root shaped like a cock and probing for a wet place, or shaped like a finger on a mother's hand and reaching out to touch the face of love, a throbbing hungry thing pulsing and coursing onward without a care but with a purpose and that purpose may be no more than its own appetite but still that is something.<sup>34</sup>

To delve into Henri Bergson's *élan vital* would be tangential even if the French philosopher's musings on the mysterious life force seem relevant to Bowden's consistent but perennially surprising expressions of creative energy. What fascinates me is how *élan* fuels Bowden in a human world that he sees as death-driven and essentially deadening. How does he draw inspiration and

wisdom from sheer life force, and how does he assume a stance with ethical implications based on those gut feelings? In other words, how does his writing connect ideas, emotions, and ethics, or in Aristotle's rhetoric *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*? To relate any philosophy of consciousness or knowledge to Bowden's work, even Nietzsche's disavowal of logic and morality, would do violence to Bowden's mode of representation, since he claims closer kinship with animals and plants than with humans. In another instance at the beginning of *Blues for Cannibals* he identifies with the mesquite: "I am the tree struggling in the hot ground of my desert," and goes on to reject any messages from on high, insisting that "[T]he messages must come from here, from the ground itself,"<sup>5</sup> leading toward a kind of acceptance of the earth and its conditions that few European philosophers have entertained: "But we can accept the storm, the pitiless sun, the rot and then the dust. And we don't ask why, this is our wisdom, or at least the wisdom of my brother the mesquite and the one I reach toward every dusk and every dawn and sometimes in the blink of midnight."<sup>6</sup> Bowden refuses to constrain fleeting insights by fixing them in a system arrogantly or naively thought to withstand the passing of time. This is one of the reasons that despite the recognizable textures of his language, his ideas roam freely and are not restricted by the fear of contradiction.

What strikes me most about Bowden's nonfiction is how much more consistently poetic, creative, and speculative it is than most fiction I read. So another important component of my reading will focus on his language and how he struggles to give expression to the horror and the beauty he perceives. "In my travels toward other bloods I have simply learned how feeble my perceptions are."<sup>7</sup> Sight, the commonly privileged sense—"seeing is believing"—is often usurped by touch, taste, and smell in Bowden's experience. "Imagine this: a world of tongues and caresses, a constant touching of the genitals, a world hidden like the planet Venus from common view by the clouds of scents streaming off our desires, a world obscene with appetite and orgasm and strong spices and drenched chilies."<sup>8</sup> It follows that instead of thinking about the world in a cerebral way, Bowden searches by walking the land that is both body and text, an insight that he shares with individuals who tell him similarly inflected stories: "His people once believed the trees and shrubs were hair, the rock and mountains bone, the streams blood, and the wind the earth breathing. Some of the old people still do."<sup>9</sup> Walking along songlines and dreaming-tracks on the earth conceived as a living being recalls the Australian Aboriginal praxis of the walkabout, and there are similar beliefs and practices in the American Southwest. "[T]he nomadic Chemehuevi navigated wide expanses of this arid terrain with songs. The songs gave the names of places in geographical order, and the place names were descriptive,

evocative, so that a person who'd never been to a place might recognize it from the song. . . . A song was the length of the night and a map of the world, and the arid terrain around Las Vegas was the Storied Land of the great myths."<sup>10</sup>

In another Southwestern reference, Rebecca Solnit cites Jaime de Angulo's reflections on what the Pit River Indians meant by "wandering": "It would seem that under certain conditions of mental stress an individual finds life in his accustomed surroundings too hard to bear. Such a man starts to wander. He goes about the country, traveling aimlessly. . . . He will not make any outward show of grief, sorrow or worry. . . . The wanderer, man or woman, shuns camps and villages, remains in wild, lonely places."<sup>11</sup> Solnit goes on to relate this form of despair to "the desire for what Buddhists call unbeing. . . . It's not about being lost but about trying to lose yourself."<sup>12</sup> While at times Bowden's hiking through the desert recalls this form of despair and desire, he also mentions another kind of quest: "I travel a lot, and when I travel I tell people it is for a story, but what I am really looking for is love. Not a woman for myself, but love on the faces of people and in their gait and in the smooth joy of their speech. I travel in the true desert. The Sahara, I believe, has more water than the modern world has love."<sup>13</sup> Bowden's walking the desert in *Blue Desert* or *Inferno* diverges from this loving affirmation of humanity fueling his travels in *Blues for Cannibals*, making it fruitless to generalize in order to theorize his impulses.

Bowden might reject my assertion that he walks the desert as sacred text, together with any suggestion that his hiking enacts a spiritual ritual, only because he is suspicious of all holistic concepts, whether attributed to God or humanly constructed to comfort us. On the other hand, in *Trinity* he describes his expedition into the desert as "part of an expedition into myself and out of my life, one that would take me to the sacred ground."<sup>14</sup> A fellow critic expresses the spirituality of wild men in the desert with the same reservation I feel, but does so nonetheless in his comparative study of Bill Broyles, Bowden, and Edward Abbey: "[T]he three resonate to the same, dare I say, mystical desert vibrations."<sup>15</sup> In a rare and enigmatic reference to a collective identity signaled by the first-person plural, Bowden rejects collectively organized ritual yet suggests a kind of collective will for love over hate:

We are not druids here or pantheists or fairies in a sylvan whirl of velvet and chimes. True, we sing, we have our song. But no chants, never chants. Or ceremonies. We are not of the peaceable kingdom here, and we have little peace. We contain a great deal of anger and even more of violence, the hand reaches out at all hours for the throat. We wait for the moment to strike back and yet we struggle, struggle each and every second, to still that hand, to open that fist into a warm palm and caress the face. To not reach for that gun.<sup>16</sup>

How much more nuanced is this struggle than Nietzsche's declaration of himself and those like him as superior free spirits motivated by the will to power. Bowden avoids summing up his ideas into a theory of human nature and development, which would mean de-poeticizing them. His poetics enact paradox and thereby avoid the pitfalls of philosophical discourse intent on speaking a universal truth inevitably fraught with internal and blind contradictions. Clearly influenced by his friend Edward Abbey, Bowden reworks some of his themes and images but also pushes them further away from the contradictions inherent in reason. In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey, too, speaks of mysticism and paradox: "To meet God or Medusa face to face, even if it means risking everything human in myself. I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a non-human world and yet somehow survives still intact, individual, separate. Paradox and bedrock."<sup>17</sup>

Together with Bowden's rejection of belonging to a group held together by shared ideology and ritual, he rejects language, the medium that most binds a people to each other and the individual to a preconceived reality. Though of course for a writer this is impossible and so like many twentieth-century poets, Bowden engages in relentlessly inventive play to free language from logic. The history of the Greek word "logos" demonstrates above all else the mutability of its meaning. But in postmodern usage, especially influenced by Derrida's critique of Indo-European languages, we tend to relate the term "logos" to the symbiotic relationship between those specific languages and logic:

For Aristotle, *logos* is something more refined than the capacity to make private feelings public: it enables the human being to perform as no other animal can; it makes it possible for him to perceive and make clear to others through reasoned discourse the difference between what is advantageous and what is harmful, between what is just and what is unjust, and between what is good and what is evil.<sup>18</sup>

This concept, like so many in Western epistemology, is based on a hierarchy of being and the compulsive need to assert the superiority of humans over other life-forms, on the basis of our ability to reason (and the unfounded assumption that animals lack this ability). This is also the understanding of humans' relationship to the world that Bowden most vigorously ridicules and denounces. His challenge is to do so from outside of reason, and to some extent, from outside of language, which is an odd goal for a writer best known as a journalist. Bowden opens *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing* with this conundrum: "Names don't help me much anymore. They belong to that time when everything was kept in its place. Before the winds came up and the water came up and licked the land away, this land is your land, this land is

my land, this land is gone.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, he admits, “[B]ut words are all I have, my skills are limited and the words at best are a veil, maybe a shroud, between us and this world we touch but cannot embrace, a ball of dirt we stand on but never can really know.”<sup>20</sup> Without reducing good and evil to philosophical abstractions, Bowden’s deep ecology identifies human supremacy as the root of the worst injustices against the biotic, that is, the complete world: “We cannot say this thing about people, that there are too many of us and not enough of everything else.”<sup>21</sup> How many introductory philosophy courses and even lectures by eminent philosophers start with the assertion that humans are superior to other animals on the basis of language, morality, and knowledge? Bowden shows the disastrous consequences of this supremacist thinking and rejects its very basis, not through rational argument but through his lust for other life-forms, other bloods. However, true to his avowal of contradiction, instead of chastising humans for being out of balance, he questions whether we can or should curb our appetites. In *Inferno*, Bowden returns continually to attack the concept of balance, and goes so far as to question if humans really belong to the earth “because our hearts are too large and hungry for this ground.”<sup>22</sup> He speculates that our voracious appetites are part of our very nature and that the real problem lies in separating our nature from Nature, which we bracket off to idealize and exploit. He makes a subtle distinction between the appetite to possess things and the appetite to feel things but, though this distinction would be central and crucial to any ethical argument, he chooses to enact the feeling rather than pursue the logic required by argument.<sup>23</sup> He mocks the new environmentalist mantra: “Balance, that is the key, and let’s sing a little of that harmony like those monkish fools safe in their choirs, spared the madness of the whiskey, the power, and the tits. . . . There is this eternal thing, we insist on its existence and it is nature and it is pure and it never has sagging breasts and the hunger in the bones for just one more taste from the needle.”<sup>24</sup>

Bowden’s beyond-good-and-evil is rooted in his recognition of both the otherness of animals and his desire “to meld with beasts,”<sup>25</sup> which is very different from simply liking them or being concerned about their welfare. Contemplating snakes, Bowden states “[W]ords like *good* and *evil* and *fear* and *doubt* seem nothing to them. I cannot imagine a snake wondering about the word *yes*.”<sup>26</sup> In another instance, Bowden recalls his first crayon drawing as a child: a worm thinking about a man, a crafty act of sacred cow tipping.<sup>27</sup> As is more common in poetry, Bowden shrinks the distance between word and reality, and furthermore, he does not bar animals from language but instead imagines them enacting a language of immediacy that does not substitute names for objects: “I am part of a species where many find it forbidden

to cross religious lines. Or race lines. I want to cross bloodlines. I want to risk my life for another organism, to shed my culture and join another culture, to meld with beasts, to destroy the notion of parks and zoos and reserves and flow in a river of blood off some Niagara and be pounded into another life."<sup>28</sup> Of the rattlesnake that frequents Bowden's porch, he says, "[S]he is incapable of evil,"<sup>29</sup> yet he says about elephants, "I like the fact that they are capable of crime,"<sup>30</sup> and enjoys imagining the elephant stomping people to death: "I am attracted to these thoughts."<sup>31</sup> This difference between how he perceives the rattlesnake's serenity and the elephant's rage and need for freedom exemplifies Bowden's refusal to generalize about animals or anything else in the name of knowledge or truth or justice.

One fundamental aspect of the genre sometimes called (unimaginatively) New New Journalism, or literary, creative, and speculative journalism, is the practice of immersing oneself in the situations of which one writes subjectively. But in Bowden's case, this immersion relates not only to the dictates of investigative reporting, but even more to enacting his corporeal presence as embodied voice, becoming disembodied voice in *Inferno*. Bowden embodies and enacts the principle of contradiction (suggestively pushed back to the etymology of that term: *contra* or against diction, discourse, reasoned argument). In his introduction to *Blue Desert*, paradoxically entitled "Coordinates of Blue Desert," Bowden situates himself on slippery terrain, "My home is a web of dreams," and continues to ground his storytelling in his own being: "This book proceeds, much the way I do, in a disorderly, relentless fashion. It is fat with contradictions but sounds one steady note: the land."<sup>32</sup> Particularly when not reporting on specific crimes, like drug trafficking and its attendant murders, Bowden relinquishes language informed by a sense of being a participant in shared institutionalized discourses. At times his halting voice seems that of an aphasic child or even an extraterrestrial anthropologist surveying this bizarre world for the first time. This voice enacts the principle of nonjudgment: "You can see a war out there, or you can see a friendly place. Or you can simply see and skip the words."<sup>33</sup> Nonjudgment should not be confused with being neutral or sitting on the fence, however. Bowden sees things in ways that disorients the reader's comfort, thereby allowing us to interpret and experience for ourselves. More radical than the *ostranenie*, or defamiliarization, theorized by the Russian Formalists as an artistic technique, Bowden's defamiliarizing perception strives toward another consciousness. "[D]esire reaches past thought and escapes its strangling hold. . . . Still, there linger moments of reaching and acting not so much without a thought as without the constraint of thought. . . . I slither on the ground following the snake, and I see everything with fresh eyes."<sup>34</sup> The following passage dealing

with the ravages of economic globalization in the global South demonstrates how this alien perspective interrupts logical reasoning and the conventions of investigative reporting:

It hardly matters where this place is because it is so many places now. The spices vary, the weather also. But it is a city and it keeps growing and there is no work and no one really believes there will be work. They just live here after a fashion.

There are programs, policies, plans, meetings, slogans, marches, and lots of things to drink out of bottles. The revolution has arrived here and its color is red.<sup>35</sup>

Here he doesn't name such forces as globalization, which would automatically be associated with a kind of sociological or political discourse, in the sense that Foucault uses the term "discourse" as institutionalized language even if it is the counter-hegemonic discourse of antiglobalization. In other instances, though, Bowden offers a rigorous analysis of global economics, showing once again the diversity of his arsenal, the aphasic child's voice suddenly turning to shrewd political commentary reminiscent of Noam Chomsky:

And yet the very nature of states now makes disintegration inevitable. To tick off the forces is easy. One, as the economies go global, capital ceases to respond to local control or desires. Two, as the populations continue to grow, economic growth becomes essential for the state because only jobs and food and shelter can in the end preserve them from their nominal subjects. And three, the global economy creates structural unemployment—meaning permanent elimination of jobs as opposed to cyclical ups and downs—because global corporations seek automation, low wages and fewer workers creating more profits.<sup>36</sup>

In *Blues for Cannibals*, Bowden playfully interjects stories he gathers about Native Americans seemingly to destabilize his own use of analytical discourse. He graphically sections off the following paragraph, once again inverting epistemological hierarchies this time through tongue-in-cheek factual accounting without comment: "We are in the heart of spring now. One day a ring appears around the sun and instantly the Mexican newspaper reassures its readers. It interviews scientists who explain it is caused by particles of freezing water in the atmosphere and is perfectly natural and portends nothing, nothing at all. It does not mean the end of the world, nor does it herald a series of calamities."<sup>37</sup> The practice of citing, in this case obliquely, the beliefs of other cultures demonstrates the kind of deep respect for difference championed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in his call for transcultural thinking inclusive of indigenous knowledges: "As a post-abysal epistemol-

ogy, the ecology of knowledges, while forging credibility for non-scientific knowledge, does not imply discrediting scientific knowledge. It simply implies its counter-hegemonic use.”<sup>38</sup> Bowden’s ironic inclusion of prophetic vision denied by scientific experts enacts this very tension between dominant Western epistemology and its dismissal of indigenous beliefs as unfounded superstition. The irony of the Mexican newspaper denying “a series of calamities” lies in its absurd contradiction of newspapers daily reporting undeniable series of calamities.

The enactment of altered states of consciousness through defamiliarizing speech necessarily implicates the speaker’s identity. Since ethos (Greek for “character”) is considered to be an essential component and distinguishing feature of literary and speculative journalism, it becomes an especially interesting problem of self-representation. Given that Bowden and many other literary journalists limit persuading the reader through reasoning and strictly empirical data, their persona becomes all the more important in conveying integrity and credibility. The situatedness of this kind of writing does not refer only to immersion in a particular locale, but also to the speaking subject’s identity. It is common practice for these journalists to interweave bits of memoir writing in order to give a sense of what makes them tick, what about their past relates to their convictions and passion to write about the present and even prophesy the future. Bowden does this in each one of his works by remembering some childhood experience, however vague and explicitly mythologized. In the preface to *Blood Orchid*, he imbues a quote from Albert Camus with just this kind of power: “A person’s life purpose is nothing more than to rediscover, through the detours of art, or love, or passionate work, those one or two images in the presence of which his heart first opened.”<sup>39</sup>

In *Blue Desert*, Bowden rebels against being known as Captain Death for his newspaper coverage of homicides and counters the imposition of this dark identity by conjuring up a childhood vision of a pastoral idyll:

I like to remember being a boy on that Illinois farm and I am holding a cane pole down by the creek and the fish are jumping. The sun skips off the quiet pools of water and the air comes fresh from Eden. Up by the house the old man and his cronies are drinking beer from quart bottles, the Holsteins graze and cool spring water skims across the limestone floor of the milk house. And I am in the sun, and this is what I want and who I am.<sup>40</sup>

The affirmation “this is what I want and who I am” defies logical explanation other than associating desire and being with serene existence on the land. In *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing*, Bowden reconfigures this same memory giving it a dark edge caused by war and a changing way of life that forces people off the land to become dependent on systems and authorities;

“[T]he men broken but held together by bottles, the ocean whispering from the sawed-off cannon shells, the fabric of life unraveling before me and yet caressing my face. That is the floor of my optimism, all from a room and afternoon and time that was vanishing as fast as I swallowed it.”<sup>41</sup> By the end of this book, Bowden further demythologizes the idyllic childhood memory, the stream of consciousness resonating with the tune of Gershwin’s “Summertime”: “[A]nd the drinking is heavy and my daddy is rich and he’s gone all the time and my momma’s good-looking and she’s cooking like a slave and men are drinking because they are all scared.”<sup>42</sup> The fear and violence do not, however, preclude Bowden’s optimism grounded in the childhood scents and sights before rational understanding. The land and the caressing of his face simply trump all idiocy, lunacy, and despair.

Bowden elaborates on these memories—the floor of his optimism—connecting childhood consciousness to his sense of adventure and deep attraction to animals: “Dogs first beckoned me into the kingdom of other bloods.”<sup>43</sup> And: “The dog slips away in the brush. The future is disappearing with the dog’s ass, and I scramble, a boy of six or seven, possibly eight. Dead leaves and broken twigs litter the ground, a wet rank odor rises. In my head I am free and have no dream beyond being the dog and being the forest. Everything is in the moment.”<sup>44</sup> This sensorial basis of all experience sparks and feeds Bowden’s radical biotic imagination that surpasses all thinking, whether skeptical or utopian. The opacity of otherness, the unknowable yet physically graspable, forms the very basis of being in Bowden’s experience. “The first dog was named Dick. Right now I can smell his fur, the tongue licking my two-year-old face. I never knew what he was thinking. That much the dogs have given me.”<sup>45</sup> The dog as mediator to other bloods expresses an unknowable life force whose message is to forge ahead but always sensually integrated in the biotic world.

Always mindful not to pillage Native cultures, Bowden instead quotes people, even if in brief passing and anonymity. In one such instance, he refers to an unnamed man obliquely identified as “standing out in front of the tribal gambling hall at seven a.m. smoking,” remembering that “in his language, the word *ni*’ has two meanings: Mind. And Land.”<sup>46</sup> In Bowden’s poetics this unity would be: Body. And Land. He says, “My touchstones always seem to be of the flesh. And on my tongue.”<sup>47</sup> I suspect that for Bowden, “mind” has been hijacked by the Western thinking he associates with theories, always secretly in service of yet more exploitation. This rejection of the Western mind leads Bowden to praxis (practice and a form of knowledge) rooted in the body. He remembers his earlier work, *Killing the Hidden Waters*, undertaken in a research institute “amid heaps of reports, elegant graphs, and

piles of computer printout,” after which he came to the conclusion that he did not believe the numbers. So he takes another route to a different kind of knowledge:

I went walking—walking mountains, walking bajadas, walking deserts, walking with scientists, walking with Indians and most often walking alone. *I learned with my feet* what the books, reports, symposiums, commission conclusions, and studies skirted: that resources are limited and that technology, invention, and industrial voodoo cannot increase the amount of a resource but simply accelerate the destruction of a resource through consumption. The well does not make water; it mines water [my emphasis].<sup>48</sup>

Bowden’s poetics ground him, literally, through his feet to the land on which he nevertheless feels himself to be an intruder. In one instance, he follows the trail of the ancient Hohokam, making comparative observations between past and present, indigenous and invader cultures, but his wording subtly prophesies the return of the extinguished:

The people passed this way seeking visions and dreams and the shells became a door opening up the secret regions of their heads. Southwestern cultures once had many such journeys—salt journeys, eagle killings, shell journeys—all ventures leading to places off the map but deep in the country of the heart. This is a game almost no one plays anymore. But then the world that risked such journeys has been *temporarily* obliterated [my emphasis].<sup>49</sup>

Linear time and its teleological concept of history as human development are debunked by Bowden, even as he excludes himself from the prophesied return of a world currently extinct. Given his outsider status, he contemplates the ancient monuments as “a message sent that I will never receive.”<sup>50</sup> In this instance of identifying himself as Euroamerican, he contemplates the distance between this cultural legacy and his yearning for what Australian Aboriginals call a belonging place: “I know no desert language. I am the interloper, the refugee, the tourist, the present that denies the past. I speak a tongue forged on another continent, one rich with words spawned in green forests under gray, soggy skies. I do not belong here. I just have these longings.”<sup>51</sup> And yet, on another trip to a bat cave, Bowden experiences a connection so strong that it bridges human and animal worlds completely—“We stand inside a brief island of life, a hiding place of our blood kin”<sup>52</sup>—justifying his use of the word “holocaust” to describe the ongoing extinction of the bats due to pesticide use.<sup>53</sup>

Bowden’s literary persona as the solitary anarchist without a tribe who nevertheless feels kinship ties with bats and snakes expresses a type of radical *nepantla* consciousness, and enacts transcultural visions about how stories determine who we are and where we are heading.<sup>54</sup> “I speak for the mongrel,

the mestizo, the half-breed, the bastard, the alley cat, the cur, the hybrid, the mule, the whore, the unforeseen strain that pounds against all the safe and disgusting doors. I speak for vitality, rough edges, torn fences, broken walls, wild rivers, sweat-soaked sheets.”<sup>55</sup> While from the perspective of identity politics, one might question Bowden’s right to speak for mestizos and half-breeds, from his obvious conviction to represent minoritized characters in ways that are complex, empathetic, and truthful, another kind of question follows: how often does the charge of appropriation come from a puritanical and essentializing position, and even covers up for a lack of interest in the other and a lack of solidarity? Ironically, despite the categorical “I speak for,” Bowden never really does this but instead interweaves each character’s voice and story judiciously and in a nonjudgmental way. His solitary end-of-the-world ethics both contrast and resonate with an indigenous in-between yet communal sense of identity. Bowden and such Native storytellers as Leslie Marmon Silko and Australian Aboriginal Alexis Wright all envision apocalyptic retribution to the “staying earth,” but while most Native storytellers overtly draw from a vast and rich repertoire of collective stories generative of a coherent belief system, Bowden’s world-turned-upside-down is seen through the gaze of a fragmented and deracinated self, whose distrust of community pushes him not to cynicism but to radical association with the nonhuman. In the chapter titled simply “Serpent” in *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing*, Bowden states his position in characteristically concrete yet paradoxical terms. Each verse opens with the first-person pronoun, sign of identity and individuation, both a place of possibility and a prison from which to escape:

I have never believed in a hierarchy of being, with complex organisms up in the tower room and less complex organisms toiling in the fields.

I have never trusted the word *I*.

I have never felt comfortable with the word *nature*.

That is why I have come to snakes.

I want in.<sup>56</sup>

These simple lines once again reject the basic Western philosophical principle of human supremacy, a rejection cleverly worded to link that arrogance with the feudal or capitalistic exploitation of the poor by the elites. Bowden enacts paradox in haiku fashion by casting doubt on the word *I* despite beginning all four lines with it. And in the last line, he succinctly critiques Western thinking’s separation of human from the biotic community (inclusive of such blood kin as bats and snakes). Even in his more journalistic

writings, like *Murder City*, Bowden consistently interrupts prose narrative with verse, forcing the reader to shift gears, to slow down and contemplate the words set apart by versification on a different temporal plane. In the midst of the spreading violence that permeates Juárez, seemingly on the road to hell with no return, Bowden interjects optimism that can only be understood as coming from that floor of childhood that insists instinctively and unflaggingly on life. The clash between what is and what the best in us can imagine is graphically differentiated on the page in the transition from prose to verse:

The city now is murder, extortion, arson, kidnapping, rape, robbery, car theft, and the sweet haze of drugs and alcohol. The temperature bumps one hundred ten, but the marijuana and the cocaine and the heroin and the cold beers save the human heart from the human violence.

I see no problem.

I see a future.

I see the way things will be here now and the way things will be where you live in good time.

I see a city where basic institutions erode and then burn or die, and yet in the morning, my fellow human beings get up, smell the coffee, and continue on with their lives.<sup>57</sup>

As in the previous quote, both transitions to verse from prose also insist on the integrity of the speaking subject to own what he states. In this latter example, Bowden's insistent "I" and the repeated "see" fuse bearing witness to the horrors of violence with seeing beyond it through some inner and clairvoyant I/eye. This obsession with searching for truth and concrete evidence to vindicate the victims of a world controlled by blood money likely compels Bowden to flee to the desert.

These frequent forays into the desert, together with Bowden's predilection for epigraphs drawn from the Bible, suggest parallels with the temptation of Christ in the desert: "[F]orty days and nights and not a single word. Just those damn bones that keep singing. And four rules. That is all I can come up with. Obedience is another matter altogether. I have never been good at this obedience."<sup>58</sup> However, Bowden's stark lyricism grounds all values in bodies instead of transcendental ideals. He swigs whisky after hiking all day, and is continually brewing espresso; when receiving a woman in his desert abode, the lovemaking he describes bears comparison with nature films on animal mating habits. This he acknowledges fully and humorously, "Love, I know, is essential if death is to be put in its place, and it has a place, but love is es-

sential even if I do not know the words that give it flesh and scent. That is why we find it so difficult to write about sex. Not because we are so inhibited and prudish but because when we write about sex, we get acts and organs, a breast, a vagina, a cock, juices, tongues and thrusts—and wind up with recipes but no food.”<sup>59</sup>

Nothing he experiences in the desert is represented as a temptation to resist. Instead, Bowden enacts being a desiring machine with a voracious appetite. In his book *Desierto*, he likens himself to a man who has been drinking since noon and who “lives in one completed room like a monk in a cell,” noting “I know the hunger. I can sense our sameness: the whole world is sexual to us, down to the very last stone.”<sup>60</sup> His orientation might be called omnisexual, or in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms nonhuman, molecular sexuality.<sup>61</sup> Contemplating a waitress at a casino where he is attending a conference on the plight of desert tortoises, he expresses his desire across biotic lines: “[T]he cocktail waitress brings me another drink—this time a scotch. I feel expansive. She has great legs, long firm stems sketched by the black net stockings. I want the river, the bear, the tortoise, and those legs.”<sup>62</sup> On the one hand, the fragmentation of the woman’s body here begs for feminist critique, yet Bowden’s fragmentation of himself and of his perceptions mimics some other life-form that is not easy to accuse of male entitlement. Strangely, the woman’s legs are valorized as belonging to the elemental things for which Bowden longs. That said, the desiring machine’s fetishes somewhat limit the representation of women, strangely equating such sexualized markers of femininity as stiletto heels, push-up bras, and make-up with freedom through sensuality. Environmentalists are repeatedly characterized as sorely lacking in this regard, as if only dogmatic puritans could possibly forego these trappings. Bowden’s preference for a certain look limits his representation of women in instances when they are reduced to abstract signs of his lust for life.

Whenever I teach this text, students criticize how Bowden’s gaze objectifies women’s bodies, yet I have the uncanny feeling that Bowden’s gaze is like a snake’s flicking tongue. In *Inferno*, after quoting God’s punishment of the serpent, condemned to go upon its belly and to eat dust, Bowden muses: “Imagine no knife, no fork. The tongue split and no hands to help you grab the roast. I want to eat the dirt and lick the rock. I am loyal if nothing else.”<sup>63</sup> His loyalty is to the snake, not God.<sup>64</sup> The biblical epigraph with which he opens *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing*—“Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat”<sup>65</sup>—is explained by Bowden but rejected together with obedience to God: “In the Old Testament, the laws insist we must not drink blood. . . . I swallow the blood,

all the bloods. / I am that outlaw, the one crossing borders. / The earlier time is over.”<sup>66</sup> There is no name for this brand of anarchism since it exceeds human society, and yet it is an anarchistic impulse pushed to the limits of human experience, desire, and love.

Much of Bowden’s writing is closer to poetry than to journalism and is informed by a sense of justice that is posthumanist and too radical to be called environmentalist, since that term separates the one who utters it from the land. His representation of nonhuman life-forms as having intrinsic worth regardless of use-value to humans is consistent with the tenets of deep ecology. Yet, he also gets things done. To facilitate his dealings with people in power, he forges a public persona derived from a theatrical understanding of the human world. Specific performances take place on sets, and people are players—slipping into roles that come with appropriate costumes and props—in a constantly changing game. He opens *Inferno* with a humble explanation of what he achieves in this role-playing game and also how it sullies him:

So with a bunch of other souls, I was suddenly in cahoots with the Secretary of the Interior and various faces of the faceless bureaucracies. I wanted around five thousand square miles. In the dying breaths of that administration, the effort resulted in close to a half million acres of my desert being born again as a national monument.

I would come home at night during that period with the sensation of a coal miner endlessly scrubbing to get rid of the grime.<sup>67</sup>

“My desert” he calls this place to which he doesn’t belong. But then in *Inferno* Bowden finds the poetic resolution to this paradox of not belonging yet longing. The feminized desert is experienced as the foundation of life, though the land is paradoxically characterized by negation, much like the ancient Hebrew concept of *tehom*, the abyss of nothingness from which all life emerges. “She says nothing now. I want to eat the dirt and lick the rock. Or leave the shade for the sun and feel the burning. I know I don’t belong here. But this is the only place I belong.” Then he talks about how we ignored the warnings about overpopulation, concluding, “I thought, something will turn up and fix everything. This was an act of faith and I am made out of acts of faith. So I have come to this place because it eats acts of faith and then rots them and slowly takes them back into the ground. Still, she is silent.”<sup>68</sup> This rotting as life-generating force, he refers to as miasma, which the OED defines as “an unhealthy or unpleasant smell or vapour”; “an oppressive or unpleasant atmosphere which surrounds or emanates from something.” Miasma theory originated in the Middle Ages and persisted into the mid-nineteenth century,

holding that disease was born on bad air from decaying organic matter. But Bowden doesn't theorize the desert's association with death and renewal: "I do not seek to know what all this means. I simply feel it, all the birthing and juice in the place of ultimate desiccation."<sup>69</sup>

Bowden situates his own death, and life before birth, in this space of negation, once again recalling Australian Aboriginal dreamtime—the convergence of time immemorial and the present:

Before I was born, I would often come to this place. I do not mention this lightly—in fact, I seldom mention it at all. People would not abide me if I spoke of this matter. But I would come here before I existed and I would drink from the stagnant waters and marvel at the seep of the empty valley and the bite of the barren mountains. The sky ached. I would come here for the calm, for the certainty of my life and my death.<sup>70</sup>

What I mean by this being a poetic resolution has nothing to do with any kind of a solution to contradiction. Rather, Bowden's elaboration of contradiction moves from the disorderly fashion he ascribes to his writing in *Blue Desert* toward contradiction as desert, abyss as foundation, and paradox as truth. He hears the unsayable in the singing of bones in the desert that he walks, an act of imagination that resonates with the Aboriginals' understanding of walking the songlines. Vertigo—which he says is "the only form of balance worth living"<sup>71</sup>—he describes as a physical sensation of spinning in response to those songs. His vertigo throws him into the spinning that allows him temporary access to the miasma or kernel: "[Y]es, spinning, and within the spinning the hand flailing, fingers like talons reaching for just a touch of the coarse skin, the tongue lapping out for a taste of all the slime and ooze."<sup>72</sup>

Zen koans and other enactments of paradox resist analysis and confound reason. They prod the mind to imagine and the body to simply recite the unsayable. To this end, Bowden fuses the desert's body with a woman's, his own alienation with his belonging:

I hear the hum of the rocks and see, finally, the scream of the stars at noon. I touch the face of the clock in the scattered rocks. I smell the ooze all around me in the dry desert. I am on my knees now. The bone goes into my mouth, slowly, ever so slowly, the tongue crumbles as my mouth fills with bone. I spit out the fragments of my tongue onto the sizzling soil. A stub flounders in my mouth as the singing bones go down my throat and choke me into the music. I am now a man ready for my desert, an Adam finally prepared for the face of Eve.<sup>73</sup>

While Bowden performs his own apocalyptic death and entry into the kernel in *Inferno*, it cannot be considered the end point of his writing in the sense that Revelation is the teleological even if circular ending of the

Bible. The literal disintegration of the speaking subject in *Inferno* is one of multiple expressions of love that Bowden explores with unabated curiosity through diverse languages, subject positions, and physical settings. In *Blues for Cannibals*, he retreats from the ultimate limit experience of *Inferno* into the mundane world of his own garden and kitchen, doling out recipes like some stranger and wiser wine-guzzling Galloping Gourmet. But even the reduced space of this sanctuary resonates with the abyss of *Inferno*, as several of Bowden's loved ones die. He has one of his friends buried on his ranch—"I do not go there now—the ground around the house sings too much of Chris and his voice pains me"<sup>74</sup>—and he seems perpetually aware of the others' burial sites as presence, punctuated by the loud sucking sounds of the mesquite probing for water.

The dynamic and mutating self remains at the core of all the experiences Bowden relates, and the essence of what he means by "yes"—the ultimate and unconditional affirmation—he identifies as his final incarnation: "I have changed, not into a new person but into a final person and this person can only say yes."<sup>75</sup> This is a strange finality from a Western storytelling perspective, in that "yes" throws open the doors to all possibilities and does not give a sense of any ending. In the midst of worldwide catastrophe, he asserts that "joy sits there at the table if we are willing to reach and touch it."<sup>76</sup> This is not some religious philosophy that insists on personal conviction while ignoring the individual's troubled place in a web of biotic connections. On the contrary, life-affirming conviction is sparked by the torrent of marginalized multitudes flowing along the river of blood:

I can feel the river but as yet I cannot map it or spell out all its tributaries or describe the sea toward which it courses. I no longer think I am living in a world that is dying. Now I fervently believe it is being born. The birth is hard, the labor pains sharp, the medical assistance minimal. But still the birth is real and I feel big with it. What is being born is a new place fashioned from discarded, abused, and tortured ground. What is being born is a new people recruited from trash, from rejects, from fugitives, from refugees, from the nameless and faceless and frightened and angry. And this people is desperate and bold and surging around me. I find them everywhere. They lack passports, they have nowhere to go. They are fuel for the fire of this creation.<sup>77</sup>

This radical avowal of exactly those whom global economic systems and all their underlying ideologies strive to exploit and crush, recalls Guillermo Góhis Peña's "End of the World Topography," in which he defines the Fourth World as "a conceptual place where the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas meet with the deterritorialized peoples, the immigrants, and the exiles;

it occupies portions of all the previous worlds.”<sup>78</sup> Bowden manages to relate the intensely personal—even unsayable—to the experiences of the Majority World without ever generalizing or appropriating another’s being or voice. Despite implicating himself as one of the cannibals in *Blues for Cannibals*, the diverse appetites he performs throughout his works are always appetites to feel and not to possess in any capitalistic sense. His disintegration into the music of the bare bones enacted in phantasmagorical odysseys through the desert expresses a lust for life, finally rooted in the earth that he prophesies as on the verge of being inherited by the desperate, who are not necessarily meek. Bowden’s work is a kaleidoscope (“observation of beautiful forms” in Greek) undulating between the microscopic and the cosmic, the intimately subjective and the most expansively communitarian. He desires nothing short of communion with the biotic universe.

### Elegy

This article was submitted months before Charles Bowden died. I cannot entomb him with the accustomed R.I.P. since he performs death, in *Inferno* and elsewhere, spinning to a chorus of deafening song in a desert he claimed to know long before his birth, where he passionately licks rocks that shred his ecstatic body.

You have found your country. Now enter it. Into the flesh of beasts, into the gigantic snake. Spinning into the kernel of the desert where the bones sing and the coyotes answer under a blood moon in a green sky with screaming stars.

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## Notes

1. Charles Bowden, *Blue Desert* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 172.
2. I also limit references to *Trinity* because it is the focus of another project on nuclear criticism.
3. Elsewhere I examined the term “sentipensante” (feeling-thinking), borrowed by Eduardo Galeano from an indigenous language of Colombian fishermen, that I apply to Bowden’s awareness of the violence inherent in separating mind from body in the pursuit of theory. In Juárez: *The Laboratory of Our Future* Bowden gives tangible form to this problem plaguing analytical discourse: “There is a fine line we say we will not cross and yet that line must always be crossed if we are to live a life and have a death. This commonplace is seldom noted and almost always lied about. We erect barriers and we call these barriers disciplines, or professions or, sometimes in the name of God Almighty, ethics. And these barriers keep us on one side of the line and keep what we see and feel and sense and fear on the other side of the line” (109). For my discussion of Bowden’s relation to other storytellers where I quote these lines see “Beyond the Boundaries of Critical Thought and Toward Feeling-Thinking Stories,” *Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, 30:3–4 (July–October 2008), 316–31.
4. Charles Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals: The Notes from Underground* (New York: North Point Press, 2002), 23.
5. *Ibid.*, 6.
6. *Ibid.*, 7.
7. Charles Bowden, *Some of the Dead Are Still Breathing: Living in the Future* (New York: North Point Press, 2009), 61.
8. Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals*, 7.
9. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 56.
10. Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 192–93.
11. *Ibid.*, 19.
12. *Ibid.*, 19.
13. Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals*, 11.
14. Charles Bowden, *Trinity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), 49.
15. Anthony Channell Hilfer, “A Passion for the Desert: Bill Broyles, *Sunshot*,” Charles Bowden, *Inferno*; Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 54, no. 2 (2012): 259.
16. Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals*, 6–7.
17. Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), 6.
18. Paul Anthony Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: The Ancien Régime in Classical Greece* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 21.
19. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 5.
20. *Ibid.*, 7.
21. *Ibid.*, 7.

22. Charles Bowden, *Inferno* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 69.

23. This distinction he makes in *Inferno* (130). In a similar vein, Bowden's thinking on capital punishment refuses to collapse personal ethics and public morals for the sake of logical consistency. While he admits that he would gladly have killed some child murderers himself, he is against capital punishment "with the cited exception of my own handiwork, because I do not trust the state to dole out the killing fairly" (*Blues for Cannibals*, 146), which as he honestly concludes leaves "the matter where it always ends up: inconsistent but actual life" (161).

24. Bowden, *Inferno*, 116.

25. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 149.

26. *Ibid.*, 45.

27. Bowden, *Inferno*, 26.

28. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 149.

29. *Ibid.*, 45.

30. *Ibid.*, 124.

31. *Ibid.*, 135.

32. Bowden, *Blue Desert*, 1.

33. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 9.

34. *Ibid.*, 75. This image resonates with Edward Abbey's influence: "I lie on my belly on the edge of the dune, back to the wind, and study the world of the flowers from ground level, as a snake might see it" (*Desert Solitaire*, 30). But as in most cases of comparison with Abbey, Bowden's language is more performative and poetic.

35. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

36. Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals*, 189.

37. *Ibid.*, 193.

38. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges," *Eurozine*, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-06-29-santos-en.html>.

39. Charles Bowden, *Blood Orchid* (New York: North Point Press, 1995), xiii.

40. Bowden, *Blue Desert*, 11–12.

41. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 2.

42. *Ibid.*, 220.

43. *Ibid.*, 64.

44. *Ibid.*, 25.

45. *Ibid.*, 65.

46. *Ibid.*, 54–55.

47. Bowden, *Inferno*, 121.

48. Bowden, *Blue Desert*, 136. Both the motif and repetition here are reminiscent of Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*: "I went for walks. I went for walks. I went for walks and on one of these, the last I took in Havasu, regained everything that seemed to be ebbing away" (58).

49. *Ibid.*, 134.

50. *Ibid.*, 135.

51. *Ibid.*, 135.

52. *Ibid.*, 10.

53. *Ibid.*, 13.

54. *Nepantla* is a Nahuatl term (an Aztec language that continues in use in modern day Mexico), “connoting ‘in between’ or a reference to the space of the middle” (ChicanoArt.Org, <http://www.chicanoart.org/nepantla.html>). While this border consciousness often refers to people of mestizo, or mixed-blood, heritage, in Bowden’s case I use it to connote his striving toward a consciousness beyond human. It is important to qualify how this border term is borrowed, and not unthinkingly appropriated. Instead of attributing *mestizaje* to a specific community of people, thereby using it as an identity marker, Bowden sees the best of American culture as issuing from this process, “the restless, bastard nature of my nation and myself” (*Trinity*, 231).

55. Bowden, *Blood Orchid*, 29.

56. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 46.

57. Charles Bowden, *Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy’s New Killing Fields* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 148.

58. Bowden, *Inferno*, 17.

59. Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals*, 13.

60. Charles Bowden, *Desierto: Memories of the Future* (New York: WW Norton, 1991), 55.

61. I am also reminded of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s notion of flows relating to their conception of nonhuman, molecular sexuality. According to schizo-analysis, desire does not lack its object but is a machine, and the object of desire is another machine connected to it. “Making love is not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand. . . . [W]e always make love with worlds,” *L’Anti-Oedipe* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1972), trans. Robert Hurely, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 323, 325.

62. Bowden, *Blue Desert*, 38.

63. Bowden, *Inferno*, 26.

64. The literal disintegration of the speaking subject’s body in *Inferno* is reminiscent of the following lines from Antonin Artaud’s radio play: “When you will have made him a body without organs, / then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions / and restored him to his true freedom,” from “To Have Done with the Judgement of God,” in Susan Sontag (ed.), *Selected Writings* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 571. These lines inspired French philosopher Gilles Deleuze to imagine the Schizophrenic as a Body without organs, an explorer of depths rather than surfaces. If I were to theorize *Inferno*, whose extreme poetics actually invite such an approach more than most of Bowden’s other books, I would apply Deleuze and Guattari’s second volume, *Anti-Oedipus: A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), to explore how Bowden enacts the Body without organs in his fantasy of dissolution. According to such an approach, Bowden’s incessant walks through the desert could also be read as an act of deterritorialization in opposition to the endless neuroses encouraged by capitalism. Alas, the length of this essay does not allow me to be sidetracked into theorizing what so adamantly resists theoretic-

cal thinking. And it must also be noted that Bowden communicates these impulses much more effectively and affectively than Deleuze and Guattari.

65. Gen. 9:2–4.
66. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 41.
67. Bowden, *Inferno*, 7.
68. *Ibid.*, 21.
69. *Ibid.*, 77–78.
70. *Ibid.*, 36.
71. *Ibid.*, 139.
72. *Ibid.*, 41.
73. *Ibid.*, 135.
74. Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals*, 264.
75. Bowden, *Some of the Dead*, 18.
76. *Ibid.*, 17.
77. Bowden, *Blues for Cannibals*, 180.
78. Guillermo Gómez Peña, *The New World Border* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1996), 244.





Photo by Paula Goldman

# The Role of the Literary Journalist in the Digital Era

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I wanted to talk today about what goes into the making of a literary journalist and how we literary journalists are trying to keep faith with the elusive thing we like to call truth as we are frog-marched into the post-paper world.

I know those of you who study literary journalism think of it as a field appropriate for scholarly investigation. Of course, those of us who've stumbled into its practice, like me, find this charming and amusing. I hope what I have to say will help those of you who study our work to understand our methods and concerns. It's especially important as we face the digital era in journalism, an era of great potential but that also poses many problems for us.

I, for one, began my professional life as a newspaper intern in New Jersey, as a magazine subeditor, and then as a newspaper reporter. I was not exalted. I was like the early George Orwell, an often rejected writer of occasional pieces, or the young Graham Greene, originally a subeditor of a local paper in Nottingham. Or like the young Joan Didion, who wrote PR copy for *Vogue*. Lowly was a word that defined me—and I like to think still defines me. A writer must cling to humility, or lose everything.

For me, not to demystify things, I see literary journalism as documentary first and foremost. Also I see it as nonfiction *writing*. Literary journalism is not mysterious—or should not be. Its first obligation is to history, and history that lasts is not always an easy thing to maintain in the digital era. Digital media last forever—your post is always findable. But someone has to look for it; it's only present in the public mind for a nanosecond . . .

But I have to say one thing. As a reporter and a journalist, I was always going to be a *literary* journalist. My interest always lay with fiction, memory, and

writing; with narrative and character; and the rough, sinewy beauty of reality properly observed.

In particular, I did not like covering news, and this is a failing with most literary journalists: they abhor having to cover news. And for good reason: Imagine what this is like. Something happens and you, who are a writer—you have to deal with it as it unfolds. Instead of knowing the whole trajectory of the story and unfolding it for your readers with power and control, you yourself become not very different from your readers: no one knows what the heck's going on!

As a story unfolds in real time, it's almost impossible to know what it means. News is written down, but it is not *written*, and therefore it's not literature. Say you have to cover a murder. I had to cover a murder once when I was a reporter on Long Island. It was, supposedly, a Satanic ritual drug-induced murder—among teenaged boys. The editors sent me to the victim's house to get a quote from his family. I was a rookie and the editors treated me accordingly. Getting a victim quote was not considered an exalted task. It was lowly. I stood in the garden at the end of the path that wound down to the door. This was a path I was not going to travel, I knew as I stood there in the cool evening air. I imagined it: ringing the doorbell. The distraught mother, the angry father. The family hadn't picked up the phone all day, while other reporters called; how would they feel when I came to their door?

There are things one cannot bring oneself to do. So I went to a pay phone and called my editors and told them I had rung the bell—but no one came. And it was partly true: no one came! My editors were disappointed. What if another paper got a good quote, they asked. I didn't care. These were competitions in which I had made no investment. By the way, I can still see that path, that door, the low sky, the breeze of a late afternoon toward summer, the brown grass. I still know I did the right thing. And I know now that I can use that particular memory in my work today, if I choose. Indeed, I am using it now. Memory and time add layers to story. But newswriting is perilously free of those elements, which are the basis of literary journalism, just as they are of fiction.

Still, because of my background in journalism, I've had some funny moments in my life as a literary journalist. When I write nonfiction, critics say it's a lot like fiction. But when I write fiction, they wonder how close it is to journalism. I like straddling this porous border.

When I began to write about Haiti,<sup>1</sup> I learned more about what makes a book—or essay—writer different from a daily journalist, or someone who offers up his reports on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram. Reporters, first of all, in the old days at least, were working for a publishing entity of some sort: a newspaper, a magazine, a television news program, a radio show. They served the

interest of the publication and had to adhere to its conventions. If you worked for *Time* magazine or the *New York Times*, you had to know on which type of American cargo plane Duvalier fled the unrest in Haiti. You had to know the make and caliber of the guns the Haitian army was pointing at the crowd and at you. You had to do crowd estimates and body counts.

Whereas I had the leisure, as a book writer, a writer, that is, of literary journalism, to focus on the blue plastic roses on the coffee table in the living room of one of the dozens of the perennial presidential candidates. I had the time and the inclination to examine the blade of a machete after it was used to kill a member of the Tonton Macoutes, Duvalier's feared secret police. I knew that the renegade liberation priest who would one day become president liked to signal his presence to nighttime visitors by jangling the impressive ring of keys he always had with him in sunshine—and in darkness. I could get to know Ti Johnny, a street boy whose mother was a drunk in a shantytown called Fifth Avenue.

By dint of immersion and continuity of presence, I could learn more, over time, than the best newspaper journalists, and my understanding of Haiti, its history, its politics, its unfolding heroic and tragic narrative, its grave wonders and unfathomable human secrets, was and always would be novelistic, encompassing, profound and historic. And one of the things that fed that deep work and novelistic perspective was the work of all the daily reporters who came down to write about Haiti, and the articles where a few of them did discover actual facts and numbers and the names of those planes and the source of epidemics—reporting work that I plundered (and still plunder) without remorse to bolster my books and pieces.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that literary journalism isn't really journalism, with all of journalism's implications of the daily grind and continual output, and the quotidian chore of the workaday. The literary journalist does not feed the news-cycle communications beast the way the real journalist must. Usually the literary journalist is not writing to space—not limited to filling a hole on a page or on a website. Usually, we are not over-tormented by the needs of our editor and publisher. If we are feeding a beast, it's the beast of our literary ambitions and of our writer's hope to influence the world. It's a rarified beast of our own devising, not voracious but picky, and usually off its feed.

That said, in the hands of a writer of what we have chosen to call literary journalism, even Twitter, with its short character count, can provide a platform for great and meaningful writing. I know a doctor who was working in Haiti who in a series of consecutive tweets could conjure up the whole post-earthquake situation right down to the details of her patients' tribulations and the chaos of elections in the ruins.

But let's not forget that there are many similarities between a working journalist and a writer of literary nonfiction. Like the serious daily journalist, the literary journalist, from Mark Twain to Didion to Kapuściński to me to even the great aesthete Bruce Chatwin, writes in order to interact with or to put pressure on the actors in the very world she or he is describing. At the same time, we want to seduce our readers: we write for a two-headed beast, ourselves and our readers. It's a weird act of magic: we pluck up a world, hold it in our hands, and then offer it, often across seas and continents and across cultures and classes, to another world for consumption.

Now, what exactly happens to the subject under consideration, in that transforming moment between the act of the writer's observing and the end point of delivery to the consumer, which is to say publication in all of its guises? What happens between the writer's uploading of her subject and the download to her readers? This is especially important to consider today, on the super speedy two-way street of Internet journalism. What happens between the writer's uploading of her subject and the download to her readers? This is what happens: the subject becomes objectified. Haiti becomes a thing I give to my readers, with all of its people wrapped up in it. It's a present, a gift, to the readers and it is presented that way, too, as a surprise between covers, or behind glossy paper, or running below an eye-catching, even literally moving, illustration at the top of a website.

Yet although the literary journalist brings one world into contact with another, often enough there is very little relation between the subject of a piece of literary journalism and the readers of that piece. Ti Johnny, for example, never met my readers, nor was he likely to. There was no fair exchange. I had kidnapped Johnny from Grande Rue, put him in my pages, and handed him to my readers. In this situation, there was no ransom for poor Johnny. I lifted the child into a kind of history, but Ti Johnny, and Johnny's family, got nothing in exchange. This has always bothered me, the power I wield over my subjects, often without their even knowing it. It's why, I believe, people who live in countries where cameras have not been very present have traditionally felt that photographers are stealing something from them when they take a picture. We are stealing from them: we're stealing their graven images, and we're stealing the material of their lives.

One of my favorite meta-photographs to come out of the 2010 Haitian earthquake had as its subject a young girl in a pink satin dress who had been killed in the tremor. She was lying out on a wall somewhere in downtown Port-au-Prince, her body awkward and ungraceful, as bodies tend to be before the mortician makes his corrections. Around the globe there must have been many pictures published of this girl's body as it lay there, unprotected by her family, who, it is possible, may also have been killed. But this photo that I love is not

just of the girl but of the phalanx of white male photographers with cameras to their eyes, and great big lenses, who stand in front of the wall where she's lying, shooting her. I honor the photographer who took their picture, taking her picture. I call that picture literary photojournalism.

A chapter in my last book<sup>2</sup> was called "Werewolves in the Camps." This chapter was about the relief and recovery effort after the Haitian earthquake, but also about the traditional Haitian folk-figure of the Loup Garou, or werewolf. Actually, that was going to be the title, for a while, of the entire book: *Werewolves in the Camps*. During times of unrest or disaster, this traditional figure emerges rather strongly among storytellers in Haiti. The loup garou steals children and sucks the blood out of them, and in using that name in a title, I was trying to compare this strange, stalking, ravenous monster to the exploitive outside organizations that used maimed, raped, and orphaned victims of the earthquake to beef up their PR videos and fundraising.

But in talking about the loup garou among the traumatized Haitians, I was also talking about myself, the observer and writer. It was fully my intention to take the Haitians' story, to suck it up, and then sell it back home. I saw myself clearly as a kind of loup garou. As James Agee wrote about literary journalism in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*:

It seems to me curious, not to say obscene and thoroughly terrifying, that it could occur to . . . an organ of journalism, to pry intimately into the lives of an undefended and appallingly damaged group of human beings, . . . for the purpose of parading the nakedness, disadvantage and humiliation of these lives before another group of human beings, in the name of science, of "honest journalism" (whatever that paradox may mean), of humanity, of social fearlessness, for money, and for a reputation for crusading and for unbiased . . . without the slightest doubt of their qualification to do an "honest" piece of work, and with a conscience better than clear, and in virtual certitude of almost unanimous public approval.<sup>3</sup>

Even with better known people who appear as characters in my literary journalism, my writing gives me a power over them in which they have no say—and that is how they are handed over to my readers. I don't just mean Haitians but also the Californians I wrote about in my book about California and all the other individuals I've allowed or forced into my work over the years.

I'm not just an information vector, I'm a middleman, and I can add or subtract value from the resource I'm selling. I always tell my students in the literary journalism program at the University of California, at Irvine, that they are the kings of their pieces. And I mean this. They rule! As they like to say.

This is why it has become rote to call a nonfiction writer's characters "subjects." Not just the topic of the piece but the characters in it. A piece of literary

journalism is a country where the writer rules as a harsh dictator. The failures of that “country” are his, its successes also. The people who, as subject matter, are sucked into a piece of literary journalism are utterly controlled by the writer. Almost as much as in fiction, they are ruled by her fierce demands and the demands she imposes by her choice of narrative. She marshals her subjects, she deploys them; they scatter at her command. She decides, within the contours of her narrative, where and when her characters will die, or at least come to their inevitable and inexorable finale.

This is why writers can so easily become arrogant and prideful, even though we here at this conference know that writers are also famously frightened and insecure, like powerful queens who nonetheless fear the handmaid’s poison. It’s important, then, to recognize the position of the writer, both as she writes the story but even more important, as she appears in the story and as she appears to her subjects. Without that recognition, a writer can become obscene and immoral, as Agee says.

It’s crucial to know how our presence as the writer influences the outcome of our story, how it changes the behavior of our subjects; what impact it really does have, what effect the book or article is assumed by the subjects to be about. For though there is little relation between the writer’s reader and her subject, there’s plenty of unacknowledged exchange between writer and subject. The writer bows to his subject and then turns and bows to his reader, equally, like a dancer in a minuet.

Here’s one way these relations play out between writers from the developed world and their subjects in less developed countries. In almost all of these stories, the joke is on the writer. When I was working on my first book, I used to go visit Andre Pierre, a *houngan*, or voodoo priest, just outside Port-au-Prince. He lived off the national highway in Croix des Bouquets in a *lakou*, or courtyard, where he ruled his family—another king in another domain. He wore a tweed hunting cap and a brown argyle plaid sweater in the tropical heat; he chain-smoked, he had big bags under his eyes. No teeth to speak of. He was always glad to have a gulp of rum, at ten a.m., at five p.m., and whenever in between, and also before—and also after. He had, at that time, thirty-two children, by his best calculation. He was already ancient when I first met him. I never neglected to bring him a bottle of rum when I visited.

Like many voodoo priests in Haitian history, Gangan Pierre was also an artist. In his case, it happened that he was a very great artist. His pictures are jewel-like crowded contained radiant canvases strewn with majestic gods and goddesses in the full midst of godly activities. He’s dead now, but I visited him for years, for maybe a decade, on and off. I would just let him talk, let him run on. He was prophetic and majestic, himself. He held my book together with

his amazing pronouncements. I loved him—although it must be said we didn't have a lot in common. But I would sit on the hard black wooden chair in his studio, I guess you would call that one small sunlit room, and have coffee prepared by his acolytes with chicory and tons of sugar, and he would paint and talk and drink and smoke, and pour rum for the gods.

One day, about a year after my book was published, I went to visit Gangan Pierre. He was painting. Behind his canvas, I saw the glint of a piece of glossy paper that had never been there before. It looked strangely familiar to me, somehow. He gestured me to my black chair (all visitors sat there), and I sat and squinted to get a better look at the scrap of paper. Ah. Yes, could it be? It was: it was a review of my book that had appeared in *Time* magazine, I think it was.

After painting in silence for some time, Gangan Pierre took a swig of rum and was prompted into speech. He started talking about the painting in front of him and the gods in it, Erzulie Freda, Kouzin Zaka, Papa Legba, Damballah Wedo, and the rest, as if they were his nieces and nephews—or possibly a few of his thirty-two children. And then he plucked up the *Time* review. A wealthy foreign patron had brought it to him, he told me. Gangan Pierre pointed at the piece of paper, or really pointed into it, with a jutting, jabbing, paint-stained finger pushing at the surface, and began to quote by heart in Creole from a paragraph in it that was a quote from him that I had quoted in the book. The patron must have read it to him, translating.

It was clear that Gangan Pierre had absolutely no idea that the piece of paper had anything to do with me. He did not know that it was a review of a book, much less a book written by me, his faithful friend and rum-bringer. I am not sure he ever fully took into his mind that I was a writer, or what that might mean, exactly. I don't think he was ever aware of my name, not even my first name, although I introduced myself on a regular basis. He certainly did not know that I was the writer of the book that was being reviewed on the piece of paper he had in front of him. I don't think he could read.

He definitely was never going to begin to conceive of the idea of a book review—that was not in his wonderstruck universe, luckily for him. But he had memorized the quote from himself and knew he was being quoted in a place where the quote, as well as his name, could be seen, as he said, by the *mond entye*, the whole world (or at least, I said to myself at the time, some New York subscribers).

He was quite pleased. I felt ridiculous. There was a yawning crevasse of understanding between us that I was not about to begin to try to explain to him. Imagine explaining it. Imagine, if you will, explaining to someone, to anyone of good faith, what a book review is. In any case, what dazed me most about this weird moment was that this person whom I had quoted in

my book as a dispenser of timeless truths, as a poetic seer, as a visionary who gave life and Haiti meaning—this man, this colossal artist, felt in some way validated by . . . well, essentially by his appearance in my book.

Again: the writer must understand her role. She must understand not just how she herself crafts a narrative out of the material she gathers, but how she and her project are perceived and understood by her subjects, who are her basic material, after all. In other words, literary journalists, if they're serious, are taking the world and making art from it: a big claim, I know, but true—and I think you all agree.

**T**he only problem is our art ain't fiction. Like documentary filmmakers, to whom we are closest in the narrative arts, we make our art out of other people's lives, hardships, woes. What we do is simply a lot less fictive than fiction, but it's fiction-y, nonetheless. It's an awkward, vexed combination: this fiction-y nonfiction, the stuff that lies on both sides of the porous border.

I can tell you that once I'm finished with a story, I often find myself wishing that there weren't so much reality in it. For example, I don't like it when my characters strike back; when what I thought I had pinned to the page turns out still to have a life of its own and flies in my face. This was the case, to an extent with Gangan Pierre, though it was merely a gentle reminder.

But after my California book was published,<sup>4</sup> I was made queasy when I heard that one of my subjects had taken to her bed for three days after reading my pages on her. And then she managed to get a *New Yorker* writer to do a very friendly profile on her around six months later. I didn't like being taken off the social circuit by my former friends in Hollywood. There were two things about it: my characters were punishing me (the handmaid's poison, as I call this phenomenon), but also I felt guilty for causing them public embarrassment, I felt guilty about betraying them. They had let me in, a guest among their gold furnishings and paintings of Marie Antoinette (seriously!!); they had let me in imagining I was one kind of journalist, a Hollywood journalist, but I had behaved like a literary journalist, and that, for them, was unforgiveable.

But that is as nothing when compared to the unequal relationship I feel to my Haitian subjects. A journalist from an imperial country poaching on a colonized, globalized population, a rich bitch in a poor land. In Haiti, no matter who I think I am, I end up being a representative of the hegemonic power, a living embodiment of the United States and France and the white man and the whole torrid history of the island with its masters. Here I am, great white bwana, sitting on the one chair in a rundown, dirt-based, tin and cardboard *lakou* in a Haitian shantytown, eating a Haitian sweet and listening to the family's stories of tragedy with my notebook open, with my notebook actually resting on the narrow back of a little girl who has decided to perch herself on my

lap and has clambered up as if I were a climbable statue of a seated Napoleon or Columbus. Actually, in such circumstances I feel more like a combination of an intrusive, bratty Goldilocks and Alice in Wonderland, when she's ten feet tall. And here I am, stealing their sweets and their stories, which they give me so freely. The child's braids hang over my notebook, and I brush them aside to write.

If you're writing about people in Beverly Hills or Washington, D.C., it's not too surprising that they can try to get back at you. They'll hear about your book; they'll read it; they'll complain, sometimes publicly. But now in the digital world, even the most oppressed subject may hear about your work and strike back, although, except in one instance, Haitians never have struck back at me. Yet! Again, Internet writing is a two-way street as is anything that's viewable on the Internet. Interactive: an interesting word. Here's an example: Another reporter-slash-writer went to Haiti to write a piece for *Mother Jones* about a post-quake gang rape victim. The story was to appear online as well as in print. The reporter spent time with the woman,<sup>5</sup> and then one day she was with her in Port-au-Prince some time after the rape when the victim started screaming and freaking out because she had just seen some of her attackers.<sup>6</sup> The reporter was with her at that moment and witnessed the woman's reaction to seeing these men. The reporter tweeted about it in real time.

Well, the rape victim found out about the story the reporter was filing to *Mother Jones*—someone she knew had seen the series of tweets, I think it was—and went to a lawyer in Haiti. The rape victim also wrote a note to Haitian American novelist and nonfiction writer Edwidge Danticat in which the victim said: “Our choices about when and how our story is told must be respected.”<sup>7</sup> Danticat published the letter online.

Take that, White Bwana. Take that, Goldilocks. This kind of public chastisement of writers and documentarians by their subjects will become more and more common, because imperial writers are now writing in places where they can be read by everyone—and more important, by anyone.

So the Internet can keep us honest by letting the voices of our subjects into the conversation. But it is also demanding, and it demands, above all, action and narrative in long-form writing, because “clicks” and “eyeballs” are attracted to what is fastest moving and most cinematic in writing; clicks and eyeballs are also attracted to links and illustration, to video and photographic attachments running alongside your literary nonfiction. Thus this year's much-touted *New York Times* magazine story “Snowfall,” about skiers caught in an avalanche, was overburdened with links and attachments that the narrative, moving quickly but with little character development or description or introspection or meaningful context or even real suspense, could not support.

So the variety and complication of Internet presentation of nonfiction, while it may beef up a story's appearance, also can easily sully and detract from literary quality. Depth is sacrificed to surface appeal—the literary swirl of the Internet is often a reflective and seductive but shallow lake. Because of this, I have not yet written long-form literary journalism directly for the web, although I do write a blog. But to write long form for readers who are seeking thrills, I don't think I can satisfy that, so I don't think my work would necessarily get seen.

I'm not positive (because I can't find the reference for the quote anymore), but I believe it was Ryszard Kapuściński who said, "Evil people cannot be good journalists." Let's define evil as having no moral scruples. If you have no moral scruples, QED, you cannot be a good journalist and—I will add—you especially cannot be a literary journalist.

A good journalist doesn't just find truth, he combats evil in the world. I keep telling my students: If your goal is to tell a happy story about happy people, go tell it somewhere else. I am not interested in "upworthy." Which, by the way, is the name of a website dedicated to good news. I say leave good news to the believers, and meanwhile, we who question norms, hierarchies, and rules that are handed down will go on being literary journalists, which is to say, again: writers.

So these literary journalists, the long-form nonfiction writers—explorers, really, who have Kapuściński's moral scruples—will go on, in spite of the web's demands for speed and sometimes superficiality, questioning leaders, power brokers, cronies, and bankers. We'll continue framing the stories that we find as narratives, with characters who have backstories and psychological baggage. We'll keep looking at how life is lived on the planet. We'll notice eccentricity and explore it. We'll discover worlds you never knew existed, and bring back their histories and their lives to you. We'll find new activities people are engaged in, and we'll watch them and live with them and emerge bringing you their tale, wherever they are, wherever you are. We may do this for free, or for pay. Hopefully paid, because it costs money to go places and learn things. We may do this on paper, but more likely online. We may take notes in notebooks, or on smartphones. But the moral quest of literary journalists will always be the same, same as it ever was: to find truth, to tell stories, to change the world.

And in the digital age, despite the obstacles confronting literary journalists, a good, smart, profound story that "gains traction" or "goes viral" can have a huge impact. And I am glad about that. I'm truly glad; it's important.

But my heart and my mind still lie with the great stories, the greatest stories, ones that, in their eccentricity of interests and idiosyncrasies of form, tower above the rest, and will never gain traction, will never, can never, go viral.

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*Amy Wilentz is an award-winning journalist who has covered Haiti since the end of 1985, during a period of great turbulence in that country's history. She has also written about the ongoing conflict between the Palestinians and Israel. She is a contributing editor at the Nation magazine and was the Jerusalem bureau chief of the New Yorker magazine 1995–98. Her work has appeared in those two publications as well as in the New York Times, Time, the Los Angeles Times, the New Republic, the London Review of Books, Vogue and Condé Nast Traveler. Her most recent book, Farewell, Fred Voodoo: A Letter from Haiti (Simon & Schuster), won the 2013 year's National Book Critics Circle Award (Autobiography). She is a professor in the Literary Journalism program at the University of California, Irvine, and is currently beginning work on a documentary book about life in a Haitian shantytown, as well as finishing her second novel. Her blog, which focuses largely on Haitian politics and culture and news, can be found at [www.amywilentz.com](http://www.amywilentz.com).*

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### Notes

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**“Note-perfect prose and unflinching inquiry . . . [An] intimate, honest, bracingly unsentimental book.” —BEN FOUNTAIN, *The New York Times Book Review***



# FAREWELL, FRED VOODOO

A LETTER FROM HAITI



# AMY WILENTZ

AUTHOR OF *THE RAINY SEASON*

“Ghosts by Daylight,” excerpted from  
*Farewell, Fred Voodoo*

By Amy Wilentz

*Si syel-la te tombe, yo ta ramase zetwal*  
 If the sky fell, they'd scoop up the stars

I'm standing in the rubble one day taking a call from L.A. I'd been having lunch at Presse Café up in Pétionville with Lorraine Mangones, the daughter of the legendary Haitian architect. We were talking about the millions of designs being proposed for new shelters for the internally displaced earthquake homeless, and Lorraine—who takes after her acerbic father when describing the Haitian landscape—was on the attack. We were laughing about a particularly ridiculous shelter concept, made of tires, when my cell phone rang. It was a friend calling from outside a courtroom back in Los Angeles.

I left Lorraine and went outside into the dust and chaos of Pétionville, which hadn't been as hard-hit as downtown but was still strewn with debris and involved in the disaster. And I'm listening to Los Angeles on my cell phone as I stand in the shattered remains. Cars are picking their way down the street. It's so hot out. Lorraine is waiting for me inside where there are fans going. The preliminary hearing in the courtroom in L.A. is for a murder case; in July 2009, my friends' daughter was murdered in one of those killings that has a right to be called senseless and pointless. A perfect, lovely girl, and a brutal criminal, out on the street, violating the terms of his parole. Now her parents and all my other friends and my husband are at the hearing, listening to the evidence. The voice at my ear was telling me all of this while I was standing in the wreckage that killed who knew how many thousands of people. And all that mattered to me right then was that girl and what had happened to her. Amid all this death, the one death.

She was on my mind a lot when I went about town, both before the phone call and certainly after. I felt guilty about it, about focusing on her,

when there was so much horror around me. I thought about the old journalists' equation, that one American death equals one hundred European deaths equals one thousand Latin American deaths equals ten thousand Asian deaths equals one hundred thousand African deaths.

Then one morning, I went out to find my old friend Milfort Bruno, who had helped me get around during my first wild days in Haiti so many years ago, as Duvalier was falling. Milfort was wearing a jaunty hat and sitting on a balustrade at the Hotel Oloffson, hoping I would come by. He didn't look jaunty, in spite of the hat. He gave me a personal tour that, by showing me what he was experiencing, helped me understand better what I was feeling.

Milfort was born in Port-au-Prince in a courtyard near the Iron Market, and he worked for Carnival Cruise Lines as a young man, doing night cleaning on a ship; he got \$135 every two weeks, but then the cruise ships stopped using him. "Otherwise, now I would be rich," he says.

One day, when he was twelve years old, he found a lost *blan* wandering downtown, and he helped the man get back to his hotel. This hotel turned out to be the Oloffson, a place Milfort had never seen before although it was less than three miles from his birthplace. There at the hotel Milfort discovered a treasure trove of white men. He started working there as a guide immediately and attached himself to the hotel so successfully that—although he did his brief stint at sea—he was back at the Oloffson more than twenty years later when I showed up to become one of the *blan* in his long ledger.

The day I found Milfort in his hat, he and I left the Oloffson and drove over to his house, not far away, in Carrefour Feuilles, a *quartier populaire*. Milfort had had two grown daughters and one grown son, Harry. Harry was always the big problem in Milfort's life.

Harry has been mentally incapacitated since he was run over by a car at the age of four. The story is like a rich fable from de Maupassant or even Hugo: One day, the darling boy was given a bit of change by his adoring father. It was too little to buy anything, even a piece of gum, but the coins were shiny and the boy knew nothing of the value of money, so he ran out in his little shorts to buy himself a piece of candy, like a big kid. Out came a beautiful new car from nowhere, as the boy, coins clutched in his hand, skittered off from the curb. The car smashed him, catching him in the axel mechanism and dragging him down the street. The boy was so small the driver didn't even know he'd hit someone, and the whole neighborhood was screaming at him from ledges and windows and doors, "Stop, stop!"

And the driver stopped. He was a wealthy, light-colored young man, Milfort says. Horrified at what had happened, he took Milfort's boy and Milfort to the hospital. Although Harry's chest was half-crushed, doctors who looked

at the boy back then said he'd be fine. The man with the car gave Milfort a thousand dollars; even now, Milfort remembers how sorry the man was. And Harry *was* fine, except for the fact that invisible trauma to his brain had caused severe cerebral injuries, and he never recovered from his untreated cranial wounds. A later *eskran*, or scan, showed irredeemable damage. Otherwise, the child was in perfect health.

Now twenty-four years old, Harry sits out in a rocking chair in a little cement courtyard behind a locked gate all day long, wearing a pair of yellow shorts, when Milfort can convince him to wear anything at all. He's sedated by pills prescribed by a doctor Milfort calls the *sikat*, or psychiatrist. Milfort keeps Harry at home because otherwise he'd be out in the street in a minute, and lost perhaps forever. Also, the boy's condition shames him.

Milfort told me then that one of his daughters had died in the earthquake. He looked down at his old hands, and I remembered that this daughter in particular had been his great support, his right-hand girl. She was the one who took care of Harry while Milfort and the other daughter tried to make some money every day. (Milfort's wife had died many years earlier of a lupus-like disease.) And I realized, suddenly (though you'd imagine I would have realized it already), that the way I'd been thinking of my friends' lost daughter, the way I'd been obsessing over her fate, going through all kinds of possibilities for rescue that one shouldn't ever have to consider, was the way each Haitian who had lost someone in the earthquake was thinking about that person, or those people. Every time I thought of this girl as I went about my business in Haiti, my heart began to pound with anger and loss, and the terrible frustration of impotence, the feeling that I was somehow responsible, that I would have saved her if I could. And now, watching Milfort rock Harry's chair as Harry looked off into the blank nowhere into which his sister had disappeared, I saw that the people around me were feeling these same things, too.

But I had moments in Haiti of emotional retreat, as well. While it was happening I didn't even recognize it. After and before this moment at Milfort's, I'd wandered through the wreckage of this city I'd lived in for two years and visited for twenty, moving through the destruction with a hard heart, a very hard heart. I felt sometimes that I was inured to Haiti—I'd grown a shell against it; it could no longer touch me—hunger, tragedy, disease, waste, ruin. Nothing. It was a survival instinct, I suppose. It was the way some Haitians faced Haiti, too, I knew. Just keep moving. Don't react.

One day, right after the quake, I'd gone looking for Edgard Jean-Louis, an old voodoo priest and a maker of bright voodoo flags, an artist. The photojournalist Maggie Steber was with me. We finally found Edgard, sitting

on a white plastic chair with a few members of his family. Behind them was their ruined house. Behind that was the ruined voodoo temple he had shared with other priests; it had partially collapsed in the earthquake and then it had been burned, mysteriously. Behind Edgard's personal wreckage was the whole neighborhood of Belair—where so many years ago, before Aristide was first elected, I had hidden in the alleyways with fleeing demonstrators as the Haitian Army tried to hunt them down—now crushed and heaving under the mountains of debris. Nothing came to me, nothing occurred to me to feel. I simply thought: Where is everything? It was as if the whole city had become a lost memory, like a sudden onslaught of dementia.

Edgard I hadn't seen in a few years, but he was an imposing, statue-like old man with a white halo of hair and a face, on this day, like a mask of tragedy. Maggie, who is notoriously susceptible to emotion—it's true—knelt down in front of Edgard, took both his hands in hers, and began to cry. All that she'd seen in my company, over the past few days, and over the past many years, rose up inside her before this man who looked like a god of Africa, this person we'd known for so long. Everything he meant to her, everything Haiti meant to her, she was feeling and releasing as she held on to his hands, her face wet with tears, him smiling now—while I stood off to the side, mentally tapping my foot at the display of emotion, willing us on to whatever would be the next thing that we would see.

And I was also wondering: What can Edgard make of this? I was, as I have so often been, embarrassed by the sentimentality and muddleheadedness of my race, of us in Haiti. But to diagnose the scene properly: this was my friend Maggie feeling real emotions about a specific person and the earthquake. And this was me, not feeling that—this was me amid all the death.

Try walking through the concentration camps of the Balkans, the killing fields of the Khmer Rouge, the excavated mass graves of El Mozote, downtown Dresden, the outer circles of Hiroshima. That's what it was like in Port-au-Prince in those days. To me no emotion seemed proper. I couldn't find one or feel one that was fitting, that was up to the level of what I was seeing. There was a disconnect between eyes and heart. To Maggie, waves of sadness and tears, with some joy at human survival, some laughter over visible human frailties, felt appropriate. I walked around with flat affect, I think it's called. I could feel that, a flatline. Here's this leg sticking out of that pancaked school; here's that bloated hand under the motorcycle repair shop, the former motorcycle repair shop. Walking on, walking on. Here's the palace where I interviewed Aristide, and Prosper Avril, and Henri Namphy, and René Préval—figures from history, and the building's crushed. Walking on. Here are the survivors in their camps, their hungry babies, here's little McKenly Gédéon

without his hands. I've achieved precisely nothing for him, with my froth of activity and carrying him to and fro, from doctor to doctor. Walking on.

**A**t night, lying on my mattress under the stars next to the pool at the Aloft, I can hear the wailing and praying of survivors. The ground lifts and rocks beneath us in huge cracking aftershocks. I'm thinking about mosquitoes and reaching for my pile of nighttime survival items, next to the mattress: bug juice, a flashlight, Valium, a bottle of rum. I sit up and reslather the bug juice. Other journalists and relief workers are lying under sheets along the driveway, one next to another like corpses under the light of the stars. I lie back down and the scenes from the day shift through my mind: Edgard; the stray limbs; spaghetti meals; McKenly's stumps; the camp on the soccer field; a young girl crying inconsolably about something, something she wouldn't say, not looking at me; and the rickety Madame Couplet in her housedress telling her old stories under the remaining fluorescent bulb at the half-fallen-down Park Hotel.

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Artwork by Nolan D. Griswold

# Finding Emma Larkin

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**Abstract:** This essay examines the first of two books by Emma Larkin, the anonymous journalist behind two recent nonfiction accounts of the country we otherwise call Myanmar: *Finding George Orwell in Burma* (2005), and *Everything Is Broken: A Tale of Catastrophe in Burma* (2010). By way of a comparison to Janet Malcolm's meditations on narrative and identity, I examine in particular Larkin's strategic uses of anonymity, concealment, and identity exchanges: in her narrative persona and working practice as a journalist; in her role as a literary explicator of George Orwell's life and work; and as a political historian of the complex national transformation from colonial subjugation (as Burma) under the British into the modern totalitarian state of Myanmar. While appearing to write a conventional travel biography of the man (Eric Arthur Blair) who became George Orwell, Larkin actually "finds" a complex, multilayered Orwell in Burma's own fragmentary and illicit literary culture, a culture that to this day sustains its own underground, oblique "reporting" on the abuses of Myanmar's military regime in the early years of the twenty-first century. In turn, that society—and that regime—shapes both Orwell's legacy and what the reporter "Emma Larkin" can be.

For all I know, someone out there has reported on, blogged about, or tweeted out the true identity of the journalist behind the pen name "Emma Larkin," the anonymous author of two recent books on the country we otherwise call Myanmar: *Finding George Orwell in Burma* (2005), and *Everything Is Broken: A Tale of Catastrophe in Burma* (2010). But for now, I've decided that I may be just as happy not knowing who she really is. This is not, I should quickly add, a position that stems from any moral or critical qualms about the biographical fallacy, or authorial intention, or—assuming I fully understood the idea—Foucault's notion of the "author-function." And I'll admit up front that I still can't quite resist pestering my usually cooperative journalism

students with the various possibilities of Larkin's identity, other than the fragments her book jackets reveal: American, born and now living in Asia, educated at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and—well, that's about it. ("What if she's not really a woman?" I ask. "What if her face seems identifiably Anglo-Burmese?" You know: questions professors ask.) In any event, I've arrived at my somewhat contrarian view of Larkin's anonymity—granting her a privilege we almost never allow a journalist—from the sheer pleasure of teaching her work, and of stumbling across some of the advantages of tarrying around her anonymity. And with that, embracing the challenges of linking her analysis of Myanmar's totalitarianism with the intelligence—or, rather, the political imagination behind the pen name—with whom that political category has long been associated: George Orwell.

I'll also concede that my current preference about Larkin goes against the grain of the ways we customarily talk about either anonymity or a *nom de plume* (inadequate though that latter term is). On the literary side of things, the more customary critical approach is to scour the biographical and psychological archive behind a pen name, the better to ponder the back stories or inside jokes that might be involved. ("Mark Twain," I also tell my students: "two chalk marks on the wall of a Virginia City saloon, keeping track of Samuel Clemens's bar tab.") But the stakes of anonymity or an assumed identity rise considerably—and the issues change—when we are talking about a journalist. Especially, I think, in our current moment.

As many will recognize, a good deal of anxiety, of late, has been circling around reporters' identities. In the United States, at least—my comments will necessarily be restricted to the national situation I know best—even the most successful of undercover reporters, for instance, have recently been greeted with new resistance. So, for instance, when Ken Silverstein of *Harper's* ingeniously posed as a representative of Turkmenistan in 2007 to more-than-willing PR firms in DC, the chorus of response from his professional peers was—surprisingly—largely disapproving. If you mean to show that lobbying agencies or corporate giants like Walmart™ aren't being up front about who they are, the reasoning went, neither are you. Moreover, it was now said, the undercover strategy could lead to an unwarranted invasion of privacy. (Imagine a closeted gay man making a pass at Norah Vincent of *Self-Made Man* [2006], only to discover that she is not a he.) Even when the anonymity of a subject or source is putatively protected, some observers will now say that it is unethical to elicit private statements without having informed your source up front that you are a journalist. Nor is US law always so friendly to the undercover ploy, especially if it can be shown—in this second great Age of the Corporation—that you are trespassing, or committing "tortious inter-

ference” with an employee’s job. In many US universities, meanwhile, it is probably the case that many of the most famous undercover accounts we are familiar with, from the best traditions of literary journalism—by Nelly Bly, Stephen Crane, Jack London, and Orwell himself—would not pass muster in today’s so-called human subject research-ethics reviews. Even prominent US journalists such as Barbara Ehrenreich sometimes seem so gun-shy as to deny they are drawing upon the undercover tradition at all. And thus, a usefully renegade tradition of reporting is subjected to a chilling effect when, in my view, we may need it more than ever.<sup>1</sup>

On top of all that, especially in the wake of the “fact-fiction” scandals of Jayson Blair, James Frey, Michael Finkel, Greg Mortenson, et al., the otherwise contentious camps within the broader study of literary nonfiction can often sound uncharacteristically unanimous in insisting that a journalist be who she says she is. In newsrooms as such, of course, professional reporters have never been inclined to forego the status of the byline. Even though some readers may unconsciously digest daily news as “unauthored” prose, news writers themselves are hardly liable to turn back more than a century and a half of hard struggle for name recognition, all the more important if they turn to writing books. And yet, the really interesting thing is that even if you go out to the farthest edges of the American academic commentary that emphasizes the “epistemological insecurity,” or uncertainty, of facticity—say, to the theoretical flights of David Shields in *Reality Hunger* (2010), or the often flippant asides of John D’Agata in *The Lifespan of a Fact* (2012)—you’ll find that both these thinkers *also* concede that journalists must not play at the games of creative, inventive genre bending that they themselves do.<sup>2</sup> My sense is that these lapses into argumentative comity are, at least in part, an implicit acknowledgement of the more general cooling of the US news profession’s climate around experimental forms of reportage. For example, when the *Columbia Journalism Review*’s Robert S. Boynton edited the invaluable anthology called *The New New Journalism* in 2005, it wasn’t hard to pick up the inference in the double-take of his title: “new new” meant a course correction, away from Tom Wolfeish stylistic extravagance (!?!!!!) and from the imitation of experimental or postmodern fiction. Back to immersion, to hard reporting, to topicality—to being, at a premium, what Boynton called responsible “prose poets of the quotidian.” Not surprisingly, Boynton’s book of interviews was organized by chapter headings featuring his supposedly “new new” journalists’ real names, in bold print and all caps.<sup>3</sup>

The journalistic work represented by those names is certainly invaluable, even if the realist protocols often behind it are substantially more “literary” than it sometimes lets on.<sup>4</sup> Here, I would simply begin by observing

that the author calling herself “Emma Larkin” has taken a more unorthodox view of her journalistic identity. In a 2008 online essay for Finlay Publishers about her own naming choice—and, again, that of the man born Eric Arthur Blair—she recounts, for instance, how her own crafting of the name Emma Larkin was “part choice, part chance.” She adopted her surname, she tells us, from a street in San Francisco she happened to be driving down when she made her choice. Now that her work has gained repute, she adds, her decision to stay anonymous has occasionally had comic results. For instance, she reports that she often stutters when answering phone calls for Emma Larkin; that she blushes when her proud mother whispers her secret to close relatives; that she sometimes responds haltingly when someone in her regular life asks, as people still will, “And what do you do?” (It would seem to such inquisitors, she adds, not very much at all.) And then, she uses these self-deprecations to connect, in turn, to the similarly idiosyncratic and even baffling ways that Blair used “George Orwell.” At times, Blair employed “Orwell” interchangeably with his birth name, even in print; sometimes he used “George” with late-in-life friends (though childhood ones knew him as Eric); he even loaned out “Orwell” to a wife. Privately, he sometimes said he used a pen name because he felt overexposed in public, fearful of the “black magic” that negative reviews might direct at him.<sup>5</sup> (No pen name, alas, can ward off that curse.)

Now, to be sure, the online person behind Larkin might be accused of sheer whimsy, prolonging her ruse—or, simply tantalizing us, a bit like the proverbial Cheshire Cat of Lewis Carroll. (Or, I guess, of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson.) And whatever name she uses, people will surely continue to raise questions about her work: about her biographical and literary judgments concerning Orwell; about whether it makes sense to think of an apparent “travel biography” as *reportage* at all<sup>6</sup>; about whether, in particular, Larkin avoids the well-documented pitfalls of the Western (and female) subject once again revisiting the haunts of former empires. (One thinks, for instance, of Mary Louise Pratt’s drubbing of Joan Didion’s *Salvador* [1982] in *Imperial Eyes* [2007].)<sup>7</sup> But I myself think Larkin’s applications of her name choice are anything but whimsical, arbitrary, or conventional. On the contrary, they represent inventive, strategic, on-the-ground decisions mobilized to report on something—a totalitarian regime that viciously denies press freedoms and access—that might otherwise risk being unreportable. Moreover, her choices go to the heart of crucial dimensions of journalistic authority, and thus of the interpretations we as readers commonly make by acceding to it. Whether we recognize it or not, names and identities are entangled with all kinds of intentional and unintentional cover stories journalists may use, and these entanglements often carry over into “the what of the what” those reporters represent.

In these lights, it is telling that Larkin also used the occasion of her online rumination on pen names to cite East Asian traditions that themselves, she says, treat names rather differently than many in the West do. As Larkin has it, citizens in Asia may use name changes to acknowledge the various ways that “our true identities do not reside in random names we are given at birth.” Rather than marking us permanently, as if identifying the bloodlines behind our ink, names may instead be modified to mark important alterations in our lives, to register a change in our social affiliation or status, and sometimes to evade capture, imprisonment, or public defamation (as when Salman Rushdie lived as Joseph Anton). Not coincidentally, in fact, the two central identities identified in Larkin’s title, *Finding George Orwell in Burma*—one a pen name and the other a national identifier—turn out to be vital to her argument about Myanmar.<sup>8</sup> An argument that has, as its central claim, the ingenious idea that three of Orwell’s works—*Burmese Days* (1934), *Animal Farm* (1945), and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)—are an “unintentional trilogy” (109) on that country’s history and current identity. Larkin, furthermore, also makes a more covert claim that moves in nearly the opposite direction: along with finding Orwell in Burma, she argues that Burma is crucial to understanding not just the contents of those three works by Orwell, but the literary sensibility shaping them.

It turns out, as well, that *Finding George Orwell* is itself a hybrid of literary identities, genre forms, and literary modes. It mixes biography, travel writing, and literary criticism, to name but three of its most obvious modalities.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, these modes are also brought together, put in conversation with each other, even allowed to shape-shift into one another—indeed, most importantly, allowed to shape Larkin’s reporting on Myanmar’s present. I want to begin, however, in a different place altogether: with Janet Malcolm’s *The Journalist and the Murderer* (1990), itself a mixed-mode text with its own shadow dramas about names and journalistic authority.

### Emma Larkin: No Lois Lane

Admittedly, Malcolm’s sometimes strident and even obtuse treatise—hereafter *JM*—is pored over more by academics than by working journalists, even though it improbably offers itself as a defense of the news-writing fraternity. Page by page, as many readers will know, the book eviscerates what it characterizes as the self-aggrandizing and irresponsible treatment of murder suspect Jeffery MacDonald (another JM) by true crime writer Joe McGinniss (yes, another JM). Initially positioning himself as MacDonald’s friend, confidant, and defense team colleague, McGinniss is depicted as having betrayed MacDonald by eventually casting him, in *Fatal Vision* (1983), as a ruthless

psychopath who murdered his own family. Rather than centering on this criminal act, however, *JM* focuses instead on McGinniss as the quintessential example of the sinning journalist who has superimposed his own theories (and sloppily, at that) onto the story his source, MacDonald, really wanted told. As a book on the profession, *JM* is full of blanket meta-commentary on journalistic practice: about psychoanalytic transference between reporters and their subjects; about the temptation to be “literary” and New Journalistic; about what reporters can learn from McGinniss’s ostensibly Promethean theft of MacDonald’s trust.<sup>10</sup>

And yet, when it turns its argument back on itself, *JM* seems to draw back from the implications of these very same cautions. The moment that comes to mind is an interlude in the book’s afterword, when the narrator created by the book—you’ll see in a minute why I’ll initially speak of its voice that way—begins referring to the scandalous legal case of its own author Janet Malcolm (yes, again) involving psychiatrist Jeffrey Masson (okay, I’ll stop). Anticipating that “some readers” would be liable “to think of [*JM*] as veiled autobiography”—that is, as a confession of the sins Masson claimed Malcolm had committed against *him*—the narrator says that such mistake derives “from a misconception about the identity of the character called ‘I’ in a work of journalism” (159). The narrator goes on to explain:

This character is unlike all the journalist’s other characters in that he forms the exception to the rule that nothing may be invented: the “I” character in journalism is almost pure invention. Unlike the “I” of autobiography, who is meant to be seen as a representative of the writer, the “I” of journalism is connected to the writer only in a tenuous way—the way, say, Superman is connected to Clark Kent. The journalistic “I” is an overreliable narrator, a functionary to whom crucial tasks of narration and argument have been entrusted. . . . He is an emblematic figure, an embodiment of the idea of the dispassionate observer of life (159–60).

Whatever one thinks of *JM* as a whole, this does not seem, at first glance, its best moment. Given that the book has rather viciously belittled the literary license assumed by McGinniss, it seems incredible that *JM* now wants to claim some for itself. Moreover, having shown the professional claim of objectivity to be entangled with personal desires and interpretive traps of all kinds—the subplots we infer from all of the book’s literary play on shared initials—it seems illogical for the narrator to suddenly fall back on a claim to detached impartiality. *JM*’s analogy about Clark Kent and Superman, moreover, seems to confuse the indeed often quite superhuman powers of narrative with the outright invention of the journalist’s own character in his or her report. We actually do *not* expect reporters to reinvent their identities wholesale

in text, just because they have put their reporting into narrative form.

Over time, however, I've become less interested in debunking Malcolm herself—and you can see, now, that I really do think it's silly to call her a narrator—than in what we can gather about these particular conundrums concerning journalistic identity generally. I say that because her analogy about Clark Kent and Superman is, when applied to Emma Larkin, almost precisely, weirdly, *literally* apt—and yet strangely in many ways backward. For example, Malcolm is partly correct that the writing up of a report can reendow a journalist with powers he or she does not have in the real: seeming invisibility, uncanny foresight, even (especially impossible) narrative omniscience, to name just a few. It might be, then, that *JM* is agreeing with Joyce Carol Oates, who concluded in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1987 that a “pseudonym . . . [is] not so very different from the cultivation [of] . . . narrative voice,” since both are “inventions” of a sort.<sup>11</sup> But Malcolm's very point about journalism, we recall, has all along been that the “I” created by such effects should not stray too far from its original blood-and-bone author and his or her actions on scene. In fact, she says that's what distinguishes a given text as journalism in the first place.

And yet, it's not even quite *that* simple. The interesting thing about Larkin's online rumination, for example, is that it is not just her written-up persona, the term I'll use for her “I” in the text, which gets a literary fleshing out. On the contrary, that rumination renders a literary version of what we colloquially call Larkin's “real self.” Moreover, that self-portrait—as a somewhat casual, hang-out-with-her-mother kind of person, ranging over the hills of San Francisco, blushing and stammering through life—correlates, we think, with the person behind and within the “Emma Larkin” voice in the text of her reports (and it's more than a voice, of course). And therefore, rather than becoming Malcolm's paragon of dispassionate authority, “Emma Larkin” is represented more as a regular person, much like the rest of us, ostensibly: as we see in Larkin's reports and books, she is a bicycle rider, a book lover, fond of sitting down in a café and talking about literature or politics. Therefore, whatever disinterestedness this voice may achieve, it actually derives its authority more from that “ordinariness,” to use a word that Raymond Williams frequently honored; hardly invulnerable at all, that voice is, we might say, not *Suped* up so much as normalized.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, a related claim is made, implicitly—and I will return to this in my closing section: we are led to suppose that this identity is “regular” in the sense that she is not, in the obverse, an interested observer, in the sense of being anyone with an ax to grind about Myanmar. (Suppose, for instance, we discovered that Emma Larkin is actually a former ambassador to Burma. Or John Bolton. Or Dennis Rodman.)

In the meantime, in Larkin's reportorial practice—here, the term I'll reserve for the investigating, note-taking, and gathering up of what she reports, including her physical presence on the scene—things can get even more, to use Larkin's online term for Orwell's identity, "multilayered." As she is doing her legwork, Larkin indeed uses, as Malcolm would point out, her own given name (assuming she is not traveling to Myanmar on a forged passport). Importantly, however, this everyday identity is actually what provides her *cover* as she reports. This would be, again, akin to Malcolm's shrewd insight about Clark Kentism: reporters quite commonly come as they are without explicitly displaying the apparent trappings of their professional backgrounds or their prior training. Not Michael Lewis's MSc from the London School of Economics; not William Finnegan's training in an MFA program; not Ehrenreich's doctorate in cellular immunology. But whoever Larkin is, at most she uses the prior work done under her real name to supplement that cover—and sometimes she leaves that work unmentioned altogether. And again the inverse layer is important, too: as *JM* would insist, "Emma Larkin" is quite literally a "pen name," insofar as it is the retrospective, interior presence we encounter as we read her books.

Meanwhile, Emma Larkin never reveals her true or everyday identity to *us*, of course, as readers. While she is on assignment, only Myanmar officials, sources, and friends get that privilege, we gather. As far as those people on the ground are concerned, "Emma Larkin" turns out to be the secret identity. For us, the opposite is true. But as similar as this may sound to *JM's* analogy, this is where Malcolm gets things almost exactly backward. That is, because of the need to seem *not a reporter* on the ground in Myanmar, the pressure to seem ordinary becomes all the more vital to Larkin's practice. Her particular cover is sustained, we come to learn, by the fact that whoever Emma is, she apparently is careful not to come off as, say, a Lois Lane while she's doing her job (always searching out the scoop, making headlines, and so on). As a result, the quite grounded, earthly limitations this journalist describes in her online reflection also shape what the pen-named "Emma Larkin" can be, even in her text; the person authorizes the persona. And the persona largely stays in that name's ordinary domain, despite the superpowers that narrative might lend to her.

But, you might be asking, is Emma Larkin traveling or working undercover? Well, as I've been suggesting, the answer is both no and yes. Her ordinary identity, presented to the officials of Myanmar, is neither a lie, nor invented. Nevertheless, in practice it is selected from and refashioned, and it serves as both a cover and a constituent element of the literary persona we follow along when we read. As this Larkin seeks out George Orwell, she

travels through city after city in Myanmar, modeling her itinerary on his; in the familiar mode of travel narrative, Larkin strings together reflections along the way, on his biography, his writings, and his theories of totalitarianism, focusing on the local conditions that got him (and get her) thinking. Again, however, part of the drama of the book is that the past is being voiced to us, as her secret readers, as a way of reporting on Myanmar's present. But the ruse is not let out of the closet very much, to anyone around her, in real time.

### Looking For What's Not There

With good reason. Larkin's reporting on Myanmar coincided with the moment when its military junta's forty-year reign reached its nadir of political repression and economic exploitation. By the end of the 1990s, the ruling elite of Myanmar had conducted another round of ever more aggressive series of raids on its own civil society: banning unions and civic associations, prohibiting unregistered computer modems and e-mail, even making it a crime for its own citizenry to invite foreigners into its homes. Constantly watching or recording internal movements, the regime also outlawed gatherings of more than five people and, of course, continued to restrict entry by foreign journalists and intimidate its own press through censorship, harassment, and round-ups. While the country's predominantly rural population drew even more impoverished, its army and cooperating economic elites grew far richer—in some cases, while becoming the world's leading producers of opium. AIDS also became rampant, and a formerly respectable health care system fell, by some measurements, to next-to-last, globally. And millions of Burmese (largely members of nondominant ethnic groups) were exiled or displaced to border regions where sporadic internal warfare continues to be waged. Economic sanctions by the West, meanwhile—begun by the Clinton administration in the late 1990s and tightening over the next decade—may have only had the effect of driving the country deeper into the orbit of India, Thailand, Russia, and especially China, all eager to draw upon Myanmar's energy resources and, in some cases, sell its military their armaments. Some foreign journalists apparently resorted to the cover of tourism to gain entry to the country, but even the occasional travel writer—real or undercover—was obliged to point out that much of the tourist industry itself was erected on the backs of forced labor.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of all this, it was Larkin's decision, as I've said, to make her ordinariness her strategic asset and cover. That is, she tells us in *Finding George Orwell*, because her previous journalistic work had only rarely touched on Myanmar, she found that she could most easily "blend in" among tourists or the small community of expatriate businesspeople she discovered still there

(6). But even the tourist pose was a complicated, dangerous game. Because of the junta's extensive surveillance system, for example, we read that she was forced to repeatedly resubmit her passport, sign local form after form, and so on. In real time, therefore, she repeatedly uses the real name we, as readers, never hear. On the other hand, she occasionally lies to her watchers (but not to us) about her real occupation and the purpose of her visit (94). To reinforce this ploy, every time she arrives in a Burmese town, she tells us, she makes a point of visiting a church, since the locals assumed that's what Westerners are there to do (101). Once in a town or village, she is liable to blithely ride about on a bicycle, wittingly and sometimes unwittingly stumbling into areas where she is not supposed to be (61). And in turn, the ruse travels back out to what she writes: Larkin confesses that, in the book we're reading, she has even had to "change the names of the Burmese people [she] spoke with and, in some cases, their [actual] locations" (6). Larkin even admits that she invented such elaborate codes for places and events in her notes that she herself "sometimes had difficulty deciphering them later" (172).

Again, we might easily give in to the current impulse to scandalize these moments: to complain about "fictionalizing," point to composite characters, or theorize about the supposedly intrinsic "epistemological insecurity" of facticity itself. All, to be sure, legitimate concerns. But in my view, I think much of what we have here is simply a working journalist making pragmatic, reasonable, and quite productive decisions on the ground, and also seeing where they take her. (I don't believe we should lose any sleep over the hoodwinking of Burmese generals, either.) For like Susan Sheehan or Katherine Boo, Larkin has come to practice, I think, an art of indirection, using a persona and a practice of seeming unobtrusiveness, both of which are constituted in an "I" whose own observational powers are shaped by the practical considerations and situational ethics of her self-assignment. And she is willing to blunder into taboo spaces, all the while appearing as no threat to the powers that be. Therefore she is omniscient neither in the epistemological nor the narrative sense; neither is she aggressively digging underneath or behind facades, as we tend to think reporters should.<sup>14</sup> Rather, she accepts that, given her context, she will be forced to do what many of her sources and Burmese subjects do: dissemble, read, listen to whispers and rumors, infer the truth from what is *not* said (131)—to become experts, one friend tells her, at "looking for what's not there" (168). I can illustrate this complicated synergy with her context further, in three ways—let me start with two more obvious points, and then close this section with a less apparent, more multilayered one.

First, "Emma"—and now, we might ponder the suggestive literariness of the name—portrays her practice as strategically linking this persona of

unobtrusiveness to her female identity. Not to edgy bodily vulnerability, say, as Didion had, in *Salvador*; not to the fly-on-the-wall, clinical minimalism of Sheehan; not to the secretive moral disdain, unspoken psychological analysis, or “Japanese” reticence to which Malcolm, oh so ethnocentrically, compares her method (98).<sup>15</sup> We can imagine Burmese officials (mistakenly) regarding Larkin as lacking in confidence, or deferential to the hypermasculinity that, *in situ*, expresses their repressive ethnic nationalism and xenophobia. Secondly, of course, Larkin’s body in her practice, and as represented by her persona, marks her as a foreigner to Myanmar, or enough so that her friends and sources there are sometimes loathe to be seen with her, again for fear of government recrimination (24). To modify one of *Finding George Orwell’s* own favorite tropes for its Emily Dickinson–like circuitousness, she’s never on a tandem bike. Most conversations we see her having are in enclosures that are neither precisely private nor public. Rather, they are liminal spaces, names of places where we meet informants who, again, were in all likelihood renamed in the text we are reading. (In a few cases, Larkin also talks with unnamed exiles outside of Myanmar.)

My third example of her practice and persona is likewise related to Larkin’s characterization of Myanmar as a totalitarian state. The instance emerges when she describes a defense mechanism she experiences under the pressures of surveillance by the government and its beehive of informants. She enlists the help of Czeslaw Miłosz’s *The Captive Mind* (1953), a book also indebted to Orwell:

When I thought too much about the ever present surveillance I found it incredibly unnerving. I would view everyone I met with paranoia, weighing up the possibilities that he or she might be an informer or a member of [military intelligence]. If someone approached me while I was sitting on my own in a tea shop and asked too many questions I would often give him or her the cold shoulder. . . .

I tried to develop the mask that I had seen so many of my Burmese friends wear in public. . . . “One does not perform on a theatre stage,” says Miłosz, “but in the street, office, factory, meeting hall, or even the room one lives in. Such acting is a highly-developed craft that places a premium on mental alertness. . . . A smile that appears at the wrong moment, a glance that is not all it should be can occasion dangerous suspicions and accusations. . . .”

“It doesn’t matter whether the things [informers] say about you are true or not,” a friend told me. “You will be taken away to a detention centre and tortured or pressured until you have confessed to something you didn’t do” (80–81).

There’s a lot going on here: Larkin is describing a personal reaction that is partly temperamental, partly strategic, and even unconscious to a degree.

But mainly what seems to be happening is that she found herself developing a mask on top of the masks she had already been using. The multilayered irony is that, if Larkin begins by fashioning an ordinary, unobtrusive, even vulnerable “I,” that persona-in-her-practice actually gets redoubled by the fearful conditions on which she is reporting.<sup>16</sup> And thus, finally—one might well have to revise one’s syntax accordingly—*this* is how we begin to find Emma Larkin. That is, “find” not in the sense of discovering, or seeing behind, or even necessarily seeing more deeply into. Instead, I mean “finding” in the sense of coming to, connecting to, even making a readerly accommodation with: an accommodation with the journalistic authority she has constructed within the limits she has described. And this means coming to accept that there are some things that even a direct witness—even transformed by the white magic of narrative’s superpowers—cannot fully penetrate or claim to know with certainty.

But what does this shape-shifting have to do with finding Orwell? And beyond that, with finding the country no longer officially named Burma?

### Orwell Found And Lost In Myanmar

Most of the old names [of Myanmar’s cities or streets] were Anglicized Burmese names that had been used by the British colonial government, and the [new] regime claimed that the changes were a long-overdue move to discard these colonial tags. But there was a deeper-rooted motive. The generals were rewriting history. When a place is renamed, the old name disappears from maps and, eventually, from human memory. If that is possible, then perhaps the memory of past events can also be erased. By renaming cities, towns and streets, the regime seized control of the very space within which people lived; homes and business addresses had to be rewritten and relearned. And, when the regime changed the name of the country, maps and encyclopedias all over the world had to be corrected. The country known as Burma was erased and replaced with a new one: Myanmar (*Finding George Orwell*, 13–14).

Read primarily as a biography, *Finding George Orwell in Burma* returns to many tantalizing moments and speculations that have preoccupied scholars for years: for example, it discusses Blair/Orwell’s admiration for Kipling (200); covers the question of whether the young colonial officer took a Burmese mistress (210); offers a meditation on whether, as Norman Sims recently noticed, the writer really ever shot an elephant (224).<sup>17</sup> Larkin also devotes a significant amount of her text to the possibility that Eric Blair had mixed-race, Anglo-Burmese cousins (206 ff.). This last item is especially germane, she argues at length, to the author Orwell’s eventual representations of race—including, Larkin suggests, the significance of the birthmark on the

face of *Burmese Day*'s English protagonist, John Flory. In part, this final argument is Larkin's attempt to parry any charges of Orientalism directed at Orwell or herself (see 20). And such a preemptive move is understandable, given that she spends a good deal of time haunting colonial graveyards, documenting the longings of displaced elites and former colonials, and—after all—seeing Burma's history primarily through the lens of a white Westerner named Eric Blair. Larkin is also deeply interested in how Orwell's books would be received in-country. Indeed, *Finding George Orwell* devotes a disarmingly large number of pages to patrons of tea shops, to booksellers, and to holders of private libraries; her informants are as liable to name their favorite book, or tell their favorite joke, as to discuss the national political scene. As a result, to some readers, it may seem that Larkin (like many a literary biographer) can be too fond of her subject-author, falling victim to overplaying his prophetic talents and confusing the man and the writer. As Larkin tracks down the literal boy inside the master-pen-name, the younger not-yet writer seems to become endowed with all the interpretive foresight that the biographer's hindsight can give him. As if unaware of this risk, Larkin herself frequently refers to Eric Blair as "Orwell" or "the young Orwell." She also clearly prefers the colonial name "Burma" (rather than "Myanmar"), and not always when referring to the past.

But the truth of it is that any book, *Finding George Orwell* included, is not only what it contains, but what we ourselves choose to name it. Rather than a unilinear biography, Larkin's book actually involves a quite complex layering of past and present, biography and imagination, history and prophecy. And her name choices throughout prove quite strategic. As the long passage I have quoted above suggests, for example, she turns her interest in naming and authority to show how the presence of "Orwell" is itself necessarily entangled with the current regime's historical memory and political objectives. On the one hand, therefore, Orwell (not Blair) might seem completely findable in Myanmar's political scene—that is, one might envision his account of totalitarianism everywhere, as if *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were the regime's own playbook. On the other hand, that very same text (along with *Animal Farm*) has in fact been banned from the country's bookshelves: in this more literal sense, "Orwell" (as the shorthand we use to name a corpus of work) is hardly "in" Myanmar at all. If you like, he's become a name banished down *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s infamous memory hole. Or, one might say, he's only "in" Myanmar's lost or remade past. As these temporal paradoxes suggest, Larkin presents Myanmar/Burma more as an Alice-in-Wonderland terrorscape pockmarked with all sorts of absences, renamings, and reinventions of political memory; it is often as if she were writing within

in a kind of Mobius loop of time and memory. But perhaps I should be more straight-line than Larkin typically is. I might say her problem as a journalist goes something like this: you can't use Orwell for your critique until you have really found him. And, on top of that, it may turn out that a lost or forgotten Burma *itself* helped to make him—helped to make not just Blair, but Orwell, the name we use for the literary imagination we find in his texts. Even Mynamar itself has undergone any number of identity inversions that complicate where we might find Orwell “in.”

How could all of this have happened? Well, to begin with, British colonialism in Asia was, as we know, its own special backwater: with its milieu of soggy tennis clubs (242) and military rigmarole, it preserved an Englishness that might well have been laughable in modern Great Britain itself. But by pickling itself in colonial arrogance, overseas Englishness also created legacies of its worst imaginings. Ironically, Larkin argues, much of Myanmar's present is a byproduct of Britain's own colonial system—as it were, subaltern mimicry turned malevolent farce. Exposing a bizarre flipside to the “civilization” the British thought they were exporting, Larkin shows the junta of Myanmar to have learned, instead, from England's own rabid censorship in the colony (127); its own use of forced labor (46, 102); and again its surveillance over the indigenous population, largely under the guise of crime control (74). Above all, this learning curve was inspired, she argues, by what Blair hated most about colonialism: its own stifflingly repressive character. That is, rereading English colonial rule as a tightly controlled, closed, prototypically total system allows Larkin to show how Orwell's descriptions of his days in Burma can be read as harbingers of what seems like prophecy in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. For example, a society described as a “world in which every word and every thought is censored,” “even friendship can hardly exist,” and “[f]ree speech is unthinkable” (273) turns out to be the inner world of colonial rule, not Oceania.

Larkin's portrait of the subsequent postcolonial turn, then, emphasizes the dark ironies of Myanmar's own introjection of its past colonial masters' political paranoia. She presents Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, for example, as materialized in Myanmar's infamous Insein prison; Larkin shows how, retaining a colonial British name that she reminds us is pronounced “insane” (146), this madhouse has been used by the junta to house and torture resisters, and to incarcerate anyone whom it thinks acts suspiciously. (As people under suspicion are liable to do.) Meanwhile, the notorious disdain of the British for race-mixing, a trait Larkin suspects Orwell himself both exhibited and felt shame about (212), is reproduced in the rabid ethnic pride of the current regime. In a bizarre replay of the British obsession with racial

purity, the generals publicly pillory any figures of Anglo-Burmese descent, such as the leading reformer Aung San Suu Kyi, thus vaunting themselves as “more equal than others” (217–18). If theirs is a “Burmese” nationalism, it is an “ethnicity” (as Werner Sollors famously put it) operating as a form of invention; once again, the inmates and overseers have simply switched positions: those formerly treated as beasts, you might say, now walk on two legs like Englishmen. And worse yet, it is not just English blood that is now anathema to these generals’ identities; they suppress Burma’s other ethnic minorities as well (45), thus further dividing the nation they claim to be reunifying.<sup>18</sup>

These arcane turnabouts also clarify why Larkin devotes as much time to the country’s literary and intellectual culture as to its political quarters as such. For Orwell, of course, literature is an important repository of the imagination’s capacity to resist power and imagine change. Moreover, it is a reservoir of our own ability to combat the obfuscations, dull seriousness, and willed amnesia of political persuasions and discourses of all kinds. Rather than just calling up the “real” Eric Blair, Larkin therefore uses the literary-“Orwell” side of Blair, the colonial policeman turned literary subversive, as her guide to the renamed place she still calls Burma. Conversely, Burma is imagined as persisting in the country’s own literary memory. “Where does the past exist,” Larkin writes, quoting Winston Smith’s famous meditation, “[i]f it cannot be read in actual sites or in official records, is it preserved only in people’s minds” (63)? To Larkin, this Burma continues to exist as what Benedict Anderson might call an imagined community, in a neverland literary underground.<sup>19</sup> “In Burma,” Larkin writes in the telling present tense, “certain narratives may be forbidden and many books may be banned, but this doesn’t mean that they don’t circulate. They travel between trusted friends, between false covers, from hidden libraries all over the country, and form a parallel universe of alternative truths and secret histories” (63). Present day Myanmar is thus unnamed, the clock hands of its repressive present turned backward.

The challenge, however, is that Larkin, also travelling “between false covers,” finds herself reporting on a nation state that was and is quite *literally* unwriting its past, literary and otherwise. And thus this alternative world she reports on, this lost Burma of secret histories, often risks vaporizing the minute she finds it. Even those libraries betray the problem: “All these [book] collections,” Larkin admits, “had one thing in common: they were gradually disappearing. Their pages were being glued together by damp and mildew. Pull any book from a shelf in Burma and it will be followed by a sprinkling of powder-like dust, the work of white ants relentlessly munching their way through thousands of texts all around the country” (64). Though these tea

shops may be the seedbed of another resistance culture, the immaterial world of Burma hides in books that are themselves hidden; then the books themselves physically dematerialize. In their place is the regime's own propaganda. Ironically, Larkin's problem as a reporter, then, is that Orwell's prophecies about book reading have become all too true.

Fortunately, as I've suggested, it turns out that Larkin can find her Burma in yet another place. That is, betraying her ruse behind what seems like her doubly incorrect usage—but now, we should see, isn't that at all—Larkin also attempts to demonstrate the young Orwell's own reciprocal absorption of key elements of the culture she calls Burmese. The lost Burma, that is, reappears in the Orwell we read. Crucially, as I've said, this reciprocal exchange of identities is connected not just to *what* Orwell wrote, but *how*: his efforts to vary and modify the genres in which he wrote (something Orwell's best interpreters have long been intrigued by). For instance, journalism and biography, we customarily say, are genres or modes of facts: we usually think they help us see a whole life, or see behind things. But when local censors in Myanmar warn Burmese dissenters and authors, "Don't write about life" (35), the threat actually provides a clue to how Larkin's "biography" (as we would misname it) itself channels Burma's genres of underground imagining and reporting. And, full circle, how she casts the forms we might find if we look back at Orwell. After finishing *Burmese Days*, she reminds us, Orwell turned his "trilogy" away from novelistic realism to fable and dystopian futurism. She suggests, therefore, that Orwell's more realistic, novelistic imagining of Burma worked merely as a prequel to the trademark works still ahead of him. (And that Larkin herself is emulating.) Orwell's corpus, that is, underwent genre- and mode-morphing in which his characters, well, morph. For instance, think of the haunting of the farmers' identities in the spirits of the pigs in *Animal Farm*, or of O'Brien's ruse of good fellowship in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, or the fatalistic reversals of Winston Smith (or Julia) at the end of that novel. (A book that some have suggested was first titled, in the inverse, 1948.) To suggest Burmese sources for such transformations, Larkin slides into discussions about Burmese parables that show similar patterns: stories where Siddhartha appears in human and animal form (34), for example, or a unnamed legend about a village hero who tracks a dangerous evil dragon to its lair, but then turns into that dragon once it is slain (108). Not simply parallels, I would argue, but what journalists and academics alike call really nice "finds": moments when a lost Burma, as it were, seems to ghost write the literary imagination we call Orwell.<sup>20</sup>

And with that, Larkin postulates a reciprocal exchange of humor and satire, and a Burmese-Orwellian appreciation of the suitability of both modes

for the purposes of political critique. Referring back to Orwell's famous observation that "[e]very joke is a tiny revolution" (112), for example, Larkin retells many underground examples of Burmese survival through subversive humor. Bleak truths arise from an oblique strategy that understands what must seem to be unsaid, and yet somehow manages to emerge through a joke's punch line. For instance, she refers to the Burmese joke that, in the country's newspapers, only obituaries make for reliable news reading (39). The locals likewise refer to "rubber band" laws that can be stretched to allow the state to charge as criminal anyone who acts against it (155). She recounts a Burmese joke about a fish that, upon being returned to a lake instead of being used to feed starving people, offers a sarcastic blessing to the junta's leading general for saving its life (112). Or, a joke about a man who travels to a dentist outside Myanmar, and must explain why he does so when there are (supposedly) plenty of dentists in his home country. "The problem," he explains, "is we are not allowed to open our mouths" (115).<sup>21</sup> Obviously, jokes like these work because they invert the everyday, operating again as a Mobius loop that flips over and over again, between tragedy and farce. It turns out that totalitarian rule in Larkin's description produces something like a vile joke—a cartoonish, macabre rendition of governance that reminds us of the futility and horror of such a grandiose lust for control. There is, for example, the horribly funny observation that everyone fears being watched even when they are *not* being watched. Or, there is the laughable terror of when someone confesses something that is not at all true: here, the phantasms of the army's fears get to ghostwrite the state's version of the truth. Or, there is the bleak comedy of official censors who lose track of which material they are supposed to be censoring (125).

Larkin's rendering of the Burma within this totalitarianism is not without its own ambiguities, however. As I've suggested, it may well be that she wants to show us—despite her admission about being unable, in this book, to find much of a *political* underground in-country, except in prisons (269)—that there is indeed a Burma that survives in the ordinary, as (again) an underground not political so much as, again in Anderson's terms, imagined. The refusal of the junta's own *nom de plume* may be Larkin's own tiny revolution, a thumbing-of-the-nose that persists in her second book title as well. Nevertheless, one might still ask whether she is putting too much faith in memory or culture, or perhaps downplaying the extent to which the evocation of "Burma" could itself be bound up in racist and autocratic traditions. Though I am no specialist on the country, my own view is that these associations with the name "Burma" probably all exchange meanings with each other, much as (especially in Orwell) the past, present, and future always do. I have also

tried to suggest that Emma Larkin herself is very aware of the challenges of channeling prophecy into a book of reportage. It is one kind of contribution, as Orwell did, to imagine totalitarianism, to conjure it up in the dystopian novel. It's quite another thing to report on it as a journalist: to see what cannot be seen, to observe when one is always observed, to record what cannot always be written down. Or, to find what has been so intentionally lost. And to try to do all that while being forced to put on masks over masks.

### Conclusion

That the Penguin US paperback of *Finding George Orwell* retains the British spellings of its original London edition—though not its title<sup>22</sup>—also allows me to annoy my students with this final question: “What if Larkin is not really an American?” With little prompting, they quickly get the point that the real question I’m asking is whether it matters if she is. I myself am thinking, of course, of the familiar exceptionalist error for American writers who chose to criticize European colonialism: the risk of making it seem that the international role of the United States itself shouldn’t be considered “imperialist” at all. I thought of that hazard especially because I began teaching *Finding George Orwell* right in the fall of 2012, as the United States announced a warming of relations—a *rapprochement*, a reengagement, you pick the label—with the ruling government of Burma/Myanmar. A new relationship was now made possible, American officials said, by the junta’s release of prisoners (including Aung San Suu Kyi), by a turn to new parliamentary elections, and by a new openness to Western investment. Even President Obama made a visit that year, as his administration eased sanctions previously imposed by two previous administrations. And in May 2013, White House spokesman Jay Carney drew attention to the fact that the Obama administration was now using “Myanmar” more often, reversing its own past practice and that of several past presidencies.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, whether the Obama administration is concerned primarily with human rights, or simply fears economic competition from India, China, and elsewhere is a matter only the future may show. Democratic activists within Myanmar and without, meanwhile, continue to worry that new investment by the West will simply deepen existing inequalities and corruption in the country, since large (often infrastructure or extraction) industries have remained in the hands of the army and its cooperating elites.<sup>24</sup> As in other parts of the world, in other words, the heralding of “the transition to democracy” often only provides cover for the more difficult questions of who manages the economy, how religious tolerance will be nurtured, and how power will be shared or transferred. (In 2011, a joke circulated by the Irrawaddy—

an Internet news agency founded in 1993 by a group of Burmese journalists living in exile in Thailand—said that Myanmar’s president “had indeed handed over power”—from his right hand to his left.) And sure enough, gains for Myanmar’s dissenters were followed by the return of ethnic violence and continuing repression of indigenous journalists.<sup>25</sup> In many ways, therefore, Larkin’s reporting remained not only relevant, but—in a new light—became even more urgent, now, for her American audience. It was one thing, that is, to pillory the British colonial past. But would the US government simply repeat English failures of engagement with Asia, all over again? Would Americans turn a blind eye to persisting totalitarian disciplines underneath the Burmese junta’s current proffer of democratic reforms? In other words, would *Americans* still find Orwell in Burma?

And then, of course, there was the matter of which Orwell they might find, and to what ends. Reading Larkin’s work, one can easily forget that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has always been something of a cultural inkblot test, with writers on the left doubting Orwell’s socialist credentials and those on the right taking perverse joy in embracing him. As John Rodden has put it, even Orwell’s canonization has often meant “assimilation” to the middlebrow and the middle school, at some cost to the writer’s original intentions. These days—despite the marking of Orwell’s legacies upon the passing of the banner year 1984, and then on the centenary of Eric Blair’s birth (2003)—it often seems that critics are as ready to point to the aesthetic and political limitations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Animal Farm* as to their strengths. In particular, as important as Orwell was to his own moment, some have begun to say, it can seem questionable how applicable his essentially Eastern European template for totalitarianism can be to Asia today, much less to our age of increasing globalization, resurgent ethnic nationalisms, and international terrorism.<sup>26</sup> And one has to remember that some attempts to keep Orwell’s ideas about totalitarianism alive have not always been so comforting, either. Neoconservatives in the United States, for instance, have revived the term in order to conflate religious fanaticism with political tyranny, under a supposed emerging “axis” of “Islamofascism.” The late Christopher Hitchens, for example, even contributed an essay for the *Cambridge Companion to Orwell* in 2007 vehemently defending this particular part of Orwell’s legacy for our times—as Hitchens had, we might add, when defending the American invasion of Iraq. We might all be cautioned by realizing that, in that essay, Hitchens also referred to Emma Larkin’s work quite approvingly, and precisely in these terms.<sup>27</sup>

Was this final reading the real Emma Larkin? My advice, naturally, would be to find out for yourself. Certainly, like anyone else, I'm going to be upset if Larkin turns out to be an interested party, or someone with intellectual or political baggage that her self-constructions serve only to conceal. Who wouldn't be? For now, however, the Larkin I find is a bit different from the one driving an appropriation like Hitchens's. For, as I've tried to say in this essay, Larkin is not simply recuperating Orwell, or "writing a life," in order to serve up any particular country-saving solution for Burma/Myanmar. Instead, she is folding into Orwell, and into the reporting behind *Finding Orwell*, fable-like transpositions of the human and the animal, stories of unsaid whispers and rumors, and a healthy mixture of pathos and farce, all of which troubles any brand of political certainty. In reading her work, I am instead reminded—*contra* Hitchens—that the label of totalitarianism has often served those who, unlike Larkin herself, have preferred not to look too closely at the West's version of liberalism (classical, imperial, market-, neo-, you pick the prefix). Or, those who refuse to think historically and contemporaneously about the global power used to promote that liberalism.<sup>28</sup> (And, lately, the powers of surveillance so used.)<sup>29</sup> Indeed, we might also consider the relevance of Larkin's musings on naming, identity, and political transformation to the broader challenges of labeling the ever-changing scheme of our current global order—when we notice, for instance, that the label "Cold War" (a phrase Orwell himself famously coined) is itself currently making a comeback. Whether or not this is the name we should use for our times, we might remember that when Orwell originally conjured the phrase, he actually meant not to describe a world order that was static or, in truth, very "cold" at all. Rather, it was one in which key players might often morph; in which superpowers were liable to find themselves switching their identities with their supposed antagonists; where victims of colonial repression might become its perpetrators; and where ambitious regime changers abroad could find themselves—well, regime-changed at home.<sup>30</sup> Both Eric Blair and George Orwell, I think, would have appreciated that it doesn't always take slaying a dragon to actually become one.

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## Notes

1. My overview here is largely limited to examples from the United States, though even here the literature on the ethics and legality of undercover work is enormous. For examples, see Aaron Schwartz, "Is Undercover Over?" *Extra!*, March 2008, 28–31; Howard Kurtz, "Undercover Journalism," *Washington Post*, June 25, 2007; Mark Lisher, "Lying to Get the Truth," *American Journalism Review*, October/November 2007; and David A. Logan, "Masked Media: Judges, Juries, and the Law of Surreptitious Newsgathering," *Iowa Law Review* 83 (October 1997): 161. The Silverstein piece was "Their Men in Washington: Undercover with D.C.'s Lobbyists for Hire," *Harper's*, July 2007, 53–61. For Ehrenreich's denial, see *Nickel and Dimed: On Not Getting By in America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), 6. For comparable debates in Canada and England, see Carolyn Morris, "Undercover Blues," *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, January 13, 2009, <http://rrj.journalism.ryerson.ca/undercover-blues/>, and the articles listed at <http://dlib.nyu.edu/undercover/undercover-journalism-debated>. For my thinking on journalism's importantly renegade status, I am indebted to Barbie Zelizer, *Taking Journalism Seriously: News and the Academy* (New York: Sage Publications, 2004), 189–90, 204–05.

2. Compare John D'Agata and Jim Fingal, *The Lifespan of a Fact* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2012), 19, and David Shields, *Reality Hunger* (New York: Vintage, 2010), 169.

3. Robert S. Boynton, ed., *The New New Journalism* (New York: Vintage, 2005), xv. Notably, this "new new" formulation allowed some writers to say explicitly that they were *not* "new journalists" at all: see, for instance, the response of Calvin Trillin, 401. As John Hartstock shows, the norms I describe here commonly dominate the field of American literary journalism studies. See *A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form* (Amherst:

University of Massachusetts Press, 2000). These norms are also discussed from a dissenting viewpoint, different from my own, in Doug Underwood, *The Undeclared War Between Journalism and Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), esp. 39, 64, 67 ff.

4. I have written elsewhere about the dominance of this realist tradition in contemporary literary journalism. See, for example, my “The Underwater Narrative: Joan Didion’s *Miami*,” *Literary Journalism Studies* 3 (Fall 2011), 9–29, and “When Noir Meets Nonfiction,” forthcoming in *Twentieth-Century Literature*.

5. Larkin’s reflection can be found at <http://www.finlay-publisher.com/articles.htm>.

6. With characteristic balance, Hartstock discusses how travel writing sometimes troubles the category of “literary journalism” itself (13 and ff.).

7. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007), 222 ff.

8. Emma Larkin, *Finding George Orwell in Burma* (New York: Penguin, 2006). All further citations in text.

9. Augustin Zarsosa has recently suggested that the idea of a “mode” is a more instructive way of thinking about the rhetorical strategies that traverse genres and that these operate as discursive models that “[regulate] our knowledge of reality” (237). “Melodrama and the Modes of the World,” *Discourse* 32 (Spring 2010): 326–255.

10. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York: Vintage, 1990). All further citations in text.

11. Quoted in Carmela Ciuraru, *Nom de Plume: A (Secret) History of Pseudonyms* (New York: Harper, 2011), xiv.

12. See, for example, Raymond Williams, “Culture Is Ordinary” (1958), reprinted in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, ed. Robin Gale (London: Verso, 1989), 3–18.

13. “The Ruin of Myanmar,” *New York Times*, November 19, 2000; Blaine Harden, “How to Commit a Perfect Dictatorship,” *New York Times*, November 26, 2000; Seth Mydans, “Myanmar: No. 1 in Opium Production,” *New York Times*, December 21, 2001; “Ending Repression in Myanmar,” *New York Times*, May 7, 2002; Jane Perlez, “Myanmar Is Left in Dark, an Energy-Rich Orphan,” *New York Times*, November 17, 2006; “The Despotism Formerly Known as Burma,” *New York Times*, September 26, 2007. See also David I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), and Ian Holliday, *Burma Redux: Global Justice and the Quest for Political Reform in Myanmar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

14. I discuss this presumption about exposé in “The Underwater Narrative.”

15. “Being a woman,” Susan Sheehan has written with something of a wink, “has been a great help in interviewing, in that you’re less of a threat.” In Jack T. Huber and Dean Diggins, *Interviewing the World’s Top Interviewers* (New York: S.P.I. Books, 1992), 247–48.

16. Larkin’s strategies might also be compared with those of Australian ethnographer Monique Skidmore, author of *Karaoke Fascism: Burma and the Politics of Fear* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004): “When I am in Burma

. . . I scare myself. I practice self-censorship. I engage in self-talk and fear rationalization and minimization strategies. In short, I do many of the things that Burmese people do when confronted with repression. And that forms the basis of my analytical strategy. . .” (8).

17. Sims’s comments that this brief suggestion by Larkin affected his reading of Orwell’s famous essay: see “The Problems and the Prospects for Literary Journalism Studies,” *Literary Journalism Studies* (Spring 2009): 9.

18. Werner Sollors, *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

19. The name “Burma” is preferred by many democratic activists and exiles. Thomas Fuller, “Burma? Myanmar? New Freedom to Debate Includes Name,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2012. I refer here, of course, to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1993).

20. Larkin’s hypothesis therefore provides an important reply to those critics who have faulted Orwell’s use of allegory or fable for political critique; cf. Morris Dickstein, “*Animal Farm*: History as Fable,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orwell*, ed. John Rodden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 133–45. Importantly, the contemporary archive of folklore from across Burma is deeply indebted to the pioneering work of Burmese journalist and activist Ludu U Hla, who collected some of his tales from fellow prisoners while being imprisoned for three years by his government. His first-person account (1958) of those years has been translated into English as *The Caged Ones*. See *The Folk-tales of Burma: An Introduction*, eds. Gerry Abbott and Khin Thant Han (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 22 and ff.

21. As Choe Sang-Hun pointed out in the *New York Times*, this particular joke Larkin retells actually landed one Burmese performer in prison; “Myanmar-Magic: Tell a Joke, and You Disappear,” October 29, 2007. On the regime’s suppression of humor, compare Skidmore 126–7, and Holliday 75.

22. The British edition was called *Secret Histories* (London: John Murray, 2010).

23. See the transcript of Carney’s press conference, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/05/20/press-briefing-press-secretary-jay-carney-5202013>.

24. Aung Zaw, “Are Myanmar’s Hopes Fading?” *New York Times*, April 25, 2013. See also Thomas Fuller, “Democracy Leader Cautions Investors against ‘Reckless Optimism’ in Myanmar,” *New York Times*, June 2, 2012; Mark McDonald, “Rights Groups Assail U.S. Decision on Myanmar,” *New York Times*, July 12, 2012; Thomas Fuller, “A Myanmar in Transition Says Little of Past Abuses,” *New York Times*, June 15, 2013.

25. “Myanmar’s Journalists Still at Risk,” *New York Times*, May 24, 2014, reported arrests and new jailings. The joke I recount is reported by Holliday, 86. The *New Republic*, meanwhile, did manage to track Larkin down, seeking out her assessment about whether a “Burmese Spring” was or wasn’t in the air. She saw hope, but was cautious. See Emma Larkin, “The Awakening,” at [http://www.newrepublic.com/article/world/magazine/99537/burma-spring-aung-san-su-kyi](http://www.newrepublic.com/article/world/magazine/99537/burma-spring-aung-san-suu-kyi). Her essay originally appeared in the *New Republic* on February 2, 2012.

26. On Orwell as a “Rorschach,” see E. Bruce Douglass, “The Fate of Orwell’s Warning,” *Thought* 60 (November 1985): 263; John Rodden in *The Politics of Literary Reputation: The Making and Claiming of ‘St. George’ Orwell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 30, 395 ff. Michael Clune begins his essay “Orwell and the Obvious” (*Representations* [Summer 2009]: 30) citing the range of critics who argue *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has become a period piece. See also Robert Conquist, “Orwell, Socialism, and the Cold War”; Bernard Crick, “*Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Context and Controversy”; and Erika Gottlieb, “George Orwell: A Bibliographic Essay,” all in *Cambridge Companion to Orwell*: 126–32, 146–159, and 190–200 respectively.

27. Christopher Hitchens, “Why Orwell Still Matters,” in *Cambridge Companion to Orwell*, 207.

28. On this point, see Michael Halberstam, *Totalitarianism and the Modern Conception of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

29. Thanks to the anonymous *LJS* reader who pointed me to the *International Business Times* claim (based on Amazon.com statistics) that “George Orwell’s 1984 Book Sales Soar[ed] 6,000% on Edward Snowden NSA Prism Data Leak.” Article by Hannah Osborne, June 11, 2013, at <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/george-orwell-sales-1984-rise-edward-snowden-477262>.

30. I’m thinking here, of course, of Orwell’s famous essay, “You and the Atomic Bomb,” available at [http://orwell.ru/library/articles/ABomb/english/e\\_abomb](http://orwell.ru/library/articles/ABomb/english/e_abomb). Importantly, the political views of Barack Obama’s own grandfather, Hussein Onyango Obama, had been vitally shaped by his years spent in Burma. Peter Baker, “In Visit to Myanmar, Obama Will See a Nation that Shaped His Own Grandfather,” *New York Times*, November 18, 2012.



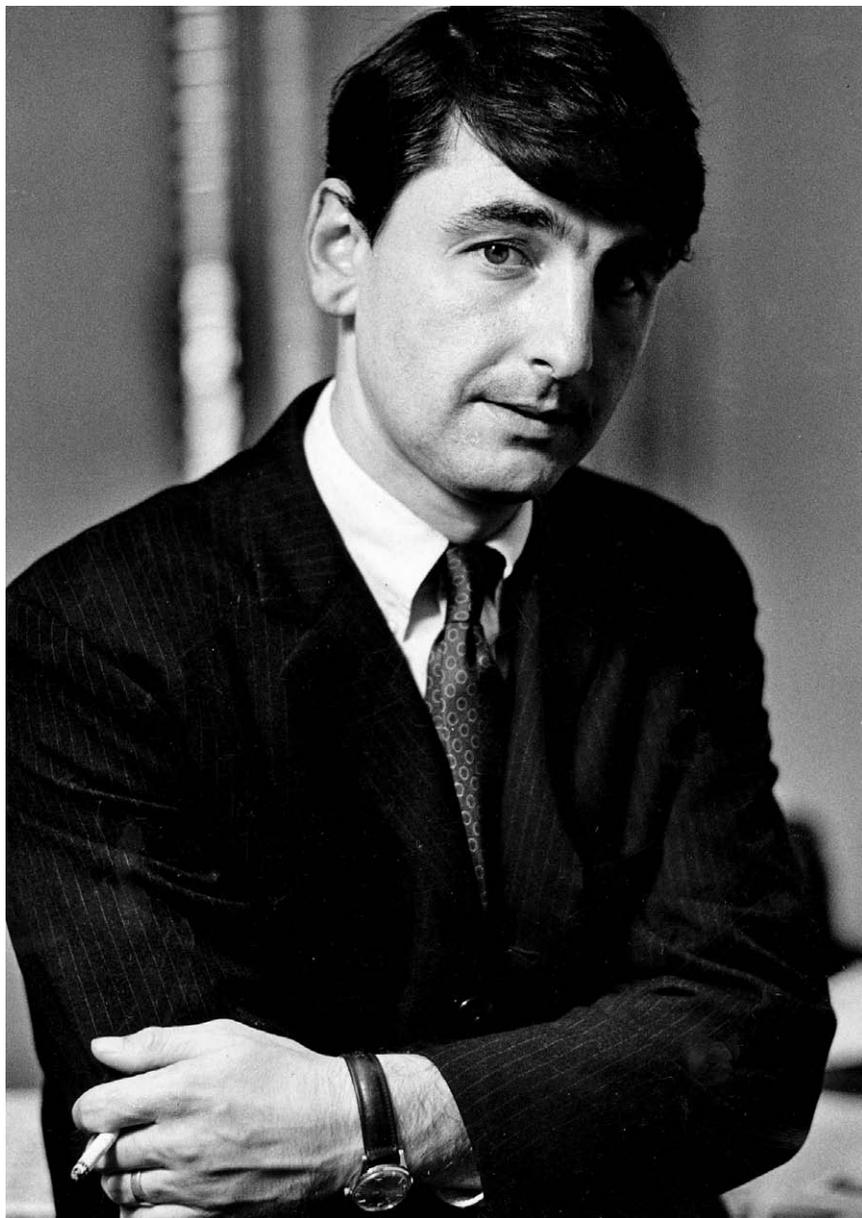


Photo by Barbara Gandolfo-Frady

## “Just as I Am”? Marshall Frady’s Making of *Billy Graham*

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**Abstract:** Literary journalists have a dual role that more or less inevitably presents a moral problem. They must establish a relationship with their subject, and then must shift their attention and loyalty to their art—the writing of the work. Marshall Frady (1940–2004), a journalist with a zeal for the literary side of the balance that drew on Southern writers such as Faulkner and Agee, published evocative profiles of numerous subjects in national magazines and novelistic biographies. Nowhere was the moral problem more troubling than when Frady, the son of a Southern Baptist preacher, took on world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham in a biography he spent at least five years working on. The following paper is based on Frady’s personal papers, recently acquired by Emory University in an IRS auction.

A moral conundrum at the heart of literary journalism is the writer’s relationship with his or her main character. The writer of this higher order of nonfiction needs to get inside the head of the individual or individuals being written about. This relationship-to-source is different from that of the newsroom correspondent. That more common journalistic relationship has its own set of ethical and legal complexities, balancing protection of a source against a public interest in disclosure.<sup>1</sup> But for the literary journalist, the main source of information is usually the story’s subject as well, unless the work’s central figure is never interviewed. (In that case, the work can be an attack, like Tom Wolfe’s 1965 profile of *New Yorker* editor William Shawn, or a tour de force, like Gay Talese’s legendary “Frank Sinatra Has a Cold” in 1966, assignments in which the subjects refused to cooperate.<sup>2</sup>) Furthermore, the literary journalist lacks the authority of an overriding public good. Whether the protagonist is a celebrity, a political superstar, or a nobody, this is “intimate journalism,” requiring what Walt Harrington calls “a kind of invasive

interviewing” and the subject’s “enthusiastic involvement.”<sup>3</sup> The writer may also need to ask probing, personal, or seemingly trivial questions of the subject’s kinfolk and associates. The closeness requires a variety of methods to win the trust, if not enthusiastic involvement, of the subject and other sources. The writer must be something of a salesman, a gentleman caller, or a hustler. He will try to radiate trustworthiness, backed by past writings and third-party testimonials, or play on a subject’s vanity. The writer might try to achieve a level of familiarity that makes him or her seem to vanish into the background. Janet Malcolm describes these devices and “disingenuousnesses” as being played out in a fever of anxiety on the part of both the writer and the subject.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of all this is not true friendship or intimacy, of course, but the amassing of facts and impressions. And a lot of facts and impressions must be gathered, for the literary journalist’s art is to select only those that deliver the goods to the reader. The writer might well remain on friendly terms with the source after publication; the writer’s double-ness does not necessarily become a double-cross. Still, Malcolm’s cruel curse is hard to shake off in the case of literary journalism, that the process is “morally indefensible.”<sup>5</sup>

Marshall Frady provides a beguiling case study of this dilemma, specifically around the reporting, writing, and publication of his biography of Billy Graham by Little, Brown in 1979. Frady died of cancer in 2004, leaving a massive archive of personal papers that document the mixed successes and gyrations of his extraordinarily productive career.<sup>6</sup> Frady’s talent for writing in a lavish style all his own—a high rhetoric of the American South using on-the-ground reporting from civil-rights-era dramas and personalities—was recognized in the magazine world as early as 1964, when he began reporting for *Newsweek* at age twenty-four.

His idea of writing a novelistic biography of the world-renowned evangelist Billy Graham had many foreshadowings. Frady was the only son of a Southern Baptist preacher, J. Yates Frady, who pastored a sequence of churches around the piedmont scrublands of South Carolina and Georgia in the 1940s and ’50s. From his father, he absorbed a way of using language to sway moods, evoke biblical dimensions in everyday life and give spiritual matters an incarnation in metaphor. He was smote as a teen by literary ambition rather than the Holy Spirit. But he also retained an enduring sense of sin in a life that would be full of mischief and infidelities, an exhilaration more than a shame that he described as lurking “like the distant steaming of a robust and unabashed calliope.”<sup>7</sup> The essay containing that fanciful image, from a first-person account that ran in *Mademoiselle* in 1970, “Growing up a Baptist,” offended his parents. His father, in particular, felt that the piece mocked Southern Baptists and dismissed his gospel preaching as a grand delusion. The son

tried to repair the damage in a letter home, insisting the piece was not about the Southern Baptist Church or Southern Baptists in general, but about his own experience. “I just don’t understand your dismay,” he wrote. “The editor wrote me, before the piece appeared, that she envied me my upbringing, that she wished she had grown up in [so] full and rich and intense—and *integrity-conscious*—an atmosphere, and she absolutely was not being condescending or patronizing.” In this four-page typed letter (typical of some forty years of letter-writing in his archived papers), Frady spells out a sort of personal theology for his own literary journalism.

Now, there may be some for whom “the mixture of a lie ever giveth pleasure,” but I can tell you that it never giveth pleasure to any serious writer—in fact, there is nothing more lethal and deadening to what every serious writer is trying to do than even the faintest traces of a lie in his work; nothing more alien than a lie, because his business—what impels him to be a writer in the first place—is, so far as he is able, no less than telling the truth as God Himself would be telling it (which may also be the real writer’s supreme conceit, but there it is anyway). . . . “If you would just stick to the facts,” you say. But I don’t think reality consists of facts. And anyway, where do you suppose all that imagination—all these adjectives—came from in the first place? For what may have been the extravagant and high emotionalism of that piece, you have to thank the high emotionalism of where I came from—which is what I was talking about in the piece.<sup>8</sup>

One of the first sallies he took out of the Atlanta bureau of *Newsweek* was for the profile of a sixteen-year-old male evangelist in Campbell’s Creek, West Virginia, in 1964. The dispatch he sent to the New York office was so bewitching, it took on a life of its own, according to several letters from Michael Janeway, then a staff writer at *Newsweek* assigned to rewrite the profile.<sup>9</sup> Under *Newsweek*’s system at the time, bureau reporters telexed long, detailed files that were then rewritten, shortened, and sometimes blended with other files to run without bylines. Janeway, who told Frady he wept to cut back on his prose, said that the original file had so impressed senior editor Jack Kroll that he passed it around to other editors until “I hear your name echoing through the corridors occasionally.” Jim Cannon, the head of correspondents, sent copies to all the bureaus saying he wanted reporting of that caliber in the future. Janeway also discreetly sent Frady’s file to *Esquire* and got a “very encouraging” letter back, which he relayed to Frady. “If you follow *Esquire* you have probably noticed that they seem open to any new talent, which they then stir with N. Mailer’s or some other philosopher’s turgid works,” Janeway wrote. “Anyway, I hope you keep in touch with them.”<sup>10</sup> Soon after, Janeway moved on to become an associate editor at the *Atlantic*

*Monthly* in Boston, and trumpeted Frady there. “Everybody addicted to the Baptist piece,” he wrote Frady in 1966. “[*Atlantic* executive editor] Bob Manning says go ahead, shoot for a top of forty-five hundred words.” Frady had apparently proposed a story for the *Atlantic* that would examine together his two obsessions: Southern Baptists and the civil rights movement.<sup>11</sup> (One of Frady’s first assignments with *Newsweek*, besides the West Virginia file, was covering Martin Luther King Jr.’s disastrous campaign in St. Augustine, Florida.) The theme of Frady’s *Atlantic* article, which ran the following January, was that the twain never met. “The South, the most thoroughly churched corner of our country, is a humid gospel region largely under the cultivation of the Southern Baptist Convention,” the article maintained. “Here in the South, the moral challenge of the post-1954 civil rights movement was mounted—and here it was for the most part ignored, sidestepped, and in some cases opposed by the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.” The piece makes passing reference to Dr. Billy Graham, citing a somewhat misleading quote that suggested “the South’s folk preacher” felt the primacy of soul-salvation should foreclose the church’s interest in “questions the people aren’t asking.”<sup>12</sup> In a letter Janeway sent Frady a few months later, he says reports of progress “on your biography of Billy Graham” are good news and he hopes Frady’s literary agent will let the *Atlantic* see it. The reference to a Graham book twelve years before it would actually come about could be a mistake or a joke.<sup>13</sup> Frady, at the time, was a guest writer-in-residence at Sea Pines Plantation, Hilton Head, South Carolina, writing his first book, a biography of George C. Wallace consciously modeled on Robert Penn Warren’s 1946 novel *All the King’s Men*.<sup>14</sup>

**W**allace was a critical success, establishing Frady as a dazzling new Southern contender in the New Journalism happening.<sup>15</sup> He had an ear for Wallace’s dialect, an eye for detail (in Wallace’s 1967 New Hampshire primary campaign for the presidency, “his breast pocket was bulging with plastic-tip White Owl cigars and scraps of paper on which were scribbled random notes . . . like a traveling novelty salesman”), and an intuitive intellectual flair. Wallace was “a consummate political and cultural articulation of the South, where life is simply more glandular than it is in the rest of the nation,” Frady writes in his blend of Faulkner, Agee, and political journalism. “Southerners tend to belong and believe through blood and weather and common earth and common enemy and common travail, rather than belonging, believing, cerebrally.”<sup>16</sup> He had left *Newsweek* after four months for a fellowship at the University of Iowa, where he gravitated to the prestigious Iowa Writers Workshop. He returned to *Newsweek* for about a year more of covering the civil rights drama, including the trial of the killer of civil rights activist Jonathan

Daniels in Lowndes County, Alabama.<sup>17</sup> Soon after moving to *Newsweek's* Los Angeles bureau in 1966, Frady quit the magazine with a contract for the Wallace book, and made Atlanta his transitory base camp for the next ten years. During that time, he juggled literary agents, contracts, and freelance assignments with many of the brand magazines of the day—*Saturday Evening Post*, *Mademoiselle*, *Esquire*, *Holiday*, *Atlantic* and, in his most rambunctious run of work in 1969–71, *Harper's* under editor Willie Morris, with David Halberstam, Larry L. King, and John Corry as fellow staff writers. Later, *Life*, *New Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, and *Playboy* would be regular venues for Frady's work.

By the fall of 1973, Frady was feeling played out. In Raleigh, North Carolina, having lunch in a hotel dining room with Claude Sitton, executive editor of the Raleigh newspapers, it seemed the civil rights excitement had sputtered and died. Sitton had singlehandedly covered the South in its most violent years of the early 1960s for the *New York Times*, while Frady had come late and doe-eyed to this epic upheaval. So the two reminisced, as Frady wrote to his former *Newsweek* bureau chief, “about the old smokes and glories, indulging in melancholy benedictions and accounts of the fine sun-bright soar and slow dim decline since of many princes and knights of those days.” Frady goes on to apologize for being so “inert and sludgy of wit and fellowship” during a recent house party in the North Georgia mountains hosted by that former boss. “I was not, needless to say, in finest fettle,” he writes. “It’s just that, for about the past year now, I’ve felt like one of those black holes in space. . . . Whatever this thing is—simply too much isolation and insularity, probably—it’s been a fearsome bear, a real gulch, and of course there’s nothing for it but to haul myself back out into the quick heat and surge and glisten of things by my own hands’ labor: but I seem to dwell in a strange abiding second-distance removed even among the liveliest of company, like a stopped clock under a glass bell.” Frady was in Raleigh on assignment for Clay Felker’s *New York* magazine, immersing himself in “the ferocious Nuremberg wholesomeness of a Billy Graham football-stadium Crusade for Christ.”<sup>18</sup> The idea of the story was to see how Graham, as America’s preacher to presidents, was coping with the undoing of his favorite White House host ever, Richard Nixon. That particular story never ran.

A month later, however, Frady was on another assignment for *New York*, covering the Yom Kippur War. Frady seemed to be getting back into the surge and glisten of things, back to the biblical region where *Harper's* had sent him in 1970 for a series that became Frady’s second book, *Across a Darkling Plain*.<sup>19</sup> There in the warring Middle East in October 1973, he met a younger American correspondent, Marc Cooper, whose earlier experience as a transla-

tor for Chilean President Salvador Allende gave Frady the idea that the two could make a pitch to *Playboy* for a profile of Fidel Castro. Castro had been a fascination for Frady since his misadventures at age seventeen trying to get to the Sierra Maestra Mountains of Cuba to join the Revolution. *Playboy* accepted the story proposal, sending Frady and Cooper to Mexico City for what turned out to be nearly eight weeks of surreal haggling and waiting in vain on the Cuban embassy for passage. Cooper would later publish a eulogy in the *Nation* that included a gonzo tale of Frady renting two IBM Selectric typewriters (one for each to write a book proposal), buying a drug-store package of amphetamines and a fifth of Scotch, and locking himself in his room at the Hotel Geneve to stay up all night consuming the intoxicants, typing and discarding crumpled drafts and finally producing the perfect book proposal on Billy Graham, on a single sheet of paper.<sup>20</sup>

The Frady archives suggest that, in fact, his Graham biography had already been accepted a few months earlier. He had been separated from his second wife, Gloria, and staying with a friend, *Look* magazine writer William Hedgepeth, in Atlanta. Hedgepeth recalled one afternoon when he found Frady in a state of exuberance. He had just gotten a phone call from his agent Sterling Lord that his Graham biography had landed a \$100,000 contract. Frady threw an arm around Hedgepeth, held up his finger and said in his courtly manner, "If it's not too much to ask, could you, on my behalf, contact an available and attractive member of the fairer sex?" Hedgepeth presently introduced him to a former next-door neighbor, German artist Gudrun Schunk, who would become his third of four wives.<sup>21</sup> What Frady typed up a few weeks later in Mexico was a proposal for a fictionalized version based on Graham. An editor at Bantam had seen Frady's original proposal for a biography and asked for a novel instead. So, as Frady tells his version in a 1975 letter, "I quickly clacked out a scenario over a day and night on a rented typewriter in a dim-bulbed Mexico City hotel room while I was down there awaiting clearance from the Cuban embassy on a *Playboy* assignment on Fidel. Accordingly, it came out a bit muzzy and sloshy and ill-proportioned, which may be why [Bantam] finally demurred on it, but by then the biography had already been signed by Little, Brown anyway."<sup>22</sup>

All his writing life, Frady was working on two or three novels on the side, with at least one usually included in multibook contracts with various New York publishers. The editors and agents who saw his fiction in drafts or proposals responded with serious comments and compliments. Yet he never had a novel published.<sup>23</sup> The frustration of this for Frady was not so much in his failure as a novelist, but in his success in literary journalism. He began to wonder if this mongrel genre, this "dubious and uneasy medium" combin-

ing factual reporting and art, would survive the amnesia and decays of time. His driving passion from early adolescence was to achieve something of lasting merit, the semblance of immortality. As David Halberstam recounted in his admiring 2006 introduction to a posthumously reissued *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness*, Frady had always seen himself as a writer. “The epiphany—that he was a writer, or at least wanted to be,” Halberstam writes, “had come to him while still in high school because he had been reading Shakespeare and had loved not merely the prose, but the fact that Shakespeare, on the Richter scale of durability, had lasted a long time, over four hundred years.”<sup>24</sup> Yet Frady was troubled by some of the ethical damage a literary journalist suffers in the process of seeking the highest form of writing using real people caught in the circumstances of their lives and of history. “I don’t know,” he mused to his agent, Sterling Lord, as he faced the Everest of his Graham project, “maybe this is just my own peculiar midnight dybbuk to wrestle with. But it’s prompted suspicions of my own that what this whole long experiment of literary journalism will finally come to is one of those dark futile misbegotten arts like alchemy.”<sup>25</sup>

Frady from the start was prepared to write the Graham book “exclusively from the outside” without Graham’s cooperation.<sup>26</sup> His initial request in April 1974 for two or three hours of Graham’s time at his home in Montreat, North Carolina, was rejected because the evangelist was fully booked for the rest of the year.<sup>27</sup> It seemed probable to Frady that he would be unable to breach the protective machinery of the Billy Graham Evangelical Association.<sup>28</sup> He began his research with a stretch of time in Charlotte, then installed himself back in Atlanta.<sup>29</sup> There were many distractions. During these years in the in the mid-’70s, his legal, financial, and personal problems seemed to tumble over each other. He spent twenty-four hours locked in a Fulton County jail cell for owing \$4,000 in alimony to his first wife. His second wife, who was suffering mental problems that would land her in a clinic in South Carolina, entangled Frady in a drawn-out divorce. The IRS was after him for back taxes. His letters throughout his career, but especially during this time, plead in elegant gestures of misery with lawyers, literary agents, magazine editors, and collection agencies for loans, advances, deadline extensions, quick magazine assignments, or simple mercy. By the end of 1975, without having turned in a single page of the Graham book, he told his editor at Little, Brown that his personal travails had landed him “at an absolutely hopeless and implacable cul-de-sac.”<sup>30</sup> Little, Brown bailed him out with enough funding to work on Graham for another nine months.<sup>31</sup> Frady continued mining Graham’s documented history in morgues of newspaper clippings and in the long shelf of books on Graham—critical or hagiographic—that had accumulated since the ’50s.<sup>32</sup>

### Courting The Source

In March 1976, Frady again contacted Graham's aide, T.W. Wilson, about spending time with Graham, unobtrusively and intermittently, to "lend a final crucial dimension to the whole portrait." Frady acknowledged to Wilson that Graham seemed, in previous biographies, uncomfortable with too much attention on himself. "I don't know how I can reassure you on that score," Frady wrote, "except to say that this is a profile conceived to be, obviously and necessarily, both about the man and his ministry."<sup>33</sup> Wilson, a long-time Graham associate, phoned Frady ten days later asking for more specifics, given the avalanche of requests they got for Graham's time. Without yet hinting at his technique of radiographic portraiture, Frady wrote back that he wanted to shadow Graham on his busy schedule "at whatever appropriate remove," and at some point, sit down with the man to chat. "I'm somewhat abashed to be requesting the help of you all to this extent . . . but it would be immeasurably helpful to the final registers of what is going to be, it seems certain, an important book—owing not at all to my hand, I hasten to say, but simply to the man and his work, and the way this whole undertaking has come to take shape."

Frady got his initial interview with Graham a short time later.<sup>34</sup> He describes the meeting this way in the biography:

[Graham emerges] suddenly out of a glimmer of leaves with a curiously lurching and off-tilt lope, a precipitous and galumphing eagerness. He greets his visitor, a stranger who has flown up that morning, with a huge glad grin flaring lavishly under his dark sunglasses, yet there seems in his manner some vague momentary falter of abashment, distraction—his commodious handshake loose and tentative, in the cordial blare of his voice some vapor gap of light uncertainty—a furtive shyness that is faintly startling after all the awesome theatre of those stadiums over the years.

The two men settled down on the porch of Graham's log-and-shingle house for a light lunch, which Graham blesses with a short prayer that mentions his visitor, asking the Lord to bless him and his family and be present for their talk. "It has the peculiar effect of producing in the stranger, as he hears this with bowed head, an unexpected little interior bloom of gratitude," Frady writes. Amiably, Graham ("By all means, call me Billy, please") asks the stranger about his own spiritual standing. Frady responds, "Well, I don't know that I have accepted Jesus exactly in the sense you would mean, but I believe in him, I love him, he's a living reality to me. I'm a Christian, yes, though a terribly imperfect and faltering one." While being driven back down the mountain in a station wagon, Frady savors a feeling of lingering benediction from Graham.

It's as if his simple presence has the effect of a kind of blessing—leaves a mellowness afterward of a spontaneous, guileless, eager, fond absorption and regard. But more than that, one is left with a surprising sense in him of an ineffable utter innocence, as clear and blameless as the crystalline mountain morning. It prompts the stranger to turn and declare to the aide behind the wheel, "I have to tell you, I've never gotten off of anyone I've ever met such a feeling of natural goodness. What a wickedness it would be to ever visit mischief on a soul like that." And then one realizes—he's Billy Budd. Melville's welkin-eyed Billy.<sup>35</sup>

With that, Frady sounds his literary theme, and he would share this "Billy Budd" idea with both Graham and his wife in the next few months. In that initial two-hour interview, he told Graham what his theme would *not* be: He would not paint him as insincere or a profiteer, the suspicions of the cynical who imagine an Elmer Gantry behind every popular evangelist.<sup>36</sup> Graham, for his part, went into his study after Frady's visit and prayed that the writer would be drawn closer to the Lord during his research and writing and, as Graham wrote in the first of many courteous letters he would mail to Frady, "that it will culminate in a complete surrender of your life to Jesus Christ, not only as Saviour but as Lord!"<sup>37</sup>

Frady sensed an opening. Thus began the courtship that every literary journalist learns to conduct. Frady conducted his with word-magic and charm. "I am, needless to say, thrummingly eager to move on into whatever talks and times with Billy can be worked out," he wrote to Wilson in a follow-up. Frady asked for meetings with Graham's wife, brother, mother, sons, and daughters and requested Graham's week-by-week schedule over the next few months for Frady's planning, especially so he might attend one more Crusade. In a letter to "Billy," Frady described how the book "is turning out to be a rare and difficult grappling indeed, more consuming and deeply-dimensioned than I had ever anticipated, and of course you have divined not a little that's involved in that grappling," a hint at the divine assistance Graham was praying for.<sup>38</sup> Graham invited Frady to join his team at the next Crusade in San Diego, August 15–24, 1976, and Frady accepted. The bonding Frady achieved on that nine-day trip would open up much closer relationships to milk for the book's central narrative of Graham's life. Frady called it "a windfall of material resulting from an access and intimacy that developed with Graham beyond what any of us really expected."<sup>39</sup> Witnessing the San Diego Crusade from the inside also provided scenic detail, such as the book's final glimpse of Graham the insomniac, back in his motel room, "a lamplit carpeted muffled hush abruptly far from all the heavings of great hosts, the anthems and grandeurs of the stadium . . . in the darkness as he waits for sleep—waiting to resume his navigation through that gape before him again of the night."<sup>40</sup>

For Frady, the process of charming was also a kind of self-seduction. He often described it as Stanislavsky journalism. “Wholly without premeditation, in an almost automatic suspension of your own persuasions and sensibilities, you enter into an identification with your principals, perhaps not unlike that an actor reaches with a character, so complete that you almost *become* them, become who and what you’ll later be writing about.”<sup>41</sup> Such a transformation happened to him in San Diego, he told Graham. “I kept feeling as if I were becoming assimilated into it [all] somehow—a highly unprofessional lapse of detachment. But then, I’ve had to realize that the truths of this story can’t really be come by from a perspective and position of detachment: they don’t lie there. In that sense and others, it seems I’m light-years beyond where I began with this book.”<sup>42</sup> He also explained this book’s “particular literary run” to Graham’s wife, Ruth, who grew so close to Frady during these months that she sent him her poems for his reaction. “I’m trying something with this book that is terribly difficult to effect,” he wrote to Ruth, “though it’s also what makes the difficulty worth it: to write it, not so much as conventional journalism or as an illustrated kind of critique, but, while answering to all the journalistic integrities, to write it also with the fuller realization and larger vision and language and dramatic movement that a novelist would bring to bear.” His ambition was indeed Shakespearean. “Going into why one really writes would be a book in itself, and would still be a mystery in the end, but I know that a part of it, especially with this book, is that I want it to move people not just today and five years from now, but a hundred, three-hundred years from now.”<sup>43</sup> Graham asked Frady for permission to share those two letters—the one to him and the one to his wife—with a *Charlotte Observer* reporter working on a series about Graham for that newspaper.<sup>44</sup>

Frady’s absorption into the Graham family and ministry brought him two marathon sessions with Graham at his Montreat home in October. In the second one of these, Frady mentioned an offer he had made to T.W. Wilson in San Diego, in the warmth of that budding trust: to let Graham scan the final manuscript to check for factual errors. Graham seemed to be aware of the offer, but wasn’t going to press for it unless Frady wanted to carry through with it. But others in the Graham camp, it turned out, insisted on a legalistic interpretation of Frady’s offer.<sup>45</sup>

### **Legal Gotterdammerung**

Frady enjoyed many more interviews and full cooperation from the Graham camp. Indeed, the helpfulness and trust extended by Billy Graham and his aides to Frady seemed boundless. So it didn’t strike Frady as a problem when T.W. Wilson mentioned in a letter of August 18, 1977, that he remem-

bered Frady offering to let Graham look over the manuscript when it was finished. Wilson and a couple of colleagues “commented to each other afterwards that we thought this was a wonderful and courteous gesture on your part.” Frady thought so, too, and he repeated it. Yes, he told Wilson in a letter, it’s crucial that Graham go over the material when it’s ready, but this could wait for Graham’s return from Eastern Europe.<sup>46</sup> In fact, Wilson didn’t hear from Frady for the next seven months, making him wonder if the book had been abandoned. Not at all, Frady told Wilson in April 1978, but the writing had been “the most stunningly difficult, complicated, wearing thing I’ve ever done in my life.” Two more months passed before the editing began. That’s when Little, Brown learned of Frady’s offer to show Graham the manuscript. Frady’s editor blew up, explaining to him that it was a fundamental principle that manuscripts are not submitted to principals prior to publication. Frady had to tell Graham. “I’ve been deeply distressed ever since over how I was going to tell you this,” Frady wrote, “and feel embarrassment, chagrin, miserableness in having to do so.”<sup>47</sup>

Whether Billy Graham was willing to let the matter drop, his lawyers and associates were not. They presented to Little, Brown the notion that Frady’s unprecedented access to Graham and his circle was predicated on the assumption that they would be able to review the manuscript to check for factual errors. They suggested that it was an implied contract, a quid pro quo. Frady, sending the lawyers on both sides copies of his letters to Graham and his people, told his editor this was absurd. Their cooperation began well before the San Diego crusade, and Graham and his wife especially seemed to open up to Frady in San Diego apart from the offer on manuscript review. He made the offer in the spirit of goodwill he felt toward his subjects at that time. More generally, it was a consequence of the risky way he came to enter into the essence of all his subjects, he said. “[F]or the sort of biography I wanted to do—the only kind I know how to do—you just naturally, without premeditation, enter into an eager personal rapport and empathy and identification with your principal[;] so far as possible you *become* for a while who and what you’re writing about.” But that changes when you sit down to write, Frady said. Under the circumstances and at this point, Frady said he would be quite disinclined for Graham’s people to see the manuscript.<sup>48</sup>

But it wasn’t his decision any longer. Lawyers and officials of Little, Brown and the Billy Graham Evangelical Association apparently came to an agreement that, while there was no legal obligation, there may be an ethical one. The two sides negotiated a settlement whereby Graham and a team of researchers would get five copies of the manuscript for fact-checking, but that the book’s interpretations would be the publisher’s privilege and the fact

that Graham's organization reviewed it beforehand would not be disclosed.<sup>49</sup> Frady wrote Graham a cover letter to go with the manuscript, seeking to put it in the best light, or at least explain its scenic and verbal intensities. "As you go through this," he wrote, "I want you to know that it turned out to be, beyond any comparison, the most immensely difficult work in which I've ever engaged. For one thing, how I wanted to tell this was with the fullest focusing on what might be called ultra-biography, total biography—while carefully observing all the journalistic integrities of accuracy and fairness, to write about the entire man, the entire matter, with the widest-scanning registers and fullest realizations, and so hopefully, with the truth, to move into those deepest reaches of recognition that the best literature sounds in us."<sup>50</sup> When Little, Brown later acquiesced to a request from Ruth Graham for one more copy so that she might review it as well, Frady was furious. "[N]ow not only Billy but a brace of his researchers, plus his literary attorney, and now God help us plus Ruth, are going to be plunging and tracking and rifling back and forth through the thing," he wrote his editor. He fumed that, at a certain point, the lawyer and others at Little, Brown would have to trust him and trust that he has been responsible in what he had written.<sup>51</sup>

Graham's legalistic arguments to Little, Brown had put the publisher into a tort-law defensive crouch, even before the secret sharing of the manuscript was agreed on. Roger Donald, the senior editor handling the Graham book, wrote Frady a five-page letter educating him on recent case law around public- and private-figure standards for libel, privacy, consent, and adequately hiding the identity of a source who wished to remain unidentified. Donald went on to ask for clarification on thirty-eight "worrisome" passages in the manuscript. "There might be some I've missed," Donald wrote. "My point is not to scare you, but to point out that this is your responsibility." Frady attempted to address these questions before the manuscript was sent to Graham and his team two and half weeks later.<sup>52</sup> Whatever worrisome matters Frady might have fixed, Graham wrote back after a couple of days of quickly reading only a quarter of the book to say he found many things "absolutely inaccurate" or so out-of-context as to make them false. His tone is classic Billy Graham, measured and courteous, and reflects some of the deep friendship that had developed. But one can sense lawyer-talk in the background: "Everybody is entitled to his opinions but no one has a right to distort the facts," he writes. Graham said he was returning the manuscript immediately so he could get on with his ministry in Kansas City, Scandinavia, and Poland, but would be willing to make time to help give the book accuracy. "Of course, I reserve all my rights," he concludes.<sup>53</sup> Frady wrote back that he was startled by the letter, "but I'm glad we can proceed with this."<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, Graham's

legal team reviewed the manuscript and found “serious problems” and overall “a false depiction of Dr. Graham’s life and work.”<sup>55</sup>

The page-by-page legal review was a painful, disheartening process that took another six months of Frady’s time and discomfort. He added explanations of his interviewing and research methods to the four-page Author’s Note and to his twenty-nine pages of endnotes. At one point, Frady wrote to the lawyer-novelist George V. Higgins in Boston seeking to know his legal rights in resisting some of the demands for changes in the manuscript.<sup>56</sup> He had to go over quotes and facts far beyond the normal process of a book’s copyediting, under a cloud of suspicion raised by Graham’s people that he did not take notes or do any research. He was dismayed at the charge. “This just isn’t going to do,” he responded in a long statement he wrote for Graham’s people, by way of a Little, Brown representative who carefully refereed the exchanges. His extensive notes are available for proof, Frady told the Graham camp. “[A]ll it would take, even for yourselves, would just be a glance through them for it to be obvious, completely obvious, they were taken from the interviewing.”<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the Frady archives contain dozens of reporter’s notebooks from interviews about Graham, several legal pads filled with notes, and 117 pages of a five-and-a-half-by-eight-and-a-half-inch loose-leaf notebook in which he typed on one side, leaving the other blank for note-taking, with some 200 questions. He used this notebook in those leisurely interviews at Montreat, writing responses of a few words or whole paragraphs in the margins and the blank page opposite the question.

Frady tried to patch things up with Graham in letters back and forth. After Graham wished him and his family a happy Thanksgiving (“I hope you’ll be able to take some time out of what must have been a hectic year for you, to spend time with them.”), Frady wrote that he was relieved by the tone of the note after so much legal phraseology had crept into their exchanges. “Those [lawyerly locutions] are never real—they are always artificial and distant to the truth of a situation,” Frady said. Again, he tried to help Graham appreciate the literary approach of the book. “I remain absolutely convinced that you are going to find its public effect far more sympathetic than you at first, perhaps understandably, supposed. In any event, please know Billy, that I only tried to write the truth of it all, out of an admiration and affection obvious to everyone else who has read it, as fully and fairly and meaningfully as I could, in every sense possible.”<sup>58</sup> When the editing and legal review were finally complete, in February 1979, Frady told Graham there were times he wondered if any biography had ever been subjected to such exhaustive pre-publication scrutiny. “My feeling, though, is that it could hardly be sounder, and it’s been eminently worth it.”<sup>59</sup>

Another victim of the lethal gas scattered by the Graham camp was an excerpt of the book that the *Atlantic* had planned to run. Editor Bob Manning was spooked by the wrangling. Frady, who was counting on the *Atlantic* as an old friend and needed the money, fought back. "It's obviously been the hope of Graham and his attendants, because it's the only possible recourse really available to them, to exert through Harriet [F. Pilpel, their lawyer], simply with much flash and roar and smoke, a chilling and depressing effect on intentions to publish this book at all—a gambit that seems now to have indeed come close to half-working in the case of the *Atlantic*. It's like an effort at prior restraint, however farcical and contrived their actual complaints, simply through ferocious gesturings and ground-stompings."<sup>60</sup> Frady was unable to assure Manning. But *Esquire* ran an excerpt from the book's first chapter, a cover story that editor Clay Felker said in his editor's note had originated with an assignment six years earlier from "this magazine," apparently confusing *Esquire* with the magazine he edited at the time, *New York*.<sup>61</sup>

#### Attacked By Graham Surrogates

He had wanted the book to be titled *Billy: A Parable of the American Righteousness*, in reference to Melville's last work, and to carry some artful cover like David Levine's crosshatched caricature of Wallace on the dust jacket of his first book. But the tensions with Graham's camp required diplomatic trade-offs, so the title was *Billy Graham*, the word "the" dropped from the subtitle, and the cover was an ordinary-looking photograph supplied by the Graham ministry of Graham giving a Crusade sermon, an open Bible in one hand, the other firmly pointing heavenward. But Frady's skirmishing kept the text almost exactly as he wanted it. The 546-page *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* was released in May 1979 to thoughtful and wide attention in the press. Some reviewers felt that Frady had been seduced by Graham. Such reviewers, perhaps, did not quite grasp Frady's symbolic point that Graham's "innocence" distilled, and maybe permitted, a dangerous immaturity that post-war America had loosed on the world and on the Christian faith. Another criticism was of Frady's extravagant style. But overwhelmingly, the reviews recognized something startlingly original about the book and appreciated seeing an actual human being behind the myth and image of Billy Graham. Jonathan Yardley, spanning this range of reaction in the *Washington Star*, called it an "inordinately ambitious and strikingly successful biography." But, he adds, Frady at times embellishes "even upon rococo, and his prose often calls too much attention to itself."<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, the quibble between Graham's inner circle and Frady continued to smolder. While no libel suit was filed, and specific facts were not so much the issue, the charge that Frady took no notes got covered by *Newsweek*,

the *Christian Century*, several newspapers, and ABC's *20/20*.<sup>63</sup> The camera crew for *20/20* was in Frady's living room for some five hours, giving him a chance to display his pile of interview notes and to discover a certain enjoyment he felt speaking on camera.<sup>64</sup> (Frady would be working as chief correspondent for ABC's *Close-Up* within seven months of this.) Note-taking and use of a tape recorder, of course, can be a lively discussion topic among practitioners of literary journalism techniques. Writers from Tom Wolfe to Ted Conover who want to be unobtrusive or spend a lot of time with a source under natural circumstances will hold off on note-taking until it can be done in solitude from memory, in a car, or back at the motel.<sup>65</sup> Frady owns he did this when he was given free-flowing time with Graham's people. This may be why Graham, once he had seen the manuscript and recoiled, told Frady he and the others noticed how few notes he took while talking to them. "I would suggest the possibility that you make some record of what is said to you in your future interviews."<sup>66</sup>

In November 1979, *Christianity Today*, the voice of evangelicalism in America since the 1950s, dedicated six pages of its magazine to denouncing Frady for his biography of Graham. The critique was unusual in several respects. It was part book review and part editorial, yet much longer than either form for that magazine, and with an illustration of four blindfolded sculptors working on a gigantic bust of Graham with devil's horns. The main text bore no byline, but was said to be written by unnamed members of the editorial staff. In an introduction, the editor explained why *Christianity Today* would take this much trouble for a book it didn't like. The response was necessary, wrote editor Kenneth S. Kantzer, because among the scores of biographies and profiles written about Graham over the years, Frady's had "stirred so much interest . . . and [is] being given maximum exposure in the secular press." He noted Frady's "American Gothic prose," or as the essay acknowledged, that Frady "is capable of using words artistically." The problem, Kantzer wrote, was that Frady seemed to be using Graham as a scapegoat for the moral malaise of the times, "a badly twisted picture of why things are so bad in America today." A major portion of the attack accused Frady of playing loose with facts and—as it claimed several interviewees told *Christianity Today*—taking no notes.<sup>67</sup> This was the same line of attack that Graham's associates and Graham himself had been airing, at least since reviewing the manuscript.

Frady responded to *Christianity Today's* charges with a letter of about the same length—fifteen typed pages. Conceding that he knew it was a bootless exercise to quarrel with reviewers, he nevertheless shot back that in all his years of reporting on subjects who were not always happy with the result, he had never had any of them "venture this absurdity." Over the five years

he worked on the book, he said, of course he took notes, and had dozens of notebooks to prove it. *Christianity Today* edited down Frady's rebuttal to about 220 words and ran it as a letter under the headline "Much Smoke and Roar."<sup>68</sup> The managing editor said he appreciated Frady's offer to edit his letter for them, but that they decided to do it themselves, to conform to their space limitations.<sup>69</sup>

### Resolution

Writing factually about Graham has been one of the great challenges for journalists who have covered religion in the post–World War 2 era. There is little doubt that he is "perhaps the most famous Christian in the history of the faith," as one North Carolina–based journalist put it.<sup>70</sup> In the age of mass media, which his crusades skillfully mastered, Graham was directly beheld by more people in more places around the globe than anyone in history. Furthermore, his close relationship with every US president since Truman enmeshed his religious message and influence with politics at the highest level.<sup>71</sup> While books about Graham were numerous—Frady cites more than thirty volumes on Graham alone by the '70s—they tended to be marked by special interests, "whether diligently admiring or indicting," Frady wrote, "all principally arguments with their homiletic points to make."<sup>72</sup> Since then, it can be argued that among dozens of additional Graham biographies a few stand out as admirably free of bias, pro or anti, particularly Rice University professor William Martin's *A Prophet with Honor* and the study of his relationship with the White House by *Time* magazine editors Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy. These more balanced biographies since the '80s seem to have benefited from Graham's willingness to cooperate with writers from the "secular media" without conditions.<sup>73</sup> "It's your book," Graham told Martin. "I don't even have to read it. I want you to be critical."<sup>74</sup>

A factually likeable rendering of such an influential, successful, and personally likeable figure carries the challenge at the heart of literary journalism, the challenge that Janet Malcolm called morally indefensible. Frady sought to understand and present Graham in a way that no other biographer dared to try—in the highly subjective and controversial methods of the narrative form. "How I wanted to tell this story . . . was through frequencies of feeling, mood, characterization—of realization—fuller to the reality than simple blank reportage or essay-like critiquing . . . to write about the entire man and the entire matter with the deepest possible registers and sensings."<sup>75</sup>

The twists and troubles Frady encountered in the process are what makes this a good case study of the problem, as this paper asserted at the start. Stud-

ies of literary journalism have explored the “fellow human being” difficulties of the form, but these usually relate to another type of story, where the writer is spending months with private and sometimes marginal people.<sup>76</sup> Graham was as public and media-savvy a figure as anyone. Likewise, critical writing on professional deception has little to say about a case like this.<sup>77</sup> Frady never disguised his identity, or purpose, or even his own spiritual standing as “a terribly imperfect and faltering” Christian. Indeed, some of the richness of this study is in the many letters between him and the Graham camp describing his creative purpose as it evolved.

The problem was not deception or violation of privacy. It was precisely that pivot that the nonfiction writer must make from being an immersion reporter and researcher to being a word-crafter at the keyboard. This right-angle turn from facts to creation, from hunter-gatherer to artist, was wearing him down. In *Southerners*, a collection of his magazine profiles published a year after the Graham biography came out, Frady mentions times when the people he was writing about felt betrayed by what he wrote with such icy detachment. “An uneasiness would overhaul me upon moving into a new story,” he wrote. “I imagined I could spy, in approaching a new character, the accumulated shades of all those past aggrieved ones glaring over his shoulder like so many Banquo’s ghosts.” The vicarious probing of those many strangers’ lives also took its toll on Frady’s existential need for a solid self. “After laboring for so long as a kind of broker or magpie collector of other people’s passions and struggles, you begin to feel you are receding further and further out of any real life yourself. You seldom experience its charges directly and personally any longer, becoming instead someone made up of assorted secondhand mementoes of other people’s realities.”<sup>78</sup>

Word-weary and still insolvent, Frady moved to New York to work for seven years with ABC-TV’s news magazine *Close-Up*, then for Ted Koppel’s *Nightline*. Although he helped ABC win an Emmy, he soon became disenchanted with the medium. One reason, as Halberstam noted, was that television requires verbal minimalists and Frady was not that, nor much given to understatement.<sup>79</sup> Frady later recalled that getting his first script for *Close-Up* into an hour felt like trying to inhale a half-century of history then re-utter it in one breath. “But the fundamental fact about television,” he realized, “is that it is finally a realm of air, whose ceaseless bright winds blow away all memory, isolating one in an endless repetition of disparate, turbulent, pastless moments—a petty storm of forgetting.”<sup>80</sup> He moved to California and found more success in screenwriting. Then, in 1987, he began work on a profile of Jesse Jackson that would eventually produce five articles for the *New Yorker* and a 552-page book, *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage of Jesse Jackson*.<sup>81</sup> His biog-

raphy of Jackson is stamped with Frady's distinctive voice and the same literary ambition that drove his earlier biographies, to render the full person in all his emotional dimensions. But Frady had a different kind of connection with Jackson, an empathy that required less method acting. Both men were raised in the same area of South Carolina and had special gifts for language. Frady lets Jackson speak at length, from transcripts of long recorded interviews. This time Frady used a tape recorder, and his interviews of Jackson's childhood teachers, friends, and mentors left thick single-spaced typed transcripts in the Frady archives. The *New Yorker*, where he was on staff for some six years, and Random House gave Frady more resources and more rigorous editing than he had expressed before. "Congratulations on a great and magnificent achievement," Random House editor David Rosenthal wrote Frady when *Jesse* came out after nine years of work on it. "You defied all odds and triumphed mightily. I am proud of the book and grateful for your courage."<sup>82</sup> Finally, with *Jesse* and a Penguin Life biography of Martin Luther King Jr. published in 2002,<sup>83</sup> Frady was writing biographies of subjects he bore a natural and idealistic affection for, without the Stanislavsky exertion. Jackson appreciated the biography, and spoke movingly at Frady's funeral.

**I**n all of Frady's writings, there churns an undercurrent of his own psychic dramas—religious, moral, or romantic. All four of the biographies he wrote, and many of the magazine profiles, are about Southern men who are outsiders, and who disrupt the social order—or in Graham's case, are exploited by it. If the Graham biography is a work of art, it achieves this through Frady's own Promethean struggle to understand himself through Graham's life. While Graham was praying that Frady would know Jesus, as millions of others experienced this merely hearing Graham for an hour or so from a vast stadium distance, Frady was determined to know Graham. In a typed page addressed to "Billy" and full of ellipses and stricken words, suggesting Frady was writing to himself after reading through the book's galleys, he seems to have experienced a revelation. "[W]hat you've been preaching all these years is in one sense true. . . . It takes that blind giving up to Jesus. . . . After that, nobody is ever the same. . . . It comes to me sometimes that what I've been doing is arguing, talking, traveling with you in all this. . . . I only say all this because I feel you are truly Christ-natured—Christian-natured." Whatever this ramble means, Graham may have been onto something when he told Frady, in accusing him of factual errors, that he wondered if much of the book was not Frady's own spiritual rebellion against his religious background.<sup>84</sup> That rebellion was not against Christianity, but against the particular evangelical shape that Christianity took with Graham and with Frady's father. In the biography, Frady gives eighteen pages to a profile of a figure he poses as a

counter-evangelist, an alternative. This was a renegade Baptist preacher and writer named Will D. Campbell, who had pastored foot soldiers in the civil rights movement but then turned to being a country guitar-playing farmer whose Christian mission was to prisoners, Klan members, Eastern intellectuals, songwriters, drug addicts, and writers. Frady regularly sought Campbell's spiritual guidance since doing a profile of him for *Life* magazine in 1972.<sup>85</sup> "It was as if he was always in search of himself," Campbell told Halberstam after Frady died, "that this was all part of a lifelong journey of discovery."<sup>86</sup>

One way to make a moral judgment over how a literary journalist like Frady "uses" his subjects and sources is to consider the writer's own aspiration. If he aspires to the timelessness of literary art, as Frady did, then it may be appropriate to adopt Frady's own frame of value. The negative reaction of evangelicals did not matter much to Frady. What was important to him was how he met the literary challenge—as if "sending dispatches from those far brawlings of life to Dickens, Twain, Gogol, Balzac, Cervantes."<sup>87</sup> Of course, a share of fame and funding would have been nice. But he was aiming to write something that would be read in a hundred years with as much interest as today. If the Graham biography was selling at merely "a stately deliberation," he blamed the lack of interest in Graham as a subject. "Agee, Mailer, Melville himself could have written about Graham, but still a lot of the book-buying folks would be finally uninterested in him, as a garish triviality no matter how mightily elaborated on," he wrote to friends.<sup>88</sup> One gets a sense that, after all his exertions to get inside the man, he found a yawning emptiness there, and filled it as an echo chamber with his own voice. After all the flurry over his note-taking and factual precision, the biography seems to aspire to be the novel *The Evangelist* that Frady proposed but never wrote based on Graham. Attempting to enlist facts into the techniques of fiction remains one of the inherent moral tensions of literary journalism. A tentative resolution of that tension, assuming an honest and athletic effort at factual accuracy, lies in the durability of the work as art, now and in the sweep of time.

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### Notes

1. Media-ethics literature on a journalist's use of sources mostly focuses on matters of privacy versus the public interest of news reporting. For example, see *Journalism and the Debate Over Privacy*, ed. Craig L. LaMay (Mahway, NJ.: Erlbaum, 2003). Some critics of investigative reporting question the use of unnamed sources and how much weight the text gives these sources. Joan Didion, for example, sees a problem she describes as investigative reporter Bob Woodward's allowing his often-unnamed sources, rather than his own interpretation, to define the story. "The Deferential Spirit," *New York Review of Books*, September 19, 1996, 14–19.

2. Tom Wolfe, "Tiny Mummies! The True Story of the Ruler of 43rd Street's Land of the Walking Dead," *New York*, April 11, 1965, and "Lost in the Whichy Thickets," *New York*, April 18, 1965; and Gay Talese, "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," *Esquire*, April 1966.

3. Walt Harrington, *Intimate Journalism: the Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), xxxiv–xxxv.

4. Janet Malcolm, *The Journalist and the Murderer* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 19. Malcolm, herself a literary rather than traditional journalist, experienced her own bitter entanglements with a profile subject who had been a cooperating source, Jeffrey Masson, administrator of the Freud Archives. Malcolm's two-part profile of Masson in the *New Yorker* in December 1983 and her book version published by Alfred A. Knopf, *In the Freud Archives*, became the subject of a libel suit that smoldered for a dozen years and reached the US Supreme Court as *Masson v. New Yorker*. An excellent analysis of the case's implications for the ethics, legal standing, and epistemology of literary journalism is Kathy Roberts Forde's *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).

5. *Ibid.*, 3.

6. Doug Cumming, "So Splendid It Hurts," *Journalism History* 40, no.1 (Spring 2014): 1–5. See also Cumming, "The Outtakes of a Literary Life," *Furman* magazine, Winter 2012, 3–7. Both articles describe the fifty-eight boxes of unpro-

cessed Frady papers, how they were acquired by Emory University, and the outlines of Frady's career.

7. Marshall Frady, "A Personal Preliminary," in *Southerners: A Journalist's Odyssey* (New York: New American Library: 1980), xxiii, adapted from "Growing Up a Baptist," *Mademoiselle*, March 1970, 156.

8. Frady to his parents, March 17, 1970, box 52, Marshall Frady Papers, MS Collection No. 1099, Emory University (below cited as MFP). Like most of the letters, this one appears to be a draft that was retyped. The "mixture of a lie" quote is from Francis Bacon.

9. "Vision in the Valley," *Newsweek*, June 29, 1964, 82–83.

10. Janeway to Frady, July 16, 1964; Frady to Robert Lescher (Frady's agent), February 18, 1969; John Berendt, assistant editor at *Esquire*, to Frady, July 15, 1964, box 52, MFP.

11. Janeway to Frady, May 4, 1966, box 52, MFP.

12. Frady, "God and Man in the South," *Atlantic*, January 1967, 37–42.

13. Janeway to Frady, August 27, 1967, box 52, MFP.

14. Marshall Frady, *Wallace* (New York: New American Library, 1968).

15. Ben A. Franklin, *New York Times Book Review*, October 6, 1968, BR3. Franklin said the book — "one of the finest pieces of political reporting in years" — manages to make Wallace both a villain and "in the literary and dramatic sense," a hero.

16. Frady, *Wallace*, 1–2, 10–11. This opening section is also excerpted in *Voices in Our Blood: America's Best on the Civil Rights Movement*, Jon Meacham, ed. (New York: Random House, 2001), 235–66.

17. "Haynesville Justice," *Newsweek*, October 11, 1965. Chief of Correspondents James Cannon wrote Frady, April 5, 1965, "I was immensely pleased that you have decided to rejoin *Newsweek*. We look forward to getting more of those great files you were sending to us last summer." Box 52, MFP.

18. Frady to Joseph B. Cumming Jr., September 29, 1973, box 52, MFP.

19. Frady, *Across a Darkling Plain: An American's Passage through the Middle East* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1971).

20. Marc Cooper, "Remembering Marshall Frady," *Nation*, March 11, 2004.

21. William Hedgepeth, "Transcribed Remarks . . . at the Memorial Service for Marshall Frady at Rowland Funeral Home, N. Augusta, S.C., March 12, 2004," in possession of Doug Cumming.

22. Frady to "Ken," a book editor in New York to whom Frady was sending a revised version of his proposed Graham-inspired novel, "The Evangelist," January 21, 1975. Originally, around the beginning of 1974, Simon & Schuster had paid Frady a \$15,000 advance to produce the Graham biography. But the contract was switched to Little, Brown sometime later that year. By 1980, Simon & Schuster had taken legal action to collect \$3,500 that Frady still owed on the original advance. Frady to Sue (Susanne Barker), his first wife, March 20, 1980, box 18, MFP.

23. Frady to Franklin Ashley, sent from Deja, Majorca, Spain, July 27, 1975, box 52, MFP. Frady says he is starting work on a novel for Harper's Magazine Press,

and will return in two weeks to begin work on his Graham book. In other letters, he refers to a novel, "Moab," on contract with Houghton, Mifflin.

24. Halberstam, "Marshall Frady: Son of the South," introduction to reprint edition of *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness*, by Marshall Frady (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), xv.

25. Frady to Sterling Lord, January 3, 1976, box 52, MFP.

26. Frady to Roger Donald, July 19, 1978, box 18, MFP.

27. T.W. Wilson to Frady, April 19, 1974, box 18, MFP.

28. Frady to T.W. Wilson, March 27, 1976, and Frady to Roger Donald, July 19, 1978, box 18, MFP.

29. Frady to Will Campbell, February 24, 1975, box 52, MFP.

30. Frady to Roger Donald, January 1, 1976, box 18, MFP.

31. Frady to Roger Donald, senior editor at Little, Brown, November 8, 1975; Frady to Jeff, a friend in New York, February 16, 1976, box 18, MFP.

32. Frady to T.W. Wilson, July 18, 1976; Frady to Henderson Belk of Charlotte, from whom Frady had borrowed an extensive collection of books on Graham, August 19, 1977, box 18, MFP.

33. Frady to T. W. Wilson in Montreat, NC, March 27, 1976, box 18, MFP.

34. Frady remembered it as being around April 17, 1976. Frady to Roger Donald, July 19, 1978, box 18, MFP.

35. Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 8–11.

36. Frady to Roger Donald, July 19, 1978, box 52, MFP.

37. Billy Graham to Frady, June 12, 1976, box 52, MFP.

38. Frady to Billy Graham, July 18, 1976. Frady suggests a similar need for divine blessing to Ruth Graham: "I realized some while time ago that it was going to take a wisdom and skill beyond my own indeed to deliver this book." Frady to Ruth Graham, December 28, 1976, box 52, MFP.

39. Frady to Sterling Lord, August 27, 1978, box 52, MFP.

40. Frady, *Billy Graham*, 511–12.

41. Frady, "Personal Preliminary," xxv.

42. Frady to Billy Graham, September 4, 1976, box 18, MFP.

43. Frady to Ruth Graham, September 5, 1976, box 18, MFP.

44. Graham to Frady, September 10, 1976, box 18, MFP.

45. Frady to Roger Donald, July 19, 1978, box 52, MFP.

46. Wilson to Frady, August 18, 1977; Frady to Wilson, August 19, 1977, box 52, MFP.

47. Frady to Graham, June 19, 1978, box 18, MFP.

48. Frady to Roger Donald, July 19, 1978, box 18, MFP.

49. The stipulation that no one, in either camp, will publicize the fact that the manuscript was read or approved by Graham's people is cited by Frady in a letter to Graham, September 2, 1978, box 52, MFP.

50. Frady to Graham, August 23, 1978, box 18, MFP.

51. Frady to Roger Donald, September 10, 1978, box 18, MFP.

52. Donald to Frady, August 7, 1978, box 18, MFP. Frady scribbled names and phone numbers around several of the items in the archived copy of Donald's letter, indicating the start of a follow-up.
53. Graham to Frady, August 29, 1978, box 18, MFP.
54. Frady to Graham, September 2, 1978, box 18, MFP.
55. John N. Akers and Sherwood Eliot Wirt to Marshall Frady, September 15, 1978, box 52, MFP.
56. Frady to Higgins, October 2, 1978, box 18, MFP.
57. Frady to "Ike," legal counsel for Little, Brown, September 21, 1978, box 18, MFP.
58. Frady to Graham, November 13, 1978, box 18, MFP.
59. Frady to Graham, February 15, 1979, box 18, MFP.
60. Frady to Bob Manning, October 25, 1978, box 18, MFP.
61. Frady, "The Use and Abuse of Billy Graham: How 'Christ's American Son' Lost Himself in the Halls of Power," *Esquire*, April 10, 1979, 23–44.
62. Jonathan Yardley, *Washington Star*, May 27, 1979, B1.
63. Frady to Roger Donald, January 2, 1980, box 18, MFP.
64. Frady to "Jonathan," nd, box 52, MFP.
65. Robert S. Boyton, *The New New Journalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005). In this collection of interviews with literary journalists, each writer is asked about his or her approach to note-taking and interviewing.
66. Graham to Frady, August 29, 1978, box 18, MFP.
67. "The Graham Image: A Parable of America's Blindness?" *Christianity Today*, November 16, 1979, 26–30.
68. The headline might seem to imply that Frady's self-defense was so much "smoke and roar," but the words are actually from Frady's description in the letter of *Christianity Today's* grandiose nitpicking. Frady used the same words earlier to describe the legal threats from Graham's attorney.
69. James W. Reapsome, managing editor, to Frady, with copy of letter as it would appear in *Christianity Today* attached, February 1, 1980, box 18, MFP.
70. Frye Gaillard, *Race, Rock & Religion: Profiles from a Southern Journalist* (Charlotte, NC: East Woods, 1980), 167.
71. Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (New York: Center Street, 2007), vii, x–xv.
72. Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), vii–viii.
73. Gibbs and Duffy, x–xi.
74. William Martin, *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1991). Graham also wrote his own account of his life, *Just as I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997).
75. Frady, "Author's Note," in *Billy Graham*, vii.
76. Kristiane Larssen and Harald Hornmoen, "The Literary Journalist as Fellow Human Being," *Literary Journalism Studies* (5, 1) Spring 2013, 81–94.
77. Deni Elliott and Charles Culver, "Defining and Analyzing Journalistic

Deception," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 7, no. 2, (January 1, 1991), 69–84; Larry Alexander and Emily Shewin, "Deception in Morality and Law," *Law and Philosophy* 22, no. 5, (September 1, 2003), 393–450.

78. Frady, *Southerners*, xxv–xxvi.

79. Halberstam, "Son of the South," xx–xxi.

80. Frady, from an unpublished essay for *Southpoint* magazine, November 1989, in Doug Cumming's possession.

81. Frady, "Report from Baghdad," September 24, 1990; "Outsider": "I. The Gift," February 3, 1992; "II. History Is Upon Us," February 10, 1992; "III. Without Portfolio," February 17, 1992; "An American Family," April 29, 1996, all in the *New Yorker*; and *Jesse: The Life and Pilgrimage of Jesse Jackson* (New York: Random House, 1996).

82. Rosenthal to Frady, May 9, 1996, box 55, MFP.

83. Frady, *Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Penguin Group, 2002).

84. Graham to Frady, August 29, 1978, box 52, MFP.

85. Frady, "Fighter for the Forgotten Men," *Life*, June 16, 1972.

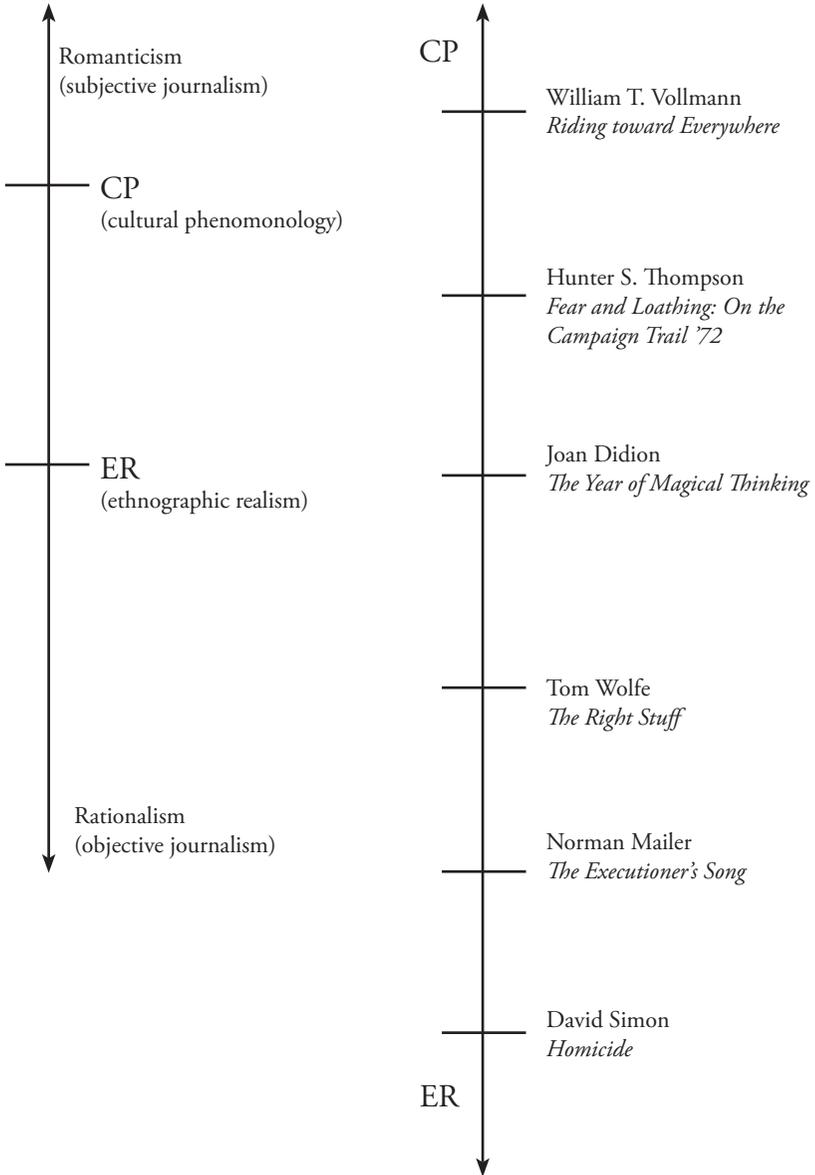
86. Halberstam, "Son of the South," xxi.

87. Frady, *Southerners*, xxviii.

88. Frady to "Good and Beloved Folks," unnamed, August 15, 1979, box 52, MFP.



### Eason-Webb Continuum



# Mapping Nonfiction Narrative: A New Theoretical Approach to Analyzing Literary Journalism

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**Abstract:** The aim of this research paper is to put forward an inclusive and flexible means to explore literary journalism's rich interior by creating a broad theoretical framework and approach that is suitable for defining and analyzing any given text in this genre, using David L. Eason's typology of Ethnographic Realism and Cultural Phenomenology (1984). ER and CP are two "modes" of responding to and organizing the experience of reporting, which is typically a personalized, interpretive, and evocative account of reality. Due to the diverse aesthetic styles and approaches found in this genre, these categories have been refined and supplemented using Joseph M. Webb's theory of rationalism and romanticism in journalism (1974). By combining Eason and Webb's theories it is possible to create a spectrum—from "objective" to "subjective"—along which to situate individual works of literary journalism. This paper includes two examples that are representative of the two modes of literary journalism: namely, David Simons's *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets* (1991) and William T. Vollmann's *Riding toward Everywhere* (2008). We will also illustrate how a variety of other texts can be situated along the Eason-Webb spectrum.

Since the emergence of the New Journalism in the 1960s, numerous theorists and academics have attempted to define literary journalism as a wide-ranging form of factual narrative encompassing both the New Journalism and other more traditional approaches. Despite these efforts, this genre currently lacks a fixed working definition and normative terminology, partly because it

is an innovative genre that is still developing and resisting narrow definitions.<sup>1</sup> While scholars may have formulated generic definitions of literary journalism, no theory will ever be complete or methodologically adequate until finer distinctions are made between several subcategories of texts. As Barbara Foley says, this genre will continue to elude theorists until they have set up “guideposts for venturing into this terrain and have proposed charts to delineate the broad configurations of important zones of inquiry; but . . . thus far, the rich interior is still unexplored.”<sup>2</sup>

David L. Eason’s typology provides a basic model for dividing the genre into two subcategories of texts. Ethnographic Realism (ER) includes texts that have an omniscient narrator and utilize literary techniques associated with social realism, while Cultural Phenomenology (CP) is associated with reflective, exploratory, and essentially personal forms of literary journalism.<sup>3</sup> Together, he argues, they account for the two main forms of writing found in this genre. Eason is by no means the first theorist to identify two kinds of writing within the larger category of literary journalism—with Ronald Weber, for instance, differentiating between an existential form (akin to CP) and a rational form (ER) in *The Literature of Fact* (1980), which was published two years earlier than Eason’s theory. However, Eason is one of the few theorists to have incorporated these two types of writing within a single theory, thereby offering an alternative to the more limited generic definitions.

Tom Barone argues that the degree to which nonfiction narratives tolerate “ambiguity, imagination or creativity—indeed subjectivity of any sort—they may be diminished in terms of reliability, validity and objectivity.”<sup>4</sup> We argue that ambiguity, imagination, and creativity are an essential and unavoidable part of the narrative process, and do not necessarily diminish the reliability, validity, and objectivity of the story. Instead, by actively drawing attention to these subjective processes, literary journalism reveals that narrative is always a matter of rhetoric and always subjective because the writer is required to select and interpret in order to tell the story, irrespective of how “objective” it appears. Writers of ER, for instance, are aware that their reports are an interpretation of past events, and—despite Eason’s claims—very rarely reflect “faith in the capability of traditional models of interpretation and expression, particularly the story form, to reveal the real.”<sup>5</sup> While Eason’s theory provides these two categories within which to begin distinguishing types, it does not, in our view, adequately account for the gradations of difference, sometimes subtle, and sometimes occurring simultaneously in a single text. Nor does Eason adequately acknowledge that the subjective approach may be used within a realist narrative, and is, indeed, an inevitable component of all narrative. For this reason, our proposal is to combine the Eason ER/CP

model with Joseph M. Webb's Rational/Romantic model to create a spectrum ranging from "objective" to "subjective," since this provides a way of acknowledging ER's neutral, objective presentation style together with its subjective processes.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, this paper attempts to reconcile ER with the subjective ideal of literary journalism, alongside CP.

Ultimately, a generation of theorists and scholars has tried and failed to identify and define the essential characteristics of a "bastard form"<sup>7</sup> that crosses the boundaries of journalism and literature, with some assuming that "it is impossible to define literary journalism by its intrinsic attributes alone."<sup>8</sup> We claim that by reference to this new theoretical approach, literary journalism can indeed be defined by its intrinsic attributes, and that there is no reason why it should remain the "great unexplored territory" of contemporary criticism.<sup>9</sup>

### **A Typology Of Literary Journalism**

The major benefit of Eason's typology is that it does not base its definition and typology of literary journalism on literary or textual features alone. As a factual form of writing, the genre is contingent upon truth and reality, and the writers are required to construct narratives that accurately depict the circumstances being reported. Apart from this ethical obligation, however, there are no hard and fast rules dictating what a literary journalist can or cannot do in representing reality.<sup>10</sup> As Michael J. Steinberg explains, "A particular piece might by turns be lyrical, expository, meditative, informational, reflective, self-interrogative, exploratory, analytical, and/or whimsical."<sup>11</sup> Viewed from a literary critical perspective, the genre appears heterogeneous, lacking in any distinctive or common traits other than its signification of actual events, making it "difficult, if not impossible, to pin down."<sup>12</sup>

Eason solves this issue of heterogeneity by conceiving literary journalism as a combined literary and cultural act in which particular attention is paid to the "relationship of literary style to the experience that it embodies."<sup>13</sup> According to Eason, the story form is utilized in literary journalism to both communicate and comprehend, with narrative techniques constituting "formal methods used in making sense of all kinds of situations."<sup>14</sup> That is, literary journalists make sense of their experiences through the imposition of a narrative line, "which connects and interrelates diverse strands of experience into a meaningful paradigm."<sup>15</sup> The resulting product (the report) "is not a 'natural' statement of 'the way things are' but an interpretation mediated by the 'multiple choices' which culture provides for interpreting experience."<sup>16</sup> These choices are dependent on the perspective, or "frame," used by the journalist to see and know the world,<sup>17</sup> whether it is a conventional inverted pyramid article structure or a

plot-driven narrative construction. However, with the latter, the literary act of shaping experience into “a meaningful paradigm” is also a cultural act because it produces “a symbolic structure in which facts function to disclose a larger meaning,”<sup>18</sup> the significance of which emerges from the enactment of cultural paradigms that “contributes to our cultural meaning-making.”<sup>19</sup>

ER and CP are two alternative ways of “responding to reality”<sup>20</sup> and organizing the experience of reporting. Eason argues that ER involves “naturalizing discrepant views of reality within its own narrative conventions”; no matter how strange or bizarre these views may be, they pose “no threat to established ways of knowing and communicating . . . and the reporter is still able to state, ‘That’s the way it is.’” In ER, reality is made comprehensible to the audience by a process that involves more than merely describing the scene and the actors’ experiences: it must be explained “by relating it to a social, cultural, or historical framework.” In order to achieve this, realist reporters must be simultaneously both near and far from their subjects, vicariously penetrating their experiences “while holding an aesthetic distance that allows the transformation of the experience within a set of narrative conventions into a story.” Eason suggests that ER attempts to reify a “commonplace cultural distinction” between lived and observed experience. Style is presented “as a communicational technique whose function is to reveal a story that exists ‘out there’ in reality,” with the reporter confronting “narrative construction as a problem of mediating between the experience of the subject and the reader.”<sup>21</sup>

**I**n contrast, CP “describes what it feels like to live in a world in which there is no reliable frame of reference to explain ‘what it all means.’” According to Eason, this mode conducts a “multi-layered interrogation of communication, including that between writer and reader, as a way of constructing reality, and by the hesitancy to foreclose the question ‘Is this real?’ by invoking conventional ways of understanding.” CP deems traditional ways of making sense to be either inappropriate or ineffective for the empirical understanding of contemporary reality, and accordingly represents “the image-world as a realm that blurs traditional distinctions between fantasy and reality.” Its aesthetic “arises out of an inability to state ‘the way things are.’” CP chronicles the interaction between consciousness and events; the story that is told “is not one discovered out there in the world but the story of the writer’s efforts to impose order on those events.” Instead of maintaining a cultural distinction between lived and observed experience, CP makes observation—grounded in an epistemology and an ethics—a vital part of the story. CP reporters therefore explore “the reality that actor and spectator create in their interaction, the dynamics through which each is created in the reporting process.”<sup>22</sup>

### The Relationship Between ER And CP

Although ER and CP represent different ways of interpreting and representing reality, they should not be regarded as entirely distinct categories of literary journalism. For over 100 years, scholars and critics have defined literary journalism as a consummately personal and subjective form of factual writing. In 1904, for instance, H.W. Boynton remarked that “many writers of power whose permanent and absorbing task is journalism [produced works that are] unmistakably informed with personality.”<sup>23</sup> Seven decades later, James E. Murphy described literary journalism as “an artistic, creative, literary reporting form with three basic traits: dramatic techniques; intensive reporting; and reporting of generally acknowledged subjectivity.”<sup>24</sup> Three years prior to these comments, in 1971, Michael L. Johnson claimed that the “principle distinguishing mark of New Journalistic style is the writer’s attempt to be personalistic, involved, and creative in relation to the events he reports and comments upon.”<sup>25</sup>

Lee Wilkins explains that in the twentieth century, literary journalists began “to rely on an internally defined reality to help explain the objective facts to which traditional journalists were welded.”<sup>26</sup> Creating reports anchored in both an internal and external reality put literary journalism at odds with conventional newswriting practices due to the latter’s firmly entrenched principles concerning the “separation of facts and opinions [and] the journalist functioning as the impartial relayer of those facts.”<sup>27</sup> Steven Maras notes that although journalistic objectivity is multifaceted and diverse in its application and interpretation,<sup>28</sup> one feature that is almost universally regarded as a key aspect is journalism’s detachment, which involves “recounting events in a disinterested or impersonal way, aligned with precepts of neutrality and balance.”<sup>29</sup> Literary journalism precludes detachment because, as John C. Hartsock explains, in its most basic sense it tries to narrow the gulf between subject and object, and this “subjective ambition could not bode well for the form in the face of the rising critical hegemony posed by ‘objective’ journalism.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite claims of a shift toward acceptance of literary journalism by the daily newspaper industry in the United States,<sup>31</sup> its general perception remains one of an overtly personal and subjective form that “flies in the face of accepted notions of ‘objectivity.’”<sup>32</sup> This may have acted as a barrier to the genre’s acceptance because, by being neither hard news nor fiction, it has fallen between two historically powerful norms. Also, as Jesse Swigger observes, there was a belief—which had its origins in the New Journalism—that “objective writing was not only untenable, but undesirable.”<sup>33</sup> Certain literary journalism theorists continue to censure any perceived objectivity they detect

within the genre, including objectified narration and other techniques associated with the social realist tradition, because this is believed to be “hampered by the same positivist attitude that permeates the fiction of objectivity.”<sup>34</sup>

Insofar as the “realist” reporter can be seen to share the same neutral and measured communicational style as the “hard news” journalist, proponents of the subjective model of literary journalism, such as Kathy Smith, Phyllis Frus, and John Hellmann, have attacked objectified narration on the grounds that it has the same ideological underpinnings as conventional journalism. Another common concern about realism in literary journalism is that “the narrator as ‘almighty author’ can shape or frame the voices of problematic characters within the story by means of rhetorical devices, which enables him or her to gain authentication and persuasive power while refraining from explicit evaluations.”<sup>35</sup>

Kathy Smith’s critical analysis of John McPhee’s narratorial strategy in *A Sense of Where You Are: Bill Bradley at Princeton*, exemplifies the distrust that some critics have for realism in literary journalism. Smith argues that McPhee disguises himself as the “recorder” of events so that he can “temper the mediation between fact and story to promote the ‘real illusion’ that structure itself provides a natural and absolute system of identification rather than a true replica that is produced in the midst of narrative adventure.”<sup>36</sup> Smith criticizes McPhee for manipulating voice and perspective and altering the exact chronology of events so that he can distance himself from the events he is reporting and preserve the story’s objectivity. However, as Hayden White has noted, it is because “real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult.”<sup>37</sup> This means that all nonfiction narratives can be dismissed as fiction “due to the fundamentally specular nature of language.”<sup>38</sup> As William Howarth explains, in McPhee’s work structural order is the main ingredient used to attract his readership because “order establishes where the writer and reader are going and when they will arrive at a final destination.”<sup>39</sup>

However, Smith suggests that by transforming his experiences into story form using the narrative conventions of logic, order, and meaning to structure reality, McPhee has chosen to represent reality in a manner that “always depends on artifice”<sup>40</sup> and has created a structure that is “the ground for the ideology of objectivity in journalism.”<sup>41</sup> Smith’s analysis of McPhee’s work shows how realist techniques are considered to be a violation of the subjective ideal of literary journalism, a view based on the misconception that omniscient narration entails detachment. This fails to recognize that literary journalism has “made use of objectivity as it saw fit, variously adopting, adapting, and rejecting its rules,”<sup>42</sup> and therefore does not offer an absolute ideological alternative to conventional reporting.

Smith is not alone in her critique of objectivity in realist literary journalism. Matthew Ricketson argues that a number of leading practitioners, heeding the controversy surrounding Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, have moved "away from writing in an omniscient authorial voice because they appreciate it conveys a sense of knowingness that is out of place when you are trying to convey events and issues that in all likelihood are contested, contingent and still unfolding."<sup>43</sup> Eason, who contends that ER displays a "faith in the capability of traditional models of interpretation and expression, particularly the story form, to reveal the real,"<sup>44</sup> shares this view. However, Eason does not take into account that narrative always has a point of view.<sup>45</sup> As Weber observes, despite the omniscient narration in *In Cold Blood*, "the writer was distinctly felt in the re-creation of events and in the selection and arrangement of the material."<sup>46</sup> This view is supported by John Hollowell, who asserts that "Capote must have realized that the final narrative presents only *one version* of the facts"<sup>47</sup> because no matter how neutral the presentation, "there is no mistaking the author's point of view; characters, actions, revealing details are all saturated with values that the author can count on readers to recognize—and, ideally, share."<sup>48</sup> Weber's and Hollowell's analyses of *In Cold Blood* indicate that omniscient narration does not erase the writer's subjective presence. Rather, it is perceived in every detail used to construct the narrative world, which debunks the claim that the writer is detached from his or her material.

The assumption that literary journalists use omniscient narration and other realist devices to create the illusion of the text's autonomy or to instill their narratives with a certain factual authority<sup>49</sup> stems from ER's aesthetic association with social realism. As Robert Anchor explains, "A century ago Realism was in its prime; today it is under attack."<sup>50</sup> Superficially, ER can be seen to operate in a typically mimetic manner, faithfully mirroring everyday reality<sup>51</sup> and exploiting a style that is generally acknowledged as direct, transparent, literal, and "characterised primarily by confidence in the representational function of language."<sup>52</sup> Yet, unlike realism, ER is not based on an "assumption of a familiar, ordered, intelligible world to which literature refers."<sup>53</sup> While it may represent a continuation of realism's aesthetic, ER is nonetheless an entirely independent, contemporary form of writing that "affirms that reality is socially and culturally constructed."<sup>54</sup> It does this by producing texts that faithfully mirror everyday reality while also acknowledging its "own status as a constructed, aesthetic artefact"<sup>55</sup>—or, to use Barthes's idiom: "Its task is to put the mask in place and at the same time to point it out."<sup>56</sup>

In this regard, ER may be seen to draw from modernism as well as social realist fiction, in that its writers "use and abuse, install and then destabilize convention . . . self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent

paradoxes and provisionality,<sup>57</sup> both inscribing and subverting their mimetic engagement with the world.<sup>58</sup> Most importantly, though, by working within this particular type of discourse yet simultaneously contesting it, ER demonstrates a knowingness about how reality is ideologically constructed<sup>59</sup> and does not, as Eason claims, “suggest ‘This is reality.’”<sup>60</sup>

### **Two Case Studies: Riding Toward Everywhere And Homicide**

In what might be called the postrealist character of both ER and CP, the major difference between them is that CP makes explicit acknowledgment of ontological uncertainty, and achieves this by questioning its own status as nonfiction and foregrounding the epistemological foundation of its writing strategies,<sup>61</sup> exposing the shaping presence of the reporter “and the pressure of his personality and consciousness on what was finally written.”<sup>62</sup> In this sense they can be seen to coexist on an ER-CP spectrum rather than belonging to mutually exclusive categories (as we shall elaborate in relation to Webb, below). This can be seen in *Riding toward Everywhere*, where William T. Vollmann’s self-reflexive and pervasive authorial presence is so visible and disharmonious with the rest of the narrative that there is an obvious tension within the narrator’s discourse. This tension can be seen in the following passage, in which the narrator abandons the past tense—previously used to narrate the events involving Vollmann’s former self—and begins informing the reader in the present tense about where he is and what he is doing during the act of narration, as shown here: “[I]ndeed, at this moment I am sitting on a bullet train between Tokyo and Shin-Osaka, rushing toward Everywhere on my laptop with a beer beside me.”<sup>63</sup> The most challenging aspect of this use of voice is that it situates Vollmann the writer “out there” in reality (on the bullet train, in this case). This is problematic because, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson explain, this “I” (of Vollmann “out there” in reality) is unknown and unknowable by readers and is not the “I” that readers use to gain access to the narrative.<sup>64</sup> Equally, it is difficult to associate this voice with the narrator because events can only be narrated after they have happened<sup>65</sup> and this voice is clearly reporting facts in the present tense.

*Riding toward Everywhere* not only raises questions about the indeterminacy of the narrating subject but also about the limits of referentiality. Vollmann refuses to relate this story within a traditional social, cultural, or historical framework and, like Raab, he chooses to depict “the image-world as a realm that blurs traditional distinctions between fantasy and reality.”<sup>66</sup> For example, Vollmann’s narrating self repeatedly uses the phrase “Once upon a time” when retelling stories heard from others or describing his personal experiences from a long time ago, thereby obscuring the actual time frame and

undermining the reader's faith in the veracity of his accounts. The fairy-tale motif is not limited to this single phrase but is reinforced through the narrator's repeated use of words such as "ogres" and "trolls" to refer to particularly unlikable hobos. On one occasion, the narrator retells a story about a hobo who had threatened to kill a man he believed to have been responsible for his dog's death. The narrator explains that the man managed to mollify the hobo by agreeing to bury the dog in his own backyard. The hobo is described as returning "like a troll beneath his fairytale bridge," at which point the narrator says: "I use the word 'fairytale' advisedly, because mere nasty actuality might have become mythic eeriness in the telling. To be sure, the warning core of that tale contained truth."<sup>67</sup> These comments reveal that the fairy-tale motif has a journalistic function. The reader is warned that the stories being recounted may not be entirely accurate or reliable because the events—so bizarre and improbable in the first place—have inevitably been distorted in their retelling. This narratological strategy is a characteristic CP response to reality and displays Vollmann's unwillingness to foreclose the question: "Is this real?" by invoking conventional ways of understanding."<sup>68</sup>

This contrasts with ER, which raises questions about its status as nonfiction only through an implicit critique of its own realist techniques. A typical example of this occurs in *Homicide*, when David Simon utilizes third-person perspective to take advantage of its capacity to focus the narrative in "close third person."<sup>69</sup> James Woods explains that close third person takes effect when the narrator appears to "take on the properties of the character, who now seems to 'own' the words."<sup>70</sup> Effectively, the narrator adopts the diction of the actor, copying his or her natural style of speech and making it hard to determine who is actually speaking—the narrator or the actor—as illustrated in this example:

Donald Waltemeyer is losing it. McLarney can tell because Waltemeyer's eyes have begun to roll up into his forehead the way they always do when he gets steamed. McLarney worked with a guy in the Central who used to do that. Nicest guy in the world. Pretty long fuse. But let some yo with an attitude ride him too far, those eyeballs would roll up like an Atlantic City slot. It was a sure sign to every other cop that negotiations had ended and nightsticks were in order. McLarney tries to shrug off the memory; he continues to press the point with Waltemeyer.<sup>71</sup>

This passage is clearly written from the perspective of Detective Sergeant Terrence McLarney. Even though the first sentence is a declarative statement and not attributed to anyone, the next sentence indicates that McLarney is the person responsible for suggesting that Waltemeyer is "losing it." The third sentence reveals that McLarney has previously experienced a similar situation with another police officer who was also on the brink of "losing

it,” which is why he can “tell” Waltemeyer’s current mental state. The final four sentences describe McLarney’s memory of the other officer in Central in greater detail, before the narrative returns to the present situation, where McLarney proceeds to shrug off the memory and “continues to press the point with Waltemeyer.”

The most noticeable feature of the middle section of this paragraph is that the narrative assumes the same gruff, muscular intonation and inflection as the language commonly used by officers in the Baltimore Police Department (BPD). For instance, “yo”—the term used for a lawless or antisocial black youth—is part of the local police vernacular, which is populated with other racially charged slurs, such as “yoette” (the female equivalent of a yo) and “billie,” which denotes a “white-trash redneck” from the southern suburbs of the city.<sup>72</sup> Simon is quick to point out that the BPD is replete with every color and creed, which he believes proves that the discriminatory nature of officers’ jargon is not racism per se but more akin to class-consciousness and “contempt for the huddled masses.”<sup>73</sup>

Returning to the middle four sentences of this passage, a combination of quick-fire, staccato statements (“Nicest guy in the world. Pretty long fuse”); ellipsis (“ride him too far, those eyeballs would roll”—a comma standing in for the conjunction “and”); and colloquial synecdoche (“negotiations had ended and nightsticks were in order”—a euphemism for assault on a suspect) are used to replicate the colloquial language of the BPD. It is clear from the lack of quotation marks or other grammatical indicators signalling speech that McLarney is not personally describing his own memory; rather it is the narrator describing it in McLarney’s idiom. This passage is an example of free indirect prose, an extremely useful tool for ER because the writer can benefit from “its potential for combining both distanced observation of a character and a sense of how he or she sees the world.”<sup>74</sup>

A naive reading of this passage might suggest that Simon is deceiving the reader because he suppresses his “autolingua”<sup>75</sup> (the inner voice of the storyteller) and assumes the implied voice of one of his actors. Yet, it is evident from the tone and context that Simon does so ironically, colorfully flaunting the narratorial contrivance and making it easy for the reader to know the dancer from the dance, to use Yeats’s expression.<sup>76</sup> Simon’s playful elucidation of this artificial construction of reality means that the narrative is both self-reflexive *and* referential, revealing how ER performs a kind of knowing social realism in both its style and technique.

Notwithstanding these differences, ER and CP both convey a highly subjective and personal reality (even though ER prefers not to draw attention to this fact). According to Steve M. Barkin, the “adoption of fictional

techniques signals an explicit return to the storyteller's emotional function."<sup>77</sup> The story form allows realist reporters to recount the past in a factual way but also embeds their factual accounts in a "deep cultural context—one which connects the objective facts of the event with the cultural facts of symbols and myths."<sup>78</sup> Despite the neutral, objective, and impersonal tone found in ER, such embedding of factual content in a deep cultural context means that these types of texts relate highly personalized, interpretative, and evocative accounts of reality that exemplify the storyteller's emotional function. It is therefore inappropriate to associate ER with conventional "objective" journalism since it shares some important characteristics with CP, such as focusing on "events as symbolic of some deeper cultural ideology or mythology, emphasis[ing] the world view of the individual or group under study, and show[ing] an absorption in the aesthetics of the reporting process in creating texts that read like novels or short stories."<sup>79</sup> CP and ER are therefore essentially two sides of the same coin because they focus on the deeper cultural significance of events and utilize the storyteller's emotional function so that the texts read like novels. That is, they both subscribe to the subjective ideal of literary journalism. It is therefore important to further refine Eason's typology so that ER is acknowledged as a subjective form of journalism, and is not associated with conventional notions of journalistic objectivity.

### **The Eason-Webb Continuum**

**I**n order to reconcile ER with the subjective ideal of literary journalism, it is helpful to consider Webb's interpretation of romantic and rationalist journalism in conjunction with Eason's typology. According to Webb, rationalism is based on the following assumptions: the key characteristic of man is his ability to think, reason, and have ideas; reality is an external phenomenon understood via the senses; human beings are fundamentally alike; society is basically static and unchanging; and reality must be "cut up into pieces, with each piece digested separately." The ideal of rationalism is, of course, exemplified in objective reporting. Romanticism, on the other hand, assumes the primacy of human diversity; society as dynamic and not static; and a "wholistic," rather than atomistic, view of reality, that is, "assuming that life cannot be understood when it is cut up in little pieces." It considers humans to be primarily feeling, emotional, and instinctual beings, and suggests that "those elements . . . must be described and reported if [we are] to be understood." Romanticism in literary journalism proceeds from the premise "that the Reality to be reported is primarily internal, inside human beings; and the methodological problem . . . is to find a way inside the human being written about."<sup>80</sup> According to Webb, there was a surge of romanticism in literary journalism in the wake of the New Journalism, which

was part of a “wider social upsurge of Romantic notions and ideas in numerous areas of intellectual work, cultural production and life style.”<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Lee Wilkins argues that literary journalism “sank its intellectual roots in the romantic tradition,” such that emotion had “an important and sometimes crucial place in [its] work.”<sup>82</sup>

Webb has constructed a definitional framework that places the concepts of rationalism and romanticism at opposing ends of a continuum, with texts situated along this continuum depending on how influenced they are by either ideal.<sup>83</sup> Combining Webb’s framework and Eason’s typology allows ER and CP to be conceived, not as distinct categories, but as different points on a sliding scale ranging from “objective” to “subjective” journalism. This reframing enables researchers to focus on literary journalism’s narrative techniques and to assess how these are used to communicate the internal, psychological reality of actors, convey an emotional or moral vision, and place emphasis not only on what is known “but on the process of knowing itself.”<sup>84</sup> Based on this information, literary journalism texts can be positioned on Webb’s continuum.

With its rationalist aesthetic but romantic intent, ER can be situated closer than objective journalism to the romantic ideal of journalism but not as close as CP. The diagram at the beginning of this essay (page 100) provides a rough approximation of where ER and CP might be situated on Webb’s continuum. In order to illustrate this point further, six well-known works of literary journalism, including *Homicide* and *Riding toward Everywhere*, have been placed on the ER/CP spectrum according to how influenced they are by either romanticism or rationalism.

Hartsock explains that literary journalism “exists on a narrative spectrum or continuum somewhere between an unattainable objectified world and an incomprehensible solipsistic subjectivity.”<sup>85</sup> Despite ER’s avoidance of the “I” in favor of the omniscient “eye” of the writer,<sup>86</sup> both ER and CP exploit the transformational resources of human perception and imagination.<sup>87</sup> Woven together into a complex interrelationship, neither proceeds independently of the other but rather they merge and overlap, with both working toward the same goal, albeit using different methods. So, although *Homicide* and *Riding toward Everywhere* are on opposite ends of the ER-CP spectrum, they are both situated within the subjective ideal of journalism.

John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* is a typical example of ER predating the New Journalism. The exploration of experiential reality through the internal mind of the reporter that is typical of CP, however, appears to have emerged in latter part of the twentieth century after poststructuralism. Typical examples include the works of Hunter S. Thompson, Joan Didion, and John Gregory

Dunne. *The Executioner's Song* is identified as ER because it is written from a third-person perspective, and Norman Mailer presents the story in a factual and objective manner. *The Right Stuff* is located more toward the middle of the spectrum because although it too is written from a third-person perspective, Tom Wolfe's authorial presence can be keenly felt in the narration. *The Year of Magical Thinking* is classed as CP because it is written in first-person perspective; but Didion's approach is unquestioning in its regard for the factual past, and does not question its own status as nonfiction, so it is situated near the middle. *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72* is more ambiguous about factual reality, with Hunter S. Thompson interspersing his narrative account with scenes derived from his imagination. And as we have seen, Vollmann's text upends any easy notion of an obtainable factuality or stable subject to interpret it.

### Conclusion

Over a generation ago, Weber said that literary journalism "is not well defined, and the many terms used to describe it . . . have done nothing to clarify matters."<sup>88</sup> More recently, Hartsock argued that uncertainty over what to call this genre is not just an identity problem: it is indicative of a "large critical void of which the problem of identity is symptomatic of a larger generic problem: how to contextualize a body of writing that, to provide a working definition, reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes a truth claim to reflecting phenomenal experience."<sup>89</sup> After a productive period of theoretical debate in the wake of Wolfe's essay on the New Journalism in the 1970s, the task of defining this genre has largely been abandoned.<sup>90</sup>

The typology and spectrum outlined in this paper represent an attempt to reinvigorate the debate and stimulate a renewed effort in defining and analyzing this form. It is merely a starting point, however, and given the limitations of this study, there is scope for testing the framework on a broader range of texts. Such an exercise could provide an opportunity to further refine the typology and perhaps contribute additional categories along the ER-CP continuum, which we welcome. Further, the analysis of the omniscient narrator in *Homicide* and the radical indeterminacy of the writing subject in *Riding toward Everywhere* indicate a need for greater clarification with respect to narrative communication in literary journalism. Norman Sims states that literary journalism can be seen as a narrative impulse in journalism,<sup>91</sup> indicating that narrative technique ought to be a prime focus of research. However, it is equally important that this type of writing represents actual events that are independent of any particular narrative perspective or presentation,<sup>92</sup> no matter how elusive or complex they might be.

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William Roberts wrote his doctorate on the subject of this essay, a version of which received the award for best research paper by a graduate at IALJS-9 in Paris. He currently works as media advisor to an Australian Federal Member of Parliament.

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## Notes

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Photo by Pablo Corral Vega

## *Scholar-practitioner Q & A . . .*

### An Interview with Alma Guillermoprieto

Mileta Roe

Bard College at Simon's Rock, United States

Mexican writer Alma Guillermoprieto remains one of the most important voices from Latin America today. Her award-winning journalistic career spans nearly forty years, during which she has traveled extensively and written on myriad topics for a variety of publications. Known to readers of English primarily for her articles in the *New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*, she has also written for Spanish-language media on both sides of the Atlantic, including *Gatopardo* and *El País*, and published a number of books (see list at end).

Born in Mexico in 1949, she attended high school in New York City and pursued at first a career in dance, notably studying with Merce Cunningham and dancing professionally for a decade. In 1970 she spent six months teaching modern dance in Cuba, an experience she later recounted in her 2004 book, *Dancing with Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution*.<sup>1</sup> Several years after returning from Cuba she accepted an offer to report on the Nicaraguan revolution in English. She has been writing professionally ever since. Along the way she has witnessed the devastating effects of conflict in Central America, observed the violence in Colombia and Mexico wrought by the international drug trade, and interviewed the likes of Subcomandante Marcos, guerrillas of the Shining Path, and Peruvian writer and erstwhile political candidate Mario Vargas Llosa.

Politics and poverty, corruption and inequity, survival and belief, the throes of modernity, and the inevitability of international (and imperial) ignorance and meddling are just some of the themes that emerge from her work. Never flinching from commentary, she crafts essay-narratives that deft-

ly blend description and significance, as in this excerpt from a 2012 story in the *New York Review of Books* on the plight of journalists in Mexico:

Let us say that you are a Mexican reporter working for peanuts at a local television station somewhere in the provinces—the state of Durango, for example—and that one day you get a friendly invitation from a powerful drug-trafficking group. Imagine that it is the Zetas, and that thanks to their efforts in your city several dozen people have recently perished in various unspeakable ways, while justice turned a blind eye. Among the dead is one of your colleagues. Now consider the invitation, which is to a press conference to be held punctually on the following Friday, at a not particularly out of the way spot just outside of town. You were, perhaps, considering going instead to a movie? Keep in mind, the invitation notes, that attendance will be taken by the Zetas.<sup>2</sup>

The reality of the situation and the locus of power cannot be misunderstood; the reader cannot help feeling discomposed. Again and again, Guillermprieto finds ways to trace her subjects with empathy and acuity, enlisting the reader to sense and consider the regions she inscribes.

She and I spoke on August 11, 2014, connecting via Skype between Mexico City and Cape Cod.

**Mileta Roe:** Early on you spent several years in Central America, covering various conflicts for several papers in a sort of accidental trial by fire that ignited your career. Given that you began reporting by chance, in a way, was there ever a conscious moment when you chose writing, or did you become a writer slowly?

**Alma Guillermprieto:** For a long time I had no idea that that was what I was doing. Really. Because it was so unexpected to end up in Central America as a reporter! So I would say that the first time I felt I should think about putting the word “writer” or even “reporter” on my visa whenever I entered or left a country—I was always baffled by that—was when I started writing for the *New Yorker*.<sup>3</sup>

**Roe:** And did you always have an attraction to or a flair for writing, or did you serve a kind of apprenticeship along the way?

**Guillermprieto:** I was always told from a very early age that I should be a writer. When I would write letters to my friends in Mexico at sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years old, they would write back and say that I should be a writer. But I had absolutely no interest in doing so. I should say, though, that both my parents wanted to be writers, and that my mother finally fulfilled that ambition by writing a monthly column in a women’s magazine in Mexico. I feel that I am very much her daughter as a writer. She had a recognizable

voice, and I think mine is pretty recognizable, too. But, no, becoming a writer really didn't interest me, even after I had my first story in the *New Yorker*.

**Roe:** Really? Even then?

**Guillermoprieto:** The editor of the *New Yorker* at the time, Bob Gottlieb, called me and said, "When are you going to do another story for me?" And I said, "Oh, I don't know. I was thinking of going to Russia to learn Russian." And I'll never forget, he said, "Wait a minute, I'm the editor-in-chief of the *New Yorker*, and I'm asking you when you want to write another story for us, and you're telling me you want to go to Russia instead?" It was so funny. But even then, it wasn't clear to me that this was what I was going to be stuck doing for the rest of my life.

**Roe:** But that sort of encouragement finally held sway and you gave in to it?

**Guillermoprieto:** I liked Bob a lot and felt that I could trust him. And I felt it would be a nice thing to be writing "Letters from . . ." for him. But I should also say that three or four years earlier, I had written a proposal to Mr. Shawn and it had been rejected with the typical blue slip, or rather pink slip, in the case of the *New Yorker*. So it's true that I always felt that I would be comfortable with the *New Yorker*. It just felt that that was the logical place, and that being a daily reporter had not been a good fit. I wasn't bad at it, but I wasn't outstanding at it either. Or maybe I wasn't so bad, because it did carry me quite a long way.

**Roe:** So was it the kind of writing in the *New Yorker* that gave you more latitude to do the work that you wanted to do?

**Guillermoprieto:** Absolutely. And then after the third story or so, I thought, right, this is what I want to do. It felt satisfying and was enormous amounts of fun and I could make a living at it, which is, of course, not the case anymore for most writers, freelance writers particularly, like me, because of the crisis in print.

**Roe:** That's an important point and I do want to return to that in a minute. Given your incredible style in writing, I'm wondering who some of the writers are whom you admire or who may have shaped your ideas about writing.

**Guillermoprieto:** I should say right off that I don't read all that much nonfiction and I have been a voracious consumer of fiction my entire of life. And that one of the writers I most admire is Dr. Seuss [laughing], you know? I still read him and I am completely enthralled by what he does with language. And I remember reading, as a little girl, *Horton Hears a Who* and just being overwhelmed by how great it was: the rhyme, the patterns, and the rhythm, and of course the story, which affected me deeply.

**Roe:** So . . . fiction.

**Guillermoprieto:** Yes, and I guess I did most of my reading before I was twenty-five or so; then I got busy reporting and didn't do much reading for a very long time. But between the ages of twelve and twenty-five, I read what everybody reads. I loved Nabokov. Loved, loved, loved. And I read Tolstoy over and over again, because he's just a tremendously great writer. If I had to say which three writers? Well, in Spanish, I read a lot of poetry—I think that was very important. But it's fiction and poetry, though I haven't read much poetry in English.

**Roe:** That's so interesting, and yet you write about the real world. And I heard you say in another interview, I think, that it is the real world that truly fascinates you.

**Guillermoprieto:** You know, I had led a—I wouldn't say quiet and I wouldn't say unadventurous—but a routine life, in many ways, although it wasn't a predictable life. But I had a dancer's discipline. What I did was do odd jobs as a waitress and go to class and to rehearsal and that was my life. The excitement of witnessing a revolution sent me to Central America and led to a kind of intensity—adrenalin, really—that switched my life around. In many ways it was a tremendously painful experience, because of the atrocities and the strong reactions I had to that, but on the other hand it was a big world out there, and an exciting one, too. Being a young person, reporting on critical events is exciting.

**Roe:** Sure. And distressing, too.

**Guillermoprieto:** Yes, and also distressing. But certainly at the beginning, it was the excitement for all of us who turned up in Nicaragua, as I'm sure it was for all the people who turned up in Iraq at the beginning. You know you're young and you've set out for exotic parts and suddenly you are given the authorial voice, the authority. It's a big deal. So that was the part I really liked. It wasn't so much the reporting that attracted me; it was the fact of living this big life.

**Roe:** And part of living that life has been being on the cusp or acknowledging your own biculturalism and your interest, primarily through your writing, to bridge North American and Latin American cultures or realities. In that bicultural role that you've taken on in different ways in your career, does it feel different today than it did, say, twenty or thirty years ago?

**Guillermoprieto:** Yes, because now I also have a readership in Latin America. And so, that makes the circle more complete.

**Roe:** How does that affect your writing—having much more of a readership in Latin America?

**Guillermoprieto:** I don't think it has. It just feels complete.

**Roe:** You've lived much of your life in Mexico City and New York, two very different megacities of more than twenty million people each. How have those cities shaped your perspective?

**Guillermoprieto:** Oh, I think I'm cosmopolitan. And a survivor. You can't live in two cities like that without becoming both. And to the degree that cosmopolitanism also implies curiosity about the other, and I'm by nature a curious person. New York and Mexico City have been wonderful places to be.

**Roe:** Now I realize that every article or project has its own parameters, but I wonder how you confront a new project or a story. I think of some of my favorite pieces that you've written, including "Fidel in the Evening,"<sup>4</sup> in which you use that second person "you" to transport the reader to Cuba to imagine virtually an entire life lived under the spell of Castro. It was such an unusual and effective opening. Could you say something about your process and how you figure out how to address a subject, decide what lens to use?

**Guillermoprieto:** One of the things that's most overlooked about writers and writing is how much despair really is the force that drives us [laughing].

**Roe:** Despair!

**Guillermoprieto:** Despair and deadlines. For that Fidel piece, which I remember doing and having great doubts about, it's not like I sat down and thought, now what perspective or what voice do I want to give this? It was more like, what the fuck can I do to start this impossible piece? Because all it is is an account of a late-night interview Fidel gave on the eve of the visit of Pope John Paul II. And that element of scratching around to find some new way of leading into a story—especially such a potentially boring story—is tremendously important for all of us nonfiction writers. Especially because by then I'd been a reporter for many years and had been writing for a while, and there are moments when I get so very sick of my own voice. And there you are; it's eleven o'clock at night, and you need to write one more lead. *How can I possibly start this? What in hell am I going to do?* And somehow or other you come up with some solution. And that one happened to work well, and it was satisfying because I did feel I was taking a risk in that voice. But it was the only thing that occurred to me at the time and it carried me a certain distance. The main thing about a lead is that it has to generate the momentum to carry you through at least the first third of your story, however long that's going to be. And Bob Silvers [of the *New York Review of Books*], bless his great and generous soul, is always willing to take whatever crazy idea I come up with. But really, those things are born of despair, of a writer's despair. Although I do have to say, in retrospect, that writing about Fidel by reviewing one of his rare press conferences was a pretty good idea.

**Roe:** So despair is actually a trade secret.

**Guillermoprieto:** Yes, absolutely. But let me see if I can say something more useful about all of this. I do a lot of my reporting while I'm walking and *not* trying to report. And I try to make time for that, because it's an activity that frees your mind. I find that if I can get a good opening graph while I'm walking and then a good closing graph some weeks later, then I'm ready to write; because once I know I have a point A and a point Z, it's much less painful than roaming around in the dark without even knowing where you're headed.

**Roe:** And the walking is part of your writing process or is it something that happens only while you're in the place where you're reporting from?

**Guillermoprieto:** Well, yes, I try to get those two things done while I'm reporting. Because it's expensive, and that's one of the reasons that real, great long-form journalism is at risk, because it's very expensive.

**Roe:** Sure.

**Guillermoprieto:** The thought on that return plane is that now you're not going to be able to do any more reporting. And so if you feel that you don't have a tight closure to the piece, well, too bad. That country is a thousand dollars away. It's that practical. So the walking is part of the reporting and is part of the writing simultaneously. And the first two, three days, if I have a budget that will allow me that luxury, I don't even try to report. I just try to walk and look around and be open to the feeling of place.

**Roe:** Just take it in initially.

**Guillermoprieto:** Yeah, because otherwise once you start looking for things, you stop seeing.

**Roe:** You know one of the things that intrigues me about long-form journalism is the power of narrative to express multiple aspects of human reality. And when people talk about Latin American history and letters, there's a tendency to talk about the clear connection between poetry and politics in the region. As one looks at some of the literary nonfiction that is from Latin America and about Latin America, could we say there's a difference in the narrative style?

**Guillermoprieto:** I was on a panel last year in New York with Juan Villoro, who is a graceful Mexican essayist and deeply cultured man, and we both do long-form narrative journalism. We do sort of similar things and we have similar sensibilities, except that our method and our process are completely different. The idea of having a fact checker really annoys him, he said—essentially because he feels that he should be free to go wherever his poetic instincts take him. Many Latin American reporters who start out as writers—not that they say falsehoods, I'm not implying that by any means—they feel that their primary responsibility is still toward the poetics of the situation. And my own

responsibilities as a writer of nonfiction for an English-speaking audience—you know I started as a reporter for the English media, I started writing for the *Guardian* and *Latin American Newsletters*—my responsibility is really to the reader. So those are very different starting points.

**Roe:** Yes. And do you think that those “poetic instincts” are a general difference between, say, anglophone and Latin American writers?

**Guillermoprieto:** Well, I would say between that and Romance languages even. And it also has a lot to do with the way I was trained at the *Washington Post* and then subsequently, primarily by my editor at the *New Yorker*, John Bennett: if we can leave the poesy out, we’re going to leave the damn poesy out!

**Roe:** That’s what he said?

**Guillermoprieto:** Well, no, that’s my quote, but I think it could be a Bennett quote. And we’re just very distrustful of that kind of veering into sentimentalism or giving one’s own emotions more importance than the emotions of the subject you’re reporting on; and the more dreadful the situation you’re writing about, the more that’s true.

**Roe:** I’m sure you’re right—there is something to that divide. Since you mentioned the panel you were on recently, I wanted to touch on some of the teaching you’ve done. I know you’ve taught in a number of high-profile places. In working with young or emerging writers and journalists, what are some of the challenges you see them facing?

**Guillermoprieto:** For years, I taught a yearly workshop at the Fundación Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano, which was founded by García Márquez to revitalize the long-form narrative in Latin American journalism. What I’ve done there is workshops for young, professional journalists. But when I’ve taught in the United States, I’ve mainly taught a course on late twentieth-century Latin American history, generally in the history department. Those are very different kinds of teaching.

**Roe:** For the journalists in Latin America, then, what are some of their biggest challenges?

**Guillermoprieto:** Not getting killed—that’s a good start. According to recent official figures, 102 journalists have been killed in Mexico in the course of the last fourteen years. And mostly the journalists who get killed are the defenseless ones, the provincial journalists with almost no training who are called to do five stories a day—literally, five stories a day—who get paid by the word. And whose editors don’t back them. So I’d say that’s been a big challenge for reporters in Colombia, in Mexico, in Central America. In other places, perhaps, avoiding lawsuits—those are still significant challenges to freedom of expression.

**Roe:** Avoiding lawsuits . . . from the private sector?

**Guillermoprieto:** Well, no, from the government. In Ecuador, significantly, the president has sued the hell out of the newspapers for running cartoons that he feels are inimical to his image. That's a real danger. You can cause a medium in Latin America to go bankrupt: newspapers in the region, particularly, are much less wealthy institutions than US media. Much, much less wealthy.

What other challenges are there? Finding a readership now that print media are closing down. Even in Latin America, this has been so. What are we going to do? I don't know. The *New York Times* had two big articles about it today. One by David Carr, who covers media for the *Times* and really tells things straightforwardly. This was the most despairing I've ever heard him be, basically saying the game's up.<sup>5</sup> I'm very happy at the moment because I've just written a 7,000-word story, but that's the longest story I've been given the freedom to write in a long time.

**Roe:** Publishers just can't afford it.

**Guillermoprieto:** They can't afford the paper for a long story. The longest stories I've been doing in recent years are maybe 4,000 words, more often 2,500 words. I just did the 7,000-word story for a new online magazine called *Matter*,<sup>6</sup> and that was encouraging because it's only available online and is betting that maybe people under forty will be reading articles online as long-form narrative. It's a sort of adjunct of an online blog instrument founded by Ev Williams, the cofounder of Twitter. A lot of big media companies and individuals with big technology money have lately been missing serious journalism, and wondering what's going to happen to the world when serious journalism disappears. So you see [Jeff] Bezos buying the *Washington Post* and Pierre Omidyar, the eBay founder, starting up First Look Media, which has interesting ambitions. Then there's the *New Republic*, which was bought by Chris Hughes, one of the cofounders of Facebook, and so on. After doing so much to destroy the printed word, many online wizards are now concerned about what will happen if people are no longer reading in depth. Because to read at length means to read in depth, and it calls for a different thinking process than reading short BuzzFeeds. And I'm not being sarcastic. It's just different.

**Roe:** And it's interesting that along with some of these new digital magazines that are popping up, we're seeing websites specializing in long-form pieces that they then anthologize or catalogue.

**Guillermoprieto:** The problem is, where is the money going to come from to pay for the reporting that aggregator sites like to anthologize? That's why I thought *Matter* was so encouraging, because they were willing to make

a commitment: they paid for a month's worth of reporting in Rome.

**Roe:** That *is* exciting.

**Guillermoprieto:** That's a huge deal—I could write a proper piece with proper reporting.

**Roe:** The other thing that strikes me as interesting is the explosion of self-publishing and self-publishing platforms, or at least where one has access to technology and no worries over censorship.

**Guillermoprieto:** You know it's a great thing, but you come back to the same thing: who pays for the reporting? And who pays for the editing?

**Roe:** Right—there's no filter, no support.

**Guillermoprieto:** People who seem to feel that this is a brave new world in which self-published reporting will solve all problems don't really take into account a) who defends the author? And b) who helps the author and the reader read a better piece? Media in the United States have long had skillful and committed editors, and this is unique to US journalism. Not even English journalism, but a specific form of US journalism. Who pays for the fact checkers? They are essential if you are talking about journalism. And particularly essential now that we have so much information and pseudo-information on the web and it's so very hard to distinguish one from the other.

**Roe:** What is your next step?

**Guillermoprieto:** Well, *my* immediate next step is to teach for a semester at a university in the United States.

**Roe:** An entire semester? That's a long time for a writer.

**Guillermoprieto:** Most of us now who write long-form journalism are doing this. It takes time away from the actual job of thinking about what the next story should be, the proposal, and getting the answer back, doing the reporting, and then writing. I don't do three or four stories a year anymore. It's a real issue, and it all comes down to economics, and it's a crisis. I wouldn't be going on endlessly about any of this, if it weren't an absolutely critical moment for journalism.

**Roe:** So it remains to be seen what will happen.

**Guillermoprieto:** I don't even think it remains to be seen. I feel quite pessimistic about it right now. There will be individual entrepreneurs or maybe even *mecenas*—sponsors or patrons—like Ev Williams, let's say. But then also the question is, how are they going to find readers out there in this enormous web? These self-publishing journals that you've mentioned before that anthologize long-form narrative—do they have 10,000 readers, 50,000, 100,000? However many it is, they remain outsider publications, and unavoidably elitist. This is the great loss that the collapse of the great middle-brow media implies. What is vanishing is the great plaza, the agora where all

kinds of thinking and contrary opinions can meet with all kinds of readers. Plus, there remains the problem of where all that great content they're going to aggregate is going to come from; who's going to produce it?

I realize that this all sounds terribly pessimistic, so I should perhaps modulate this perspective: Whenever I do a workshop, I realize that there are whole flocks out there of the smartest, most idealistic, and talented kids in the world, who have not been told that journalism is a dying craft and that we're all going to hell, and fast. These are the young people who will create the journalism that the new era and the new technology require, I'm quite certain. Perhaps they will create more visual ways of reporting and thinking. No doubt they'll incorporate much more technology. Or perhaps not; the students I've had seem to harbor an unnatural love for the magic of the written word. Whatever form it takes, though, and however hard this transitional period may be for those of us who started reporting before the Internet, I'm quite certain that journalism and long-form nonfiction narrative will survive. We all need to know about the life that exists beyond our doorstep, and for those of us who are born hungry for the world, there is no more marvelous way to be immersed in it than to go out and write about it. It's a great, great privilege.

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*Mileta Roe is associate professor in Spanish and comparative literature at Bard College at Simon's Rock and a former staff editor at the Atlantic.*

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## Notes

1. Guillermoprieto, *Dancing for Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution*, trans. Esther Allen (New York: Pantheon, 2004).
2. Guillermoprieto, "Mexico: Risking Life for Truth," *New York Review of Books*, November 22, 2012.
3. Guillermoprieto's relationship with the *New Yorker* dates to 1989, when "Letter from Bogata" was published in the October 16 issue.
4. Guillermoprieto, "Fidel in the Evening," *New York Review of Books*, October 22, 1998.
5. David Carr, "Papers Are Down, and Now Out," *New York Times*, August 11, 2014.
6. *Matter* can be accessed at <https://medium.com/matter/franciss-holywar-70a382606c0d>.

### Selected Works

*Samba* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

*The Heart that Bleeds: Latin America Now* (New York: Knopf 1994). Published in Spanish as *Al pie de un volcán te escribo*, trans. Alma Guillermoprieto and Hernando Valencia Goelkel (Mexico: Plaza & Janés, c2000).

*Los años que no fuimos felices: Crónicas de la transición Mexicana*, trans. Angela García Rocha and Juan Manuel Pombo Abondano (Mexico: Plaza y Janés, 1999).

*Looking for History: Dispatches from Latin America* (New York: Pantheon, 2001).

*Dancing for Cuba: A Memoir of the Revolution*, trans. Esther Allen (New York: Pantheon, 2004).

*Desde el país de nunca jamás*, trans. Margarita Valencia (Madrid: Debate, 2011).



# Book reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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A How-to with Ethics at Its Core

*Telling True Stories: Navigating the Challenges of Writing  
Narrative Non-Fiction*

By Matthew Ricketson

*Reviewed by Jennifer E. Moore* 135

Latter-day Pagans in the Northern Maple Forests

*The Sugar Season: A Year in the Life of Maple Syrup—And One Family's  
Quest for the Sweetest Harvest*

By Douglas Whynott

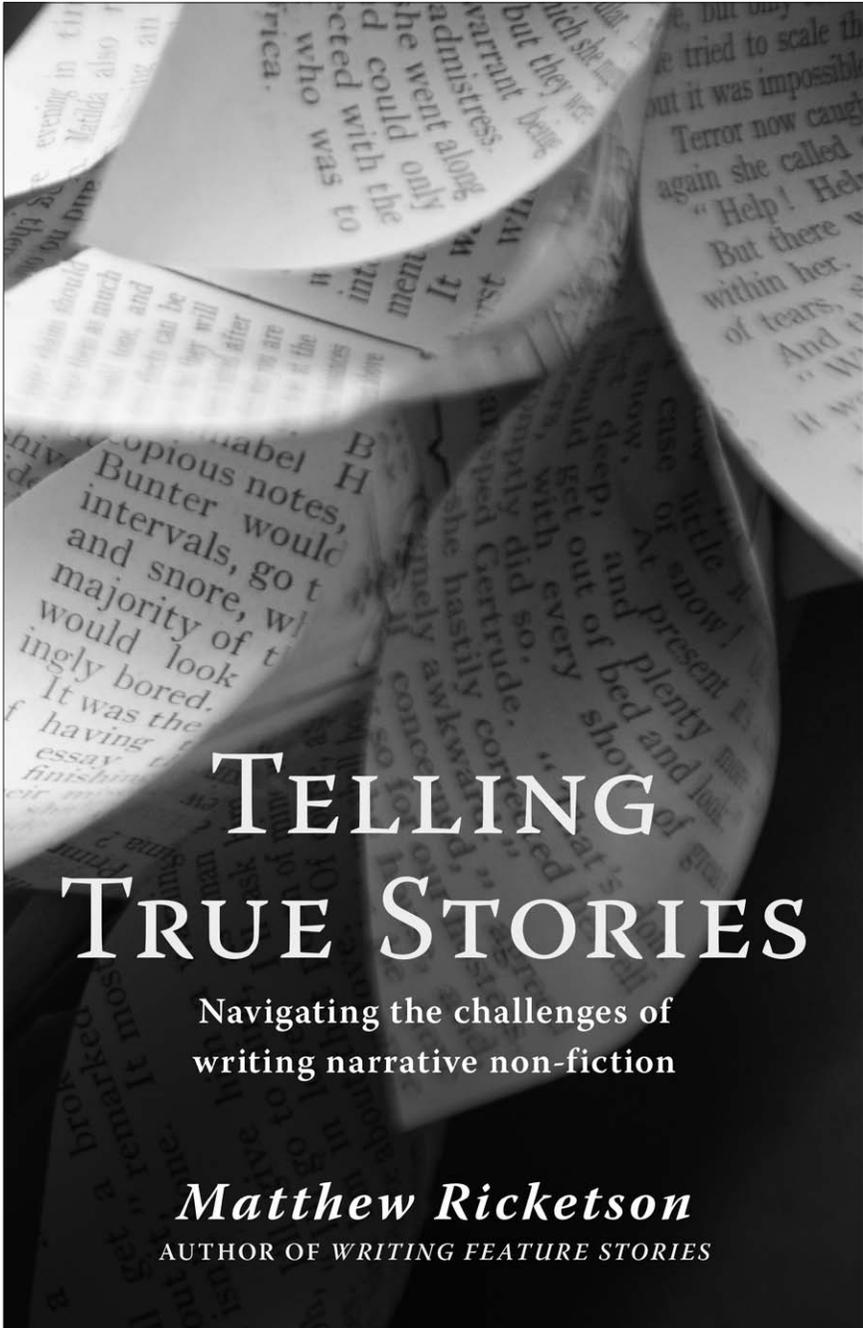
*Reviewed by John C. Hartsock* 138

A New and Important Voice

*Pulphead: Essays*

By John Jeremiah Sullivan

*Reviewed by Roberta S. Maguire* 141



# TELLING TRUE STORIES

Navigating the challenges of  
writing narrative non-fiction

*Matthew Ricketson*

AUTHOR OF *WRITING FEATURE STORIES*

## A How-to with Ethics at Its Core

*Telling True Stories: Navigating the Challenges of Writing Narrative Non-Fiction*  
by Matthew Ricketson. Sydney: Allen & Unwin. 2014. Paperback, 288 pp., \$39.99 (AUD), \$19.95 (US)

Reviewed by Jennifer E. Moore, University of Maine, United States

When my copy of *Telling True Stories: Navigating the Challenges of Writing Narrative Non-Fiction* arrived in the mail, I left it sitting on my kitchen table for a few days. A friend visiting noticed the book and was intrigued by the title. He asked what I thought about the book, and I explained that it had just arrived and I was assigned to review it. This friend happens to be a journalist who reports for a daily newspaper in a mid-sized, Midwestern town in the United States. I was hopeful I could give my friend a positive review. And, with few reservations, I would not discourage him from reading *Telling True Stories*.

A professor of journalism at the University of Canberra, Matthew Ricketson has written a book that draws on both his years of professional experience as a reporter and his scholarly and teaching endeavors. Ricketson explains that he aims to fill a gap in the current literature by combining a “how-to-write” guide with a deeper, scholarly reflection on the craft of narrative nonfiction. His work addresses issues about the process of writing, often through interpretations of well-known literary nonfiction works. Ricketson weaves in insights from both his own interviews with practitioners and from Robert S. Boynton’s *The New New Journalism: Conversations with America’s Best Nonfiction Writers on Their Craft*. Using Boynton’s work as a primary source, Ricketson interprets the interviews with many well-known literary journalists to analyze some well-known works to reveal some of the common problems associated with telling true stories in literary nonfiction.

Organized in twelve chapters with a “checklist” at the end for narrative nonfiction writers, Ricketson uses famous—or infamous—examples of book-length literary journalism to explore a wide range of ethical issues that practitioners face in research, interviewing, writing, and publishing. Becoming “friendly” but not “friends” with interview subjects; how to write about an event when you do not witness it firsthand; and understanding how to treat your audience respectfully and knowing how to best reach them are some of the topics Ricketson raises for his readers.

As someone who identifies first as a scholar of journalism and media history, I delve into the study of literary journalism from time to time. With that caveat, I found Ricketson’s work instructive and insightful in many ways. For example, in chapter 3, “Learning from the Journalistic Method,” Ricketson uses two groundbreaking works to compare and contrast approaches to true storytelling. Using Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* and *The Final Days* by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, Ricketson meanders his way through their storytelling methods to explore their contributions and to “peel back the mythology that has grown up around their

works" (41). Ricketson further explains that his interpretation considers Capote as a writer who is deeply influenced by his background in fiction writing while Woodward and Bernstein come to the craft from the profession of journalism. Spending a good deal of his critique on Woodward's writing style—separate from his partnership from Bernstein—Ricketson cites several examples from Woodward's literary writing choices to point out ethical lapses. For example, Ricketson does not advocate for Woodward's "all knowing" storytelling style. In a list of ethical issues with Woodward's writing, Ricketson says, "Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, Woodward presents his findings through the prism of an omniscient narrative voice, which make me, at least, feel uncomfortable" (55).

On the theoretical side, Ricketson explores the contributions of other disciplines to the craft of literary storytelling. In chapter 6, "The Value of Thinking About What Is Fact and What Is Fiction *Before* Writing," Ricketson reviews what aspiring literary nonfiction writers can glean from historians. Hayden White's work is particularly useful, according to Ricketson, explaining, "it is relevant here because in history, as in narrative nonfiction, an attempt is being made to represent in words actual people and events" (118).

As someone interested in the evolution of media technologies and how they influence journalism, I was intrigued by a statement Ricketson made in his introduction about the "rewiring" we are experiencing through the "hyperconnectedness" of "new communication technologies." I was hoping for a chapter dedicated to the exploration of how emerging media have fundamentally changed the practice of journalism and what that may mean for those who want to write literary nonfiction. While literary journalism and Twitter are not often mentioned in the same sentence, the evolution of social media and its influence on nonfiction storytelling would have been a useful addition.

Normally, I would not bother to comment on specific typos, but I was surprised to see a reference to "Conner, Tom" in the index (272). That error will jump out at anyone who knows the founders of the literary journalism field. I was also surprised to see some notable secondary sources about narrative nonfiction absent. For example, in Ricketson's chapter titled "The Janet Malcolm Dilemma: Developing Trust with Principal Sources *and* Keeping Editorial Independence," there is no reference or footnote to a related work about a libel suit against Malcolm, thoroughly explored in Kathy Robert Forde's well-respected and award-winning book *Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment*, which explores the historical tension between "objective" and "literary" journalism.

It seems that the implicit purpose of this book is an ethical exploration of literary journalism. This would be a stronger contribution if it had been positioned as a guide to the ethical practice of narrative nonfiction storytelling. Issues such as transparency, fairness, and harm along with ethical principles (for example, "The Golden Mean") are peppered throughout the book. Using media ethics as an overt, unifying theme would have made this book a more compelling read. In addition, the "checklist" for literary nonfiction writers at the end would tie in more effortlessly with the rest of the book. This list is smartly intended for use alongside Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel's

journalism ethical guidelines outlined in *The Elements of Journalism* (239).

In many ways, *Telling True Stories* reads like a “how to” for someone aspiring to write a book-length, nonfiction narrative. At its best, Ricketson’s book highlights ethical challenges when developing relationships with sources and crafting literary prose. This makes it a useful read in an advanced undergraduate or graduate media ethics and writing course. However, because Ricketson’s work is targeting book-length literary nonfiction writing, the best audience may be someone like my journalist friend. The book may provide the inspiration needed for a reporter holding on to a story idea that cannot be adequately told through the constraints of daily, deadline-driven journalism.

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## Latter-day Pagans in the Northern Maple Forests

*The Sugar Season: A Year in the Life of Maple Syrup—And One Family's Quest for the Sweetest Harvest* by Douglas Whynott. Boston: De Capo, 2014. Hardcover, 279 pp., \$24.99

Reviewed by John C. Hartsock, SUNY Cortland, United States

It would be easy to pigeonhole Douglas Whynott's latest book, *The Sugar Season: A Year in the Life of Maple Syrup—And One Family's Quest for the Sweetest Harvest*, as an example of the "how-it's-done" narrative. Or as "nature narrative." But in fact I found it to be a much more complex book, one that is difficult to fit into any one sub-generic category. Which is why I liked it. The account of collecting maple sap and rendering it into syrup and sugar in New Hampshire and beyond follows Bruce Bascom—and friends—during a maple harvest. Bascom is a third-generation maple sugarer, who also happens to be one of the major distributors of maple syrup in the United States, buying production from elsewhere, including Canada (which happens to be the largest producer of maple syrup and maple sugar by far; after all, why is there a maple leaf in the Canadian flag?).

One dimension is, of course, the opportunity to learn about this fascinating enterprise and the people dedicated to going out in late winter to tap the water-like sap as the temperatures begin to rise. But there is more here than initially meets the eye.

First, full disclosure: I confess I have long been fascinated by maple sugaring. This is because I live in Upstate New York (the other "New York"), in what was once the land of the real-life Hiawatha (Longfellow notwithstanding). Our area is the heart of Upstate's maple-sugaring industry. Along winding country roads here in the Appalachian Highlands you frequently pass farmhouses with awkwardly scrawled signs reading "Maple Syrup 4 Sale." So, my interest had long been aroused by the subject, and perhaps that makes me something of an insider. But I am also an outsider, since I have never made maple syrup (you heat the maple sap, which when gathered has two percent sugar content, into a steaming broth until it thickens into syrup, a practice native Americans taught European settlers). We only have a Norway maple in our yard, not a sugar maple. But still, maple sugaring is a part of our regional culture (and if "Upstate" had a flag, we could justify the maple leaf, too). Necessarily, my appreciation for maple sugaring "flavors" my reading (incidentally, speaking of flavor, when those early settlers arrived, a major source of sugar in this part of North America was the sugar derived from maple syrup, at least until cane sugar from the Caribbean started to be imported).

But there are other reasons why I enjoyed the book as part of my leisurely summer reading. It is, of course, a "how-it's-done" narrative. It is, moreover, nature writing in that it reflects on our relationship to the land and how the land nurtures us.

But again, it would be too easy to pigeonhole the narrative as such. Because the book is more than just a bucolic account about those engaged with a nurturing nature, for which I concede I am a sucker—but then I am descended from Northern Europeans whose haunts were northern woodlands. Because beneath the bucolic, there is an uncomfortable undercurrent Whynott examines. Even as nature nurtures, we can also sense that all is not well in Eden. Those ubiquitous maple trees that rise mutely throughout the northeastern United States and eastern Canada provide a message in their own slow time and in their own slow way about all life, and, yes, the consequences of global warming: Even as nature can be nurturing, we also sense what is being lost. The result is a poignancy, and the realization that the bucolic really always was about what we feared we would lose (especially if the northern woodlands are in your DNA). One can all but imagine banana trees growing in Boston someday.

In addition, there is a kind of literary journalism that *The Sugar Season* exemplifies, which in my view does not receive nearly enough attention. It makes up, I suspect, a kind of subgenre, and I can't say I've ever really heard a name for it. But it's the kind of narrative that celebrates the ordinary of everyday life. In doing so, however, it uncovers the extraordinary. Maple sugaring ordinary? Well, yes and no. For many it may not seem so ordinary, and reading this review this may be the first time they have heard of the practice. If you live in the desert in New Mexico, maple sugaring will seem to be downright exotic (I say this because I once sent a cousin in Santa Fe a jug of New York State maple syrup as a thank you for his and his wife's generous hospitality, and I'm not sure he knew what to make of it). But that's the thing about Whynott's book. In examining the subculture of those who tap maple trees, he helps reveal what is all but taken for granted in my part of the world.

In my view, one reason such a subgenre is not acknowledged nearly enough is that most of our popular modern narrative in its different media seems so centered around bone-crushing, blood-spurting “*traumadrama*” (imagine Mount Vesuvius exploding, sending thousands fleeing the rolling viscous flow of wall-high lava). Trauma can certainly be genuine, and I do not mean to belittle it: It should and must be examined. But at the same time it so often gets trivialized. For my part, I have often had a suspicion that *popular* narratives of trauma—the bang-bang-shoot-'em-ups of movies, bad police novels, video games, and the evening news, serve as a distraction from examining what we do not like about ourselves: They cheapen our postmodern condition in which it is difficult enough to find value.

Finding the extraordinary in the ordinary is, I believe, one way to do it. This is because narratives like *The Sugar Season* help to serve as necessary correctives, reminding us that people can live relatively quiet, useful, and meaningful lives—in this case, like latter-day pagans in the northern maple forests of North America. Ultimately, what we discover is the extraordinary in the everyday rituals. For the maple sugarer it means going out into the snow and slush every year when the sap begins to rise. The result for me when I read such works is a subtle comfort and reward, psychically fatigued as I am by the gratuitous violence of the *traumadramas*. There is much we can learn from those who have found quiet meaning in the rituals of everyday life, the dignity it bestows on our postmodern condition. As Whynott observes: “Walking

in these woods always brought me the feeling of peace, and another feeling I can't quite identify but associate with the idea of dignity." The dignity derived of the rituals of the everyday is a wonderful antidote to our internal and external wars. What is remarkable is that Whycott does all this without being didactic or pedantic.

But again, I confess I live in the land of the sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*). I cannot help but feel the excitement every autumn when the maple leaves turn a brilliant scarlet and gold in the crisp air (they beat oaks easily for color, and smell sweeter in the fireplace). And yet as *The Sugar Season* reminds us, we cannot take such sweet bucolia for granted because it poignantly reminds us of what is passing. But again, I am descended from a long line of those whose haunts were woodlands, and who preferred worshipping wooden idols, seeking for signs in them. As Whycott has demonstrated, the maple can provide us some of those signs. From them we can learn much.

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## A New and Important Voice

*Pulphead: Essays*

by John Jeremiah Sullivan. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011. Paperback, 365 pp., \$16

Reviewed by Roberta S. Maguire, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, United States

To my mind, what makes literary journalism an exciting area for scholarly exploration is the tension between the two terms: “literary” implies aesthetics, character development, narrative techniques commonly associated with creative (read fictional) writing; “journalism” implies truthfulness, fact, newsworthiness. It is a necessary tension, for when one of the terms overwhelms the other, what we are left with may be very fine writing—it’s just not literary journalism. Or so it seems to me.

Which makes reviewing John Jeremiah Sullivan’s 2011 collection *Pulphead for Literary Journalism Studies* a most interesting one, as it reminds me why those conversations regarding definitions that occur whenever two or more scholars of literary journalism gather matter. Without a framework for defining literary journalism, even one that is contested in some quarters and is necessarily always evolving, we have no means for assessing the field’s development, or making a case for significant contributions, or recognizing new and important voices.

And what a voice Sullivan, currently the “southern editor” for *Paris Review* and a frequent contributor to the *New York Times Magazine*, *GQ*, and other publications, has. As the pieces collected in *Pulphead* indicate, he brings a novelist’s eye and ear to the subjects he tackles, highlighting what Tom Wolfe called “status details”—the military haircut of one Christian evangelist, the lump of snuff another one kept in his jaw, the “swollen, hairless torso” of a former reality show star, the way a childhood friend of the rocker Axl Rose “finished beers quickly” and always said “*Right* on.” He recreates conversations as if they were happening in real time. And the narration that encases these conversations is a lively mix of formal explanatory prose, colloquial diction, and free indirect discourse.

But the volume is not all literary journalism—essays, yes, as the book’s subtitle indicates, whose topics range from the very personal (a recollection of his brother’s near-death experience of and subsequent recovery from an accidental electrocution) to the historically obscure (a profile of Constantine Rafinesque, the nineteenth-century Turkish scientist who studied plant and insect life and Indian mounds, especially in Kentucky). The collected pieces appeared, “most,” we are told, “in substantially different form,” between 1999 and 2011, nine in *GQ*, two in *Paris Review*, and one each in *Harper’s*, *Oxford American*, and *Ecotone*, an interdisciplinary journal out of Wilmington, North Carolina, focused on “place.” By my working definition of literary journalism, I’d say half of the volume qualifies, and it is those pieces that are typically the strongest.

Take the one that opens the volume, “Upon This Rock.” Calling to mind such New Journalists as Tom Wolfe, or Hunter S. Thompson, or Norman Mailer, whose

1960 rescinded resignation letter to *Esquire* serves as the book's epigraph, Sullivan begins the piece acknowledging how he had envisioned this *GQ* assignment, reporting on a three-day Christian rock festival in Missouri, to be an easy one: "I'd stand at the edge of the crowd and take notes on the scene, chat up the occasional audience member ('What's harder—homeschooling or regular schooling?'), then flash my pass to get backstage, where I'd rap with the artists themselves. . . . Fly home, stir in statistics. Paycheck." What Sullivan hadn't counted on was how his own history—during his late teens and early twenties, he, too, had been a Christian evangelical—would meld with his experience in Missouri, eliminating the cool distance he thought he would bring to the assignment. When a man actually died of a heart attack right in front of him, the firm belief of a concert attendee ("Just pray for his family," she said. "He's fine") shook him to his core:

I went back to the trailer and had, as the ladies say where I'm from, a colossal go-to-pieces. I started to cry and then stopped myself for some reason. I felt nonsensically raw and lonely. What a dickhead I'd been, thinking the trip would be a lark. There were too many ghosts here. Everyone seemed so strange and so familiar (36).

It is this positioning, captured in its rawness, that allows us as readers to take the same trip Sullivan has taken, from ironic and passive outsider to, if not insider, exactly, at least a place of empathy and even admiration. Sullivan's identification with his subjects in this piece we perceive as entirely sincere.

While that sincere identification recurs in the pieces I would categorize as literary journalism, that does not mean Sullivan does not also reveal a well-honed sense of the humorously ironic. In "The Last Wailer," written initially for *GQ* and one of my favorites, Sullivan recounts his pursuit of an interview with Bunny Wailer, the last surviving male member of Bob Marley's Jamaican reggae band. Gently Thompsonesque, the story is held together with ganja. Early on Sullivan tells us, "It had long been a dream of mine to meet Bunny Wailer—a pipe dream, sometimes a literal one in the sense that I dreamed it while holding a pipe (280)." He and his Jamaican guide, Llewys (the double "l," we learn, is a kind of intentional mistake), who refused to ease Sullivan's ability to find him at the airport by holding a sign with Sullivan's name on it, but who nonetheless was holding a sign—with someone else's name on it—when the two finally did meet up, decide at one point to procure "some good herb" for Bunny as a thank-you gesture. After procuring it, they decide they should test it, and in a brief break in the final interview, when Bunny goes to rest for a bit, he and Llewys finish it up. That leads to what Sullivan describes as a "momentary hallucination" after Bunny returns:

Strange things were happening to Bunny's face as he spoke. Different races were passing through it, through the cast of his features—black, white, Asian, Indian, the whole transnational human slosh that produced the West Indies. The Atlantic world was passing through his face. I was having thoughts so crypto-colonialist, I might as well have had on a white safari hat and been peering at him through a monocle (303).

In this moment of attempted identification with Bunny at his Jamaican roots, we see an unbridgeable gulf, Bunny's ultimate unknowability. And that to a large

degree is the piece's important takeaway, itself an ironic reversal of the "identification with the Other" that literary journalism is often described as accomplishing. Sullivan recounts their last phone conversation, following a transcultural misunderstanding during a photo shoot, which ended in "a dark cloud of patois cursing." Sullivan explains, "I became an unanswered ring in the pockets of [Bunny's] marvelous suits"; he and *GQ* had "come from Babylon; [Bunny Wailer] sent us back there, to our garisons (306)."

In the book's other pieces of literary journalism, Sullivan takes on the early anti-Obama fervor and rise of the Tea Party, showing the nation's tensions to be an extension of tensions within his own extended family; describes a late Axl Rose concert by embedding Rose's story in his own memories of growing up "nowhere"; brings us to a New Orleans shelter after Katrina, gathering stories from the survivors and demonstrating both their resourcefulness and fragility; describes the post-reality show circuit of a former star of the *Real World*, which pairs beautifully with the book's final piece, the story of how Sullivan and his wife gave over their too-expensive home, purchased right before the economy crashed, to a television crew filming a teen drama called *One Tree Hill*, "one of the worst TV shows ever made (348)." By turns wry and sympathetic, well reported and beautifully stylized, these pieces offer a profound portrayal of contemporary America. But the book as a whole ends up feeling disjointed. There is no introduction articulating why it was these pieces Sullivan chose to bring together. And I wonder if that disjointedness isn't in the end related to the fact that half the pieces in the book are not literary journalism—an interesting idea to ponder as we continue to work on definitions.

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## 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 that focuses 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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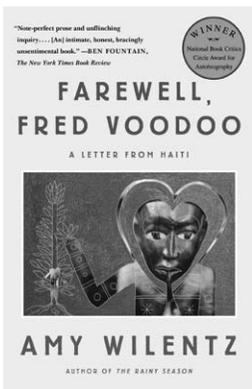
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