

Note from the Editor...



As we occasionally have done in the past, the editors of this journal have allowed the issue's main territory to be occupied by an examination of a particular nation's literary journalistic output. More precisely, for this issue it is not so much a nation's literary journalism we are examining as a culture's. Our guest editor, Isabelle Meuret from Université libre de Bruxelles, has enlisted the services of francophone scholars from France, Belgium, and Canada to provide readers with a portrait of the vitality of literary journalism itself and literary journalism studies in the French language, as well as extended glimpses into the similarities and differences between anglophone and francophone literary journalism.

I want to congratulate Meuret and her colleagues for pursuing this special issue to conclusion. As one might imagine, the journey from the assignment stage onward was long and fraught with difficulties, setbacks, and pitfalls. There were many translation issues to deal with, not to mention the inevitable extra layers of editing involved (not to mention the editor's perhaps perverse insistence on finding wonderful photography and illustration to accompany the various essays). In addition to the seven articles, Meuret and Florence Le Cam interviewed Jean Hatzfeld, the former sports journalist turned political journalist turned literary journalist, on the subject of the Rwandan genocide of the 1990s.

That all of this work was accomplished with professionalism and good humor, on both sides of the Atlantic, is testimony to Meuret's grace.

In reading over and editing these essays, I was struck by certain brute facts that affected literary journalism in France. After the Second World War, for instance, France consciously turned away from any notion of combining literary with journalistic pursuits. Post-Hitler, and post-Holocaust, a wave of determination seemed to wash away previous reporting strategies. Objectivity became the paramount virtue, which meant that news reports needed to be more rigorously fact-based, less imbued with a journalist's (presumably tainted by definition) point of view of witnessed events. As the scholars explain, this era, which held sway for decades, has now receded to reveal francophone literary journalism reclaiming its family resemblance to North American literary journalism.

Other historical facts, including the European lust for African exploration, colonization, and exploitation in the nineteenth century, and the explosion in technology (specifically as tied to air travel and the thirst for resources through colonial extraction), provided a strong impetus for literary journalism, or reportage as it is known in the francophone world, however dubious the justifications

seem now. Journalists in the service of government or airlines—imbeds, we might call them now—nevertheless wrote fascinating accounts of far-off lands and far-above clouds to inform, enrapture, and expand the minds of readers back home.

I'll leave the formal introduction to this special issue to its editor Meuret, along with co-writers Paul Aron, and Marie-Ève Thérénty. Happy reading.

Digital Literary Journalism

At the previous annual conference of the IALJS, held this past May in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Jacqueline Marino gave a presentation entitled “Read, Watch or Tap? Eye Tracking Longform Journalism on Mobile Devices,” which included some stimulating findings that she and research colleagues Susan Jacobson and Robert Gutsche had discovered. They were able to track how longform reading is actually accomplished on a computer browser—how the eyes move, what they take in, how long they engage on lines of text and images, and so on. Marino has developed her presentation into an essay for our first Digital LJ column, “Reading Screens: What Eye Tracking Tells Us about Writing in Digital Longform Journalism.” Marino and company's research should be of interest to most if not all of us who by default concern ourselves with literary journalism's production future.

My hope is that this new department, Digital LJ, will become a regular part of *LJS*. Literary journalism scholars who focus fully or partially on the digital frontier are invited to send in their ideas for future columns (the length of which should be in the neighborhood of 3,000 words).

More Thoughts on Schindler's List

In the previous issue of the journal, we reviewed John C. Hartsock's latest book, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*. Regarding *Schindler's List*, which Hartsock examined as a work of literary journalism, the reviewer, Richard Lance Keeble, countered that it was a work of fiction. Hartsock responds:

The matter of the provenance of *Schindler's List* is an old issue, and perhaps after thirty-five years our memories of its origins are fading. Here is a summary: When published in 1982, the book was marketed in the United States as nonfiction. In the United Kingdom, the British version, *Schindler's Ark*, was initially offered as nonfiction, but after the book won the Booker Award it was marketed as fiction. On hearing it had received the Booker, author Thomas Keneally called it “preposterous” that the book had won a fiction award because it was a factual account. The chair of the Booker Committee, John Carey, did the same when he described the book as “history,” finessing the traditional boundary of fiction (as made up or invented solely from the imagination) by noting that all history is a kind of “fiction.” He was taking the position popular in critical circles at the time that all symbolic discourse is a kind of fiction or mediation. Meanwhile, the American publisher considered the book a “nonfiction novel.”

So, from the beginning it was understood that the work was nonfiction even though it had won the UK's most distinguished award for fiction. Many times Keneally made plain that the book was fact and not fiction. Most notably, in the Author's Note to the book, he said, “To use the texture and devices of a novel to tell a true story is a course that has frequently been followed in modern writing.” He adds, “I have attempted, however, to avoid all fiction, since fiction would debase the record. . . .” Elsewhere he used the phrase “documentary novel” to characterize the book. “I felt that in *Schindler* I had written as a novelist, with a novelist's narrative pace and graphicness, though not in the sense of the fictionalizer.” And, “There is something in it as a novel, but not as a fiction. My publisher, Simon and Schuster, describes it as a nonfiction novel.” Still again, “I deliberately set out to write a book as fact in a literary way.”

Keneally had an array of surviving *Schindler* Jews vet the book for accuracy. He would continue to maintain that the book was nonfiction when the movie of the same name was released in 1993. Keneally acknowledged in 2008 that the decision to sell the book as “fiction” was indeed for marketing purposes. But he has not disavowed his comments that it is a nonfiction account that reads like a novel. That, by definition, is narrative literary journalism. One reason I am surprised by the claim that it is fiction, except in the sense that all discourse is a kind of fiction even when it makes a claim to a direct referentiality, is that it was open knowledge at the time that the book was nonfiction. Of course, that being the case, it casts doubt on whether *Schindler's List/Ark* was deserving of the Booker Award, the UK's most distinguished literary award. That clearly is not a palatable option for a publisher—or an author.

Death of a Colleague

Many of us were saddened by the loss of our dear IALJS colleague, Jo Bech-Karlsen, who died late last year. Jo (pronounced “You”), who was an associate professor of journalism at the BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo, Norway, had always been an indefatigable supporter of this international literary journalism project we have been nurturing these past ten-plus years. The keynoter of our 2010 conference in London, Jo, who had been a reporter, editor, and coach in a great variety of media since 1970, was instrumental in helping to create a special issue of *LJS* dedicated to Norwegian Literary Reportage (Vol. 5, No. 1, Spring 2013). Fortunately, Jo has left behind a considerable corpus, including twenty books, monographs, and textbooks on literary reportage and narrative journalism. We will treasure our memories of Jo's spirited presentations and learned opinions, both inside the conference hall and at the outdoor restaurant tables, where Jo could be found in his black leather jacket amiably nursing his lunchtime slim, dark cigarillo and coffee (or aperitif). He will be missed.

Bill Reynolds