

Note from the Editor . . .



The last time I taught Ted Conover's magazine cover story, "The Way of All Flesh," which was about the author's time spent working at a massive Nebraska slaughterhouse called Cargill Meat Solutions—don't you adore that name?—two anxious fourth-year undergraduate students intercepted me in the corridor as class was about to begin. Were they ill? No. Were they being called away? No. Did they have some urgent reporting or interviewing to do for another class? No. They had a confession to make. They had not completed the week's reading. In fact, they had hardly started the week's reading. Why? Because it was about cows being put to death in the service of human appetite and, being vegetarians, they were repulsed by the idea of reading the story.

The show went on without them, and the two students meekly sat through the discussion. I do not know exactly how much conscience should play a role in this circumstance, but they did miss a fine story. They could have compared and contrasted Conover's tale with Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle* to gauge how much more (or less) humane we have become in our treatment of cows over the past century plus. They may have come to the same conclusion as the writer, namely, that we are "a group of predators (a pack, you might say) presiding over the slaughter of vast herds far too numerous for us to eat ourselves. The genius and horror of humanity was our ability to send the spoils to anonymous others of our kind located states and continents away. . . . [Y]ou could see us as naked apes, as hominids killing cows; industrial slaughter is predation writ large."

Conover, as is well known, over many years has finely honed his ability to act as his reader's eyes. What struck me as different with "The Way of All Flesh," if compared to, say, the author's book, *Newjack*, about his time spent working as a jail guard at the Sing Sing correctional facility in Westchester County, New York, is the warmth and intimacy he is able to convey to the reader—even as the reader is quite aware, and made quite aware, that Conover is self-consciously aware that he is a character in the drama and is careful not to fall into the trap of making the story more about him than about how we treat the animals we eat and therefore about human nature in general.

Patrick Walters's lead article on Conover's immersion, "Ted Conover and the Origins of Immersion in Literary Journalism," explores this evolving methodology by focusing on three recent works in particular: the book,

Routes of Man (2010), plus “The Way of All Flesh” (*Harper's*, May 2013) and “Rolling Nowhere, Part 2” (*Outside*, July 2014). Walters contends that Conover’s “I camera” has become more versatile in switching angles from the ethnographic to the journalistic to the intensely personal.

Thomas Schmidt’s essay, “Pioneer of Style: How the *Washington Post* Adopted Literary Journalism,” zeroes in on the radical transformation of the *Post*’s Style section, from a conservative container of innocuous gossip about powerful people in the capital to a hotbed of New Journalism experimentation. Editor Ben Bradlee and his handpicked senior staff both plucked and attracted talented writers teeming with voice and an understanding of the counterculture, and Schmidt captures the historical framework that allowed a “narrative news logic” to take hold of American newsrooms.

Andrew Griffiths brings us the story of British journalist George Warington Steevens, who deftly and dutifully reported on the deeds of empire during the late nineteenth century using a kind of proto–new journalistic style. Although literary journalism tends to be seen as a tool that exposes wrongs and speaks truth to power from the left, Griffiths argues that we must see Steevens’s work as a kind of literary journalism in the service of empire (much like Mélodie Simard-Houde argued from the francophone perspective, “French Reporters, Real and Fictional Transmitters of Colonial Ideology,” in our previous issue, Vol. 8., No. 2, 76–89).

In our debut article for the section Teaching LJ, “The Ammo for the Canon,” Brian Gabriel and Elyse Amend report their findings on whether or not there is a literary journalism canon and if indeed there is one, what it might look like. Beyond determining the existence of a canon, the authors endeavor to tease out other kinds of data from surveys filled out on a volunteer basis, over a period of years, 2012–2016, by members of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies: Are there geographic biases to the canon? Are there linguistic biases to the canon? Are there gender biases to the canon? (For a visual rendering that captures the canon, as constructed from the data, brilliantly and instantly, please see Anthony DeRado’s illustration on page 82.) A few obvious data points include: the books *In Cold Blood* and *Hiroshima* loom large; and the authors Ted Conover, Joan Didion, Susan Orlean, George Orwell, Lillian Ross, Gay Talese, and Tom Wolfe are name-checked frequently. There will be various conclusions drawn from the results of this research, but my take on it is: my-my, our canon as currently constructed is awfully narrow, is it not?

Also in this issue, David Dowling’s Digital LJ article, “Toward a New Aesthetic of Digital Literary Journalism: Charting the Fierce Evolution of the

‘Supreme Nonfiction.’” somehow manages to connect the *New York Times*’s “Snow Fall,” filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, the *Atavist*’s “Mastermind,” ekphrasis, *Orange Is the New Black*, W. J. T. Mitchell’s *Picture Theory*, Robert S. Boynton’s concept of the “supreme nonfiction,” Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the *Washington Post*’s “A New Age of Walls,” Edward Steichen’s *The Flatiron Building*, among other dots. Dowling perceives a major shift in digital presentation, spurred by intense competition for eyeballs in the journalism industry, along with those eyeballs definitively opting for mobile devices to receive their information. He argues that accelerated innovation since “Snow Fall” in 2012 has created a “leaner aesthetic marked by careful editorial selection and placement of multimedia elements prioritizing storytelling over displays of technological prowess.” This is welcome news to those of us who study literary journalism and long-form writing. The piece is a real tour de force and mandatory reading for anyone following the revolution in digital literary journalism.

Miles and Roberta Maguire return with their annual Research Review, which captures in one place all of the books and papers we need to get caught up on. Finally, Kate McQueen interviews her former journalism instructor, Leon Dash, author of the famous *Washington Post* series, then book about the underclass in Washington, *Rosa Lee: A Mother and Her Family in Urban America*. McQueen and Dash increasingly focus on Dash’s concept of immersion, which brings the conversation for this issue full circle.

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