



Journalist-academic Roberto Herrscher. Photo by Miguel Fernández.

A Global Context for the Weapons of Storytelling

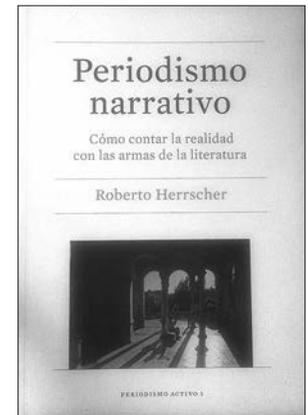
Periodismo narrativo: cómo contar la realidad con las armas de la literatura
by Roberto Herrscher. Providencia, Chile: Ediciones Universidad Finis Terrae, 2016.
Paperback, 636 pp., \$27.99.

Reviewed by Isabel Soares, CAPP, ISCSP, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Telling real stories. This is how Roberto Herrscher summarizes literary journalism in his book *Periodismo narrativo: cómo contar la realidad con las armas de la literatura* (2016), literally meaning Narrative Journalism: How to Tell the Truth with the Weapons of Literature, a Chilean edition of a book he first published with the University of Barcelona in 2009.

It is also through storytelling, his own personal life stories, that Herrscher, both a journalist and a journalism educator, starts positing a theory of literary journalism. His life stories, whether as a soldier during the Falklands War in 1982 or as a traveller crossing the border from his native Argentina to Chile with his fiancée, are examples of an “I” that writes about personal experience as a way towards both self-discovery and the discovery of the “Other” with whom the “I” engages. Such is also, according to Herrscher, the purpose of literary journalism, here called “narrative journalism,” the favored expression in the Spanish-speaking world. To Herrscher, literary journalism is the “theatre of reality” (48). It is the crossing of a threshold separating a source-only based journalism from a journalism of scenes and characters. As he writes: “To go from the sources to the characters and from the statements to the almost theatrical scenes where people tell things is to step into the world of literary journalism” (49). (My translation. Original: “Pasar de las fuentes a los personajes y de las declaraciones a las escenas casi teatrales donde la gente se cuenta cosas es entrar en el mundo del periodismo narrativo.”) It is not, of course, going from fact to fiction because literary journalism is nothing but reality.

Being a book about the guiding principles of literary journalism, Herrscher’s *Periodismo Narrativo* was written as a sort of manual for his students. There are many manuals regarding literary journalism but Herrscher’s is not the usual kind, where one can find easy recipes and unchallenged theories. The book is divided into two main sections: one provides definitions and a body of theory on the genre, and the other illustrates literary journalism at work. In this latter section, Herrscher provides a happy blend of English-speaking literary journalists with Spanish-speaking ones. Regarding English speakers he spotlights work by practitioners such as the inescapa-



ble Gay Talese, Joseph Mitchell, George Orwell, Truman Capote, and John Hersey. From the Spanish-language world, he focuses on Josep Pla, Alma Guillermoprieto, Gabriel García Márquez (another inescapable), and Javier Cercas. Outside those linguistic borders, Herrscher includes Günter Wallraff and Ryszard Kapuściński, the inescapables of, respectively, German and Polish.

Two features, however, are worthy of mention for giving *Periodismo Narrativo* its standout characteristics. Because literary journalism is journalism, Herrscher deconstructs the (in)famous 5W1H and meticulously explains what each one brings to the genre and why each one is so different in literary journalism as opposed to conventional, faster journalism. We can focus on the “where” just for the indulgence of example. “Where” is probably one of the least rated Ws of journalism. News happens in a certain place and that is basically it. Not quite so for literary journalism. As Herrscher argues when contrasting conventional versus literary journalisms:

Once we get to be sure of where things happen, in the most cases we have a succession of words that do not mean much to the reader. A geographic place, a city, a street. . . . What does that mean? Then is when the weapons of fiction intervene in literary journalism. . . . Description, dialogue, the narration of events that locate not just the geographic place but also the cultural, the economic, the historical, the psychological place in which the action takes place make the reader have the feeling of “I was there.” (76) (My translation.)

Original:

Una vez que llegamos a contestar con certeza dónde suceden las cosas, en la mayoría de los casos tenemos una sucesión de palabras que no significan mucho para el lector. Un sitio, una calle . . . ¿Qué significa eso? Ahí intervienen en periodismo narrativo las armas que nos proporciona la ficción. . . . La descripción, el diálogo, la narración de eventos que nos ubican en el sitio geográfico pero también económico, histórico, mental en que sucede la acción, hacen que el lector sienta ‘estuvo ahí.’”

Different people apprehend geography in different ways; it is always more than mere topography or physical space. Literary journalism apprehends geography from multiple perspectives so as to better convey the meaning of the true “place” to the reader.

The other instance in which Herrscher is innovative in presenting an outline of literary journalism is by alluding to the gospels. It seems a little bewildering at first but Herrscher makes a case that the history of Jesus has been told by four different voices and it is this multiplicity that allows for a more detailed picture of the life of the Son of Man. Literary journalism is just another voice looking at reality and contributing to broadening our understanding of reality. For Herrscher, Matthew’s gospel is written as though the evangelist were the advocate of Jesus. He presents facts, figures, names, and lists. He is descriptive, not narrative. Literary journalism should present facts but avoid excess description so as to not bore the reader. Luke is like a historian. He is writing for an audience that already knows the topic but he is presenting a newer, presumably better, version of events. He writes almost academically, carries out a lot of research, and even enunciates the purpose of his narrative:

to add more validity and certainty to the facts. Literary journalism should be wary of such immaculate certainty. John is a poet who directly from the heart writes of his love and admiration for his subject. Lyricism, however, is not the best path for literary journalism to follow. Albeit resorting to literary devices, literary journalism tells us what the journalist sees, not what his heart felt. Finally, there’s Mark. And Mark is the reporter. He does not start at the beginning of the narrative. He begins his gospel on the banks of the river Jordan, where John the Baptist is preparing for the Messiah. He creates a scene that he knows will have impact, taking us to the pivotal moment when Jesus entered history to change the world. After this opening he rewinds the narrative back to Jesus’ birth, and Mark then continuously arouses the reader’s interest as he recounts the various events that happened along the way. To Herrscher, this is the quality of literary journalism: to instill in the reader the desire to know more. Mark depicted a real man and told a real story, which is a trademark of literary journalism. By focusing on the lives of real people literary journalists create empathy with an audience composed of real people.

Herrscher’s *Periodismo Narrativo* reads like an unusual manual of literary journalism that constantly piques our curiosity about the genre and takes us deep into the soul of literary journalism where the truth refuses to wear the corset of the Truth. That Spanish-speaking literary journalism is presented alongside international literary journalism is also a cause to praise Herrscher’s book in giving readers a broader, borderless image of this genre.

Digital Narrative Takes Atavistic Turn

Love and Ruin: Tales of Obsession, Danger, and Heartbreak from the Atavist Magazine. Edited by Evan Ratliff. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016. Paperback, 352 pp., \$16.95.

Reviewed by Kate McQueen, Independent Scholar, Los Gatos, United States

It was 2009, and from barstools all along Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue, writer Evan Ratliff, editor Nicholas Thompson, and programmer Jefferson Rabb pondered the future of traditional narrative journalism. Digital publications and online consumption leaned increasingly in favor of the short and the simplified. "At the time," Ratliff writes in the foreword to *Love and Ruin*, "telling serious stories digitally was considered quixotic at best and utterly futile at worst" (ix). The three agreed that the internet's infinite space must have room for the deeper dive as long as such stories were "compelling enough to capture readers in the digital age" (ix). If only someone would design a software platform that made the online telling, and reading, of "long form" enjoyable.

Two years later Ratliff, Thompson, and Rabb turned that *Schnappsideoe* into Atavist, a successful hybrid venture that offers to subscribers a digital publishing platform and a digital magazine of the same name. Don't let that name fool you. Though the *Atavist* magazine originally saw its mission as a kind of reversion, it in fact deserves credit as a trailblazer of multimedia literary journalism. Over the last five years, it has been nominated for nine National Magazine Awards (winning one in 2015) and two Emmys, and attracts a steady stream of story submissions from literary journalism's rising stars. And now, more than fifty issues in, the magazine has undertaken another atavistic turn: a print anthology.

Love and Ruin offers only a small showcase of the content available on the Atavist website—ten lengthy, rich, and engaging pieces of narrative nonfiction by writers who may be familiar to regular readers of the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine* and *National Geographic*. The collection's range stretches beyond standard journalistic boundaries, from true crime and historical narratives to what we might call reported personal essays. Its style and content are eclectic, a product of what Susan Orlean in her introduction to the book characterizes as "magpie journalism," stories "glimpsed and then grabbed and shaken until they unfurled, stories that many other writers might not have noticed at all" (xiv–xv).

One great example is "American Hippopotamus," a preposterous tale of two enemy spies who briefly join forces in an effort to promote hippopotamuses as an alternate food



source in early twentieth-century America. The process of extracting this well-hidden story from archives scattered about the United States was undoubtedly arduous but author Jon Mooallem's light and lively narration gives none of that away. It is a pure joy to read.

In addition, there are long cons and lonely hearts, an attempted casino heist, a shipwreck, and a modern-day leper colony in Hawaii, parents behaving badly, lovers torn apart by war. If anything unifies this jumbled assortment, it is an emphasis on narrative. These are largely plot-driven tales, with plenty of swashbuckle, intrigue, and heartache. No profiles, no think pieces. It will come as no surprise that a few have already been optioned for television and film projects.

Collections of journalism play an essential role in sustaining knowledge of this essentially ephemeral form. Teachers, scholars, and general enthusiasts of journalism, we all lean heavily on such books, and *Love and Ruin* certainly deserves a place on the shelves alongside other publication-based collections, like those produced by the *New Yorker* and *Esquire*. Still, it's hard not to notice the irony of producing a print anthology for a digital publication. Ratliff, who edited the collection, admits as much in the book's foreword, though his only explanation is that such stories "are naturally at home in print, the medium that originally inspired us to create them" (xi).

It's true that some pieces don't suffer much in their adaptation to the printed page. David Dobb's account of the hunt for his deceased mother's long-lost love, aptly titled "My Mother's Lover," for instance, is so evocatively written that a reader hardly needs the accompanying photographs and letters. But Leslie Jameson's piece is at somewhat of a loss without its audio component. "Fifty-two Blue" tells the story of a mysterious blue whale, whose high-pitched call, measured at an unprecedented fifty-two hertz, moved a cult-like following to identify with what they dubbed "the loneliest whale in the world." Jameson's story is inherently aural. Her enormous talent can't capture in words the haunting quality of that whale song. The quoted fans of Fifty-two Blue don't fare any better; the tremor of emotion in enthusiast Leonora's voice conveys more about the meaning she finds in the whale's call than her actual words ever could. The thrill of reading a story like this in a multimedia context is gaining access to such voice recordings. They amplify the whole point of the piece, the deep desire humans have to find meaning in and connect with the world around them.

As a book of text exclusively, *Love and Ruin* does little justice to the dynamism of the magazine's multimedia work. In comparing the book's content to the original online issues, I did wonder who this volume is for. It's hard to imagine a current audience that does not have access to the internet, and through it the ability to enjoy these pieces in their fullest state. The strongest candidates are libraries and their future users. Digital-to-print adaptations are arguably an exercise in legacy building. Until we have a better way to preserve content if a digital magazine were to cease, print remains the best holding device, even if that means letting go of developing multimedia storytelling aesthetics. University libraries should by all means buy a copy of this book. All others—teachers, students, scholars, and pleasure readers of literary journalism—would be better served by subscribing to the magazine, which provides one original story per month in its intended multimedia form, access to the full *Atavist* archive, and the pleasure of providing continuing support to an innovative publication.

Hunter, Up Close and Personal

Stories I Tell Myself: Growing Up with Hunter S. Thompson

by Juan F. Thompson. New York: Knopf, 2016. Hardcover, 288 pp., \$26.95.

Reviewed by Ashlee Nelson, Victoria University, New Zealand

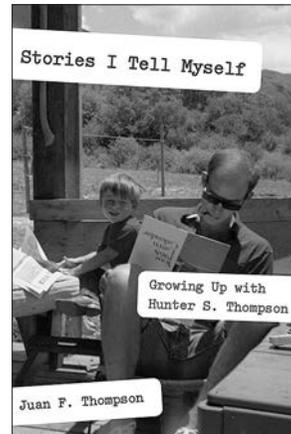
If you've read Hunter S. Thompson—any Hunter S. Thompson, really—then to some extent you know him. That is, you've gotten to know a carefully crafted, occasionally semi-fictionalized, exaggerated version of him. That is, as (auto)biography seen through the lens of a journalist who was a masterful storyteller and an author who was also his own character.

In Juan F. Thompson's memoir, *Stories I Tell Myself: Growing Up with Hunter S. Thompson*, we get a view of Thompson unlike any seen before. Juan is, of course, Hunter's son. (To avoid confusion, I refer to author Juan F. Thompson as "Juan" and subject Hunter S. Thompson as "Hunter," or occasionally "Hunter Thompson.") Juan states clearly at the beginning that this "is a memoir, not a biography," and "a highly subjective and unreliable memoir" at that (xi). Yet, in addition to being a well-written, thoughtful, and gripping memoir, it is the exclusivity of Juan's perspective, being Hunter's only child, that makes this book invaluable for Hunter Thompson scholars. This achievement is secondary to Juan's goal; his primary objective is to portray as honestly as possible his relationship with his father (xii). I'll admit to a slight twinge of apprehension reading the references in Juan's introduction to the volatility of that relationship. As a Hunter Thompson scholar, I knew he had had a chaotic and fractured relationship with his son. But it is one thing to know that as an abstract fact, or a detail gleaned from his writing, and another to be confronted with the lived-in emotional fallout.

Perhaps what saves Juan's tale from being an entirely dark narrative is the redemption that we sense is to come. He does not wait until the end to tell us how important his reconciliation with his father was to him. Instead, he foreshadows it throughout the text, and his love for his father is manifest. Despite Hunter's mayhem, Juan views his Woody Creek, Colorado home as "a place of comfort to return to, in spite of everything that happened inside that house, even long after I moved out, even now" (39).

Which isn't to say this book is not occasionally an uncomfortable read. In particular, Juan's analysis of Hunter's anger gives a disturbing twist to our understanding of Hunter Thompson as master of words:

Fully appreciating the power of the right word, he never called it a spanking or even a whipping. He always called it a Beating, with its implication of severe pain. A



Beating implies the overwhelming physical dominance of one person over another, with no mercy and no restraint, in which the victim is bloody, broken, utterly vanquished, and pathetic. (47)

That Juan assures us that his father never actually beat him (48) is small comfort compared to the implicit cruelty lying behind the selection of just the right word to instill optimum fear. Insults like "You stupid waterhead bastard!" (46) may be amusing in Hunter's Gonzo writing, but not when lobbed at his own son. There is a line early on that summarizes the dichotomy between the cruel beast of the young boy's memories, and the loved father recalled by the grown man, post-reconciliation:

I don't know what he wanted. And yet, it's so terribly important to me to believe that I didn't let him down. He's dead, I'm in middle age, and it's still very important. Will there be a time when I can say it doesn't matter what my father thought of me? I don't think so, not today. (80–81)

Though Juan does not hold back on the nightmarish quality of some encounters, he does not demonize or vilify his father. There are plenty of softer moments, particularly in Hunter's awkward attempts to demonstrate his love for his son, and in his doting love for his grandson. These vignettes humanize Hunter in a quiet way that offers a significant modification to his larger-than-life nature that has colored perceptions of much of his writing.

If this were a work of fiction, the downside to *Stories I Tell Myself* would lie in the disjointed characterization of Hunter. On the one side, he is the lauded and brilliant writer, a keen observer of humanity and the world, obviously deeply proud of his son if awkward in showing it. On the other, he is the brute, the villain, and the drunk (and a mean one), who picks fights and is cruel and spiteful. This duality in Hunter's nature is not always clearly drawn, so an observation of one side of Hunter often contradicts the other. But this is not a work of fiction, and the disjointed characterization is due not to a lack of skill on Juan's part, but to the imperfect nature of memory, the complicated feelings of a son towards a father he struggled to understand, and the complex nature of Hunter himself. And if, further along, this back and forth creates a tension that grates, Juan has succeeded in capturing the experience of living with his father's unpredictable nature.

The book's latter section, after the reconciliation of father and son begins in earnest, brings a different kind of discomfort. It is not long after Juan's public forgiveness of Hunter—at the 1996 Hunter S. Thompson celebration in Louisville, Kentucky—that the book shifts to Hunter's prolonged physical decline. His hip replacement surgery, his back surgery, the long-term effects of a lifetime of constant smoking, drinking, and drug-taking all eventually lead, inevitably, to Hunter's suicide and funeral. These facts are well known, but are painfully rendered through the eyes of the son who had only recently had his father returned to him. There is a difference between knowing that Hunter's failing health contributed to his decision to end his life and reading an intimate portrayal of what that failing health meant in day-to-day reality. The night before Hunter's suicide, there is a moment when his grandson, Will, asks if Hunter knows the difference between suicide and murder: "Hunter said, 'What?' Will said,

'Suicide is self-kill.' Hunter said, 'That is exactly right.' Will went on to explain how a forensic investigator could tell if a death was a murder or a suicide based on the trajectory of the bullet" (242). It was at this point that I had to put down the book for a bit.

References to Hunter's work abound. There is Juan's lovely touch of littering his chapters with a slew of subtitles, the way that Hunter did in many of his books and articles. Likewise, the stylized form of the acknowledgments, done, as Hunter did, as an "Honor Roll," Juan dedicates to an intention to "continue that tradition" (273). After the first, each chapter begins with a "HST TIMELINE," giving the corresponding professional movements and publications of Hunter Thompson, a nice detail for scholars and fans, as well as a technique that mirrors the key moments of the dichotomous roles of Hunter Thompson Professional Journalist and Hunter Thompson Volatile Father of Juan.

In addition, the book provides an excellent selection of photographs, from personal family shots—one, involving Ralph Steadman and Juan, is captioned "Uncle Ralph (Steadman) preparing to crush my skull with a rock . . ." (35)—to candid images of Hunter with some of his Honor Roll, luminaries such as Oscar Zeta Acosta and George McGovern (25, 31). There are also a few letters pulled from the Hunter Thompson archives that have not been published in previous collections. One of the longest and most personally revealing is from Hunter to Juan upon Juan's leaving Woody Creek to go to university in Boston (110–112). Here, Hunter is openly sentimental: "I'm glad you came home for a while, + I wish it could have been longer. I had a good time—and as always, was proud of you" (111), and, "You're a good person, and I love you for that as much as because you're my son" (112). Of the letter's importance, Juan astutely observes: "Sometimes apparently ordinary events or objects encapsulate vast realities" (112). The letter's inclusion should tantalize scholars, as it adds another piece to Hunter Thompson's already multifaceted character. It shows how acutely aware he was of the performative aspects of his Gonzo persona: of his next work project, he writes, "It will live or die on the dialogue—+ for that I will have to get re-acquainted with my own sense of humor" (111–12).

Regarding style, Juan is not the writer his father was. In his working life he is an IT professional, not a literary journalist. Nonetheless, he does a commendable job of capturing the times and places of life with his father. It is not literary journalism, but it is literary: "With the lights off in the pool room, at three a.m., at the top of a valley in Woody Creek, far from any city, the Milky Way stood out clearly and immediately. There were so many stars that it was difficult to pick out the familiar constellations among the myriad dots of light" (203).

In *Stories I Tell Myself*, non-Hunter Thompson scholars may find plenty of mid-twentieth century cultural perspectives to think about, as well as insights into the nuances of complicated relations between sons and fathers. However, Hunter Thompson scholars do need to read this book. It is not as if there are revolutionary new truths about Hunter Thompson contained in it, and readers should not take Juan's version of his father as definitive. But for a man whose identity was built out of the pages of his own works, Juan's memoir offers a new Hunter Thompson persona to consider: The Kemps (Paul and Welburn) of his fiction, the Hunter S. Thompson of his reportage, the Raoul Duke of his Gonzo writing, and now Hunter the prodigal father.

The Limits of Memory, the Vicissitudes of Truth

Kept Secret: The Half-Truth in Nonfiction

edited by Jen Hirt and Tina Mitchell. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017. Paperback, 193 pp., \$29.95.

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

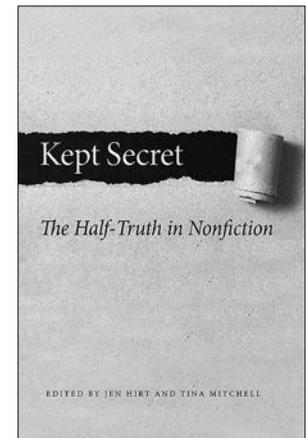
The essays compiled in *Kept Secret: The Half-Truth in Nonfiction*, edited by Penn State Harrisburg assistant professor Jen Hirt and University of Louisiana adjunct instructor Tina Mitchell, inhabit a land bounded on one side by the limits of recall and on the other by the confines of truth. At the heart of each essay resides a secret—concealed or revealed, hoarded or shared. The author interviews, incorporated within the anthology, frequently unmask the writers' hidden impulses. The result is a compendium you'll want to visit and revisit, reading first to uncover the mysteries at the surface and then to discern the enigmas below.

The anthology opens with "Maybe It Happened," Jo Ann Beard's account of an indolent summer afternoon. A young girl (likely the author) and her older, more worldly cousins play outside while the children's mothers share a cigarette and (perhaps) a bottle of liquor in the kitchen. A phone call interrupts the day. But then again, maybe it didn't, taunts the writer.

The narrative's fine, journalistic detail—the "pop-bead wardrobe," the "vat of hair dye," and the "pink Melmac cups that would outlast all the people in this story, and all the people reading this story"—suggest that the events really occurred. To paraphrase essayist Sarah Gorham, the greater the detail a story includes, the less likely that story is to crumble. Punctuated with conditional language (words like "perhaps," "likely" and "possible") the essay leaves the reader suitably puzzled and asking, "What just happened?"

In her interview, Beard reveals that James Frey, his fabricated memoir, and his shaming were much on her mind when she wrote the essay. Beard's interview does not bare all the piece's secrets, but does expose Beard's inner disquiet regarding the ethical boundaries of nonfiction writing, one of the overarching themes of the anthology.

"Tolstoy pointed out that immediately after a battle there are as many remembered versions of it as there have been participants," wrote John Hersey in his 1980 *Yale Review* article, "The Legend on the License." The essays in *Kept Secret* acknowledge the vagaries of reality and the sometimes precarious relationship between truth and memoir.



Neuroscience tells us that memory is not a blank slate on which one's personal history is indelibly recorded, to be called forth in precise detail at a later date. To the contrary, memories are encoded and consolidated fitfully—with biological taglines, footnotes and asterisks added to each incident, affair, or episode—particularly when the event arouses strong emotion.

Recall rebuilds a memory, but that memory does not necessarily match the raw input. No matter how faithfully a writer desires to honor the truth, personal memories can hijack realities past, emphasizing some facts and minimizing others. We are more likely to remember the gun in our face than the color of the assailant's eyes, but did eye color really matter? It depends . . .

In "My Father's Secrets," Ron Tanner probes the life of his deceased father—a man who lived and worked for a time at the top-secret military installation on the isolated island of Kwajalein. Amazed by his father's stoic attitude and puzzled by his father's many "impenetrable" secrets, Tanner explains that his essay was an attempt "to put some order to this jumble of fragments," including the jumble of emotions that he felt or couldn't feel about his father's death. Struggling to reassemble an image of his father from scant memories, Tanner shares in his interview that "[w]e hold secrets at our peril."

Samuel Autman's explosively personal essay, "Invisible Nails," is a wrenching account of the author's battle to discover his authentic self. No longer trapped within the box of shame imposed by a faith that sanctioned a particularly virulent form of conversion therapy, Autman shares his past agonies in excruciating detail, revealing how he removed each painful "nail"—false friendship, self denunciation, broken trust.

"Leaving Duck Creek," written by Mary Clearman Blew, describes a world that exists only in memory, except for the remnants of an old country school. Like recollection—stable in some places, weak in others—by the time Blew revisited the defunct Duck Creek School many years later it had "tilted off its foundation with its desks still bolted to its hardwood floor and a clutter of forgotten primers and workbooks discarded in the chaff." In the essay, Blew recounts her experiences as a precocious child attending an old-fashioned rural school along with her sister and an eccentric array of schoolmates taught by an unstable teacher.

Noted in Blew's essay and in her interview is the fact that she wrote and published a fictionalized version of "Duck Creek." In "Forby and the Mayan Maidens," published in the *Georgia Review*, Blew substituted a male protagonist (also permanently scarred by a peculiar and stultifying rural education) for herself. Blew's two renditions of Duck Creek School share locale, characters, and even dialog, yet the fictionalized version steepens the angles of guilt, remorse, and denial flowing from the deeds to which Blew alluded in "Leaving Duck Creek." Read together, the essay and the fictionalized account reveal trade secrets of an author who successfully navigates nonfiction and fiction, truth and half-truth.

Many *Kept Secret* authors pepper their narratives with tangible landmarks—clues like breadcrumbs that a curious reader will be tempted to follow, hoping to authenticate and grasp each writer's personal truth. Follow the breadcrumbs and you will find online images of Tara Parson's 9/11 airplane monotypes, the history of Kwajalein or

a photo that purports to show "the old Duck Creek School."

Sarah Gorham's "On Lying" is a fitting bookend for the collection. "I confess," Gorham announces at the onset, introducing an elaborate lie concerning the death of her putative great-uncle Max, a lie Gorham (possibly) used to excuse her daughter from a day of school. The essay presents a series of scenarios—all illustrating the nature and significance of lying, whether it is to protect the self from punishment or from the truth about the self's reality.

What the writer is doing when shaping a story's truth, advises Gorham, ". . . is no different from memory itself, which edits out most of life. . . . Don't feel like you must honor the facts unless you plan to turn the essay into a textbook for ultrasound technicians."

Whether it's the videotaped assault of a beloved-yet-imperfect brother, the destructive undertow of conversion therapy, or Amy E. Robillard's discovery that she and her elderly mother shared (without sharing) the grief and loss occasioned by their separate secrets, these essays dwell on the fear and apprehension inevitably aroused whether the truth is concealed or revealed.

The interviewers' well-posed questions reveal how each author negotiated nonfiction's ethical tightrope in a creative and authentic manner to produce an essay that is both compelling and illuminating. There might not be a role for half-truth in conventional journalism or some other forms of nonfiction, but there certainly is a place for inspired renditions of the truth (as opposed to mere fabrication) in creative nonfiction. *Kept Secret: The Half-Truth in Nonfiction* celebrates the veracity of this assertion.

A Long Journey from Darkness to Light

The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland

by Dan Barry. New York: HarperCollins, 2016. Paperback, 340 pp., \$15.99.

Reviewed by Thomas Connery, University of St. Thomas, United States

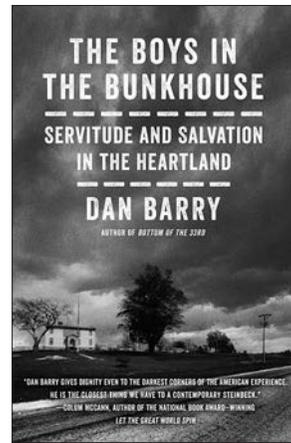
N*New York Times* writer Dan Barry's first telling of the story of the Bunkhouse Boys—not "boys" at all but grown men of various ages with mental disabilities—was an excellent investigation into the plight, exploitation, and degradation of these Texas men doing forced labor in Atalissa, a rural community in Iowa.

The March 2014 article begins with a man waiting for and then getting on a bus, and it ends with the man getting off the bus and going to his job. In between, readers learn of the decades-long abuse that the man on the bus and others like him suffered. After several sentences and a few short paragraphs, Barry gives the obligatory detail, the facts of just what his investigation has discovered:

This Dickensian story—told here through court records, internal documents, and extensive first-time interviews with several of the men—is little known beyond Iowa. But five years after their rescue, it continues to resound in halls of power. Last year the case led to the largest jury verdict in the history of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: \$240 million in damages—an award later drastically reduced, yet still regarded as a watershed moment for disability rights in the workplace. In both direct and subtle ways, it has also influenced government initiatives, advocates say, including President Obama's executive order to increase the minimum wage for certain workers (*New York Times*, March 9, 2014).

The *Times* piece successfully documented the plight of the men but it is a "telling" with a touch of showing, loaded with quotes from the proper authorities, people who were overseers of the men, residents of Atalissa, and the men who for decades had essentially been held prisoner in an old school house that had been converted into a bunkhouse. It's good reporting and fine writing, with a bit of a literary touch, but the reporting shines far more than its storytelling. (Barry's *Times* account is available online as an interactive site complete with many photos and several videos.)

Barry's book-length version, however, is a tale well told, one in which the reader gets to know the men in the bunkhouse personally and some intimately as they become fully developed characters. He provides the feel of the facts with such skill that we are taken on an emotional ride that shifts from page to page, churning up waves of anger, occasional relief and jubilation, and almost constant, immense sadness. Large-



ly that's due to Barry's wise decision to focus on the "boys," men with mental disabilities who were pulled out of a Texas institution and put to work ripping the guts out of turkeys—eviscerating the birds for a meat-processing plant—all day, over and over, their hands becoming arthritic and misshapen and painful from hour after hour of unnatural rapid repetition. These men were paid a pittance and were kept from their families; they were denied medical care so that when they were rescued many had untreated ailments and injuries. But the businessmen and turkey owners from Texas who came up with the scheme of using these men for a nasty job became rich.

The book opens with a preface in which we're introduced to Willie Levi, who in eviscerating turkeys turned "the shit-flutter task into an artistic performance of movement and sound, like some Astaire of slaughter. He was a turkey whisperer. He talked to the birds, and they talked back, as if sharing an interspecies understanding about the fetters of fate" (3). Despite Levi's skill in handling turkeys, the work takes its toll, as it did with the other "boys," who were never given proper medical care for aches, pains, bruises, and breaks. Later in the book, for instance, we learn that when Levi was rescued in 2009, he had a broken kneecap that required immediate surgery, his teeth were decayed or gone, he needed hearing aids, his feet were infected with fungus, and he had nightmares. Most of these men suffered in similar ways. Some walked haltingly in pain because no one had ever cut their toenails.

But it's the emotional pain that is the most striking and captured so well by Barry, pain caused by being cut off from family, longing for family that could no longer take care of them or had abandoned them. A few of the men would use a bunkhouse phone to occasionally call a family member, "but the rest of the men had no one to call—or, at least, no one to answer," writes Barry. "Telephone numbers scribbled on paper and stored in wallets were generally no longer in service, but some of the men kept dialing the same numbers over and over and over throughout the years, unable or unwilling to accept the disconnection" (175).

Barry's story is marked by extensive use of compound modifiers and alliteration, which give his tale a distinct literary sensibility and which this reviewer found mostly effective though some may find occasionally forced. In addition to "shit-flutter task" mentioned above, other examples include "feather-flecked flock," "fun-less funhouse," "shit-and-feather-filled work," "breeze-fluttered tremble," "snow-globe divide," "mobile home-style bunkhouse," "straight-line precision," "God-kissed soil," and the clear and true "modern-day slavery."

What more strongly makes the book a work of literary journalism, however, are the book's fully developed characters and specifically Barry's skill in capturing their humanity and dignity, both of which had been denied through most of their adult lives. In this way, Barry bears witness, essentially calling the men's humanity and dignity into existence, thereby giving meaning to their lives. He does this through rich, thick description, ample use of dialogue, scene-setting, and evocative and revealing irony and paradox. For instance, the opening of Chapter 9, with some of the former workers now old men going through a packet of photos from "their bunkhouse past" nicely demonstrates Barry's skill:

The opening of the crinkled manila envelope releases the musk of cloistered mysteries. Hundreds of photographs skitter across the varnished dark wood, the past spilling from the envelope's mouth. The four men around the dining room table hesitate. But soon they are sorting through the square and rectangular images like partners working on a familiar jigsaw puzzle they're not sure they want to reassemble.

Combined, they gave nearly 150 years to Henry's Turkey Service, and here now are stray snatched moments from their time as Henry's boys, twirling like playing cards before them. Scratch-covered photographs, taken with types of cameras no longer even manufactured, their spectral negatives tucked into small Kodak envelopes labeled "Magic Moments."

"He used to be in the bunkhouse with us," Henry Wilkins says, his finger resting on a frozen face. At seventy years of age, Wilkins remains boyishly lanky, but he has emphysema and works hard to mask the trouble he has with his balance. "I know him but I can't think of his name. What was his name, Johnny?"

John Orange, fifty-four, the only black man at the table, so disconnected from his roots that no one is sure whether his true surname is Orange or Owens, takes a look. "John . . . Novack," he says.

"John Novack," Wilkins says in confirmation. "He had his fingers. . ."

"Sewed together," Billy Penner says, because these men often finish one another's sentences. "Just like this." (111)

Overall, Barry gives us a tale of both heroes and villains, showing us the vile mistreatment of these men, but also those who were kind and tried to rescue the men from their servitude and their awful living conditions. Many of the scenes that Barry has reconstructed superbly place the reader back in time with the men, to when they would sing at the country fair or spontaneously extend Sunday worship at the Lutheran church because, as one of the men put it, "This has been such a good worship! Don't you think we should sing something else?" and then they led the congregation in the singing of "Jesus Loves Me."

The book ends as it began, with Willie Levi. But instead of pulling guts from turkeys, he's on a karaoke stage, his arm around his girlfriend, singing an old Sam Cooke pop song, having travelled from suffering to triumph. At last, in that final scene, concluding a harrowing and painful journey from darkness to light, the significance and full meaning of the book's epigraph, a quote from James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" resonates:

For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness.

All Aboard for Fun Time

The Funniest Pages: International Perspectives on Humor in Journalism

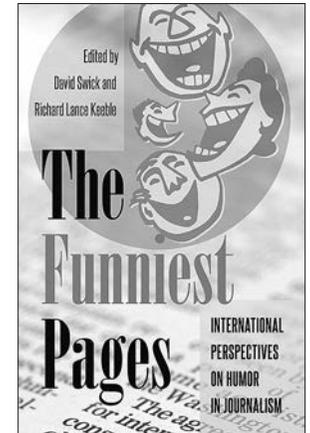
edited by David Swick and Richard Lance Keeble. New York: Peter Lang, 2016. Hardcover, 271 pp., \$89.95.

Reviewed by Ashlee Nelson, Victoria University, New Zealand

Academic texts that are well written enough to be an enjoyable read are valuable, both to those who spend considerable amounts of time with them as researchers, and those who use them in the classroom specifically to engage students in the material. *The Funniest Pages: International Perspectives on Humor in Journalism*, while missing out on a couple of opportunities, manages to be exactly this kind of enlightening and entertaining read as it analyzes various uses of humor in journalism over seventeen chapters.

The Funniest Pages is edited by David Swick and Richard Lance Keeble, with contributing chapters from Nicholas Brownlees, Dean Jobb, Ben Stubbs, Mary M. Cronin, Mark J. Noonan, David Swick, Hendrik Michael, Antonio Castillo, Carolyn Rickett, James Waller-Davies, Matthew Ricketson, Rob Steen, Dermot Heaney, Sue Joseph, Asif Hameed, Blake Lambert, and Kevin M. Lerner, and an introduction and afterword by Swick and Keeble. Swick is associate director of journalism at the University of King's College, Canada, and was a practicing journalist for more than twenty years before his academic career. Keeble is professor of journalism at the University of Lincoln, United Kingdom, and visiting professor at Liverpool Hope University. Current chair of the Orwell Society, he has written or edited thirty-six books and is the joint editor of *George Orwell Studies* and *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. Together, Swick and Keeble bring an editorial eye well informed by both the professional and academic sides of journalism studies.

The first of the book's four sections, "Seriously Funny, From Past to Present," focusing on the development of humor in journalism, covers over the course of eight chapters a large span of time beginning with a chapter on the seventeenth century "pamphlet wars" of the English Civil War, and concluding with a (truly fascinating) chapter on the *Clinic*, a Chilean satirical weekly newspaper that launched in 1998. The second section, "Unsolemn Columnists," addresses three humor columnists: John Diamond, Clive James, and John Clarke. The third, "This Sporting Life" offers two chapters on humor in sports writing (obviously). And the fourth and final section, "Have Mouse, Will Laugh," includes four chapters on humor in journalism published online. This may look at first glance like an imbalance in terms of the divi-



sion of chapters per section, but it's actually a wise move for the text, as it frames it as an overview of the development of the use of humor in journalism, and then addresses specific notable sub-genres and forms of humor journalism.

An element of the book that Swick and Keeble highlight as linking all of the texts covered in their collection is good journalism: "One key to success, for the more than thirty journalists considered in these papers, is brilliant writing. Just as a joke, poorly told, falls flat—or worse, comes across as crude or cruel—humor in journalism needs to be crafted with fine skills" (2). This reflects the underlying thread of intelligent academic analysis at play in *The Funniest Pages*, which, though Swick and Keeble emphasize the importance of humor and of taking the time to appreciate and take pleasure in that humor, is key to the book's value as an academic text. It is not just about the jokes; it is about the finely crafted journalism that it takes for a work to have both journalistic value and integrity, and to simultaneously provoke mirth.

One category the book doesn't cover is cartoonists. It would have been nice to have seen some work on the relationship between comics and journalism, particularly given the tradition of satirical political cartoons, the development of modern journalists who practice their craft entirely through the comics medium, or the fact that the book includes a chapter on Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*, which is one of the many Thompson works to utilize the illustrations of Ralph Steadman. I can't imagine I'm the only one who expected to get at least some analysis on comics in journalism from the book, given both the title and the aims. Nor are the chapters in the book as strictly devoted to print or online journalism as the introduction suggests. For instance, in "Howling Mad: *Mad* Magazine, Allen Ginsberg, and the Culture Wars of the 1950s," Mark J. Noonan spends considerable time in analysis of Ginsberg and his poem, which, though it offered societal commentary, was not journalism. Though "Howl" is the focal point for Noonan's assessment of *Mad*, this still seems a curious diversion, particularly considering the book's self-established parameters.

That said, I can certainly respect the need to make a decision on how to choose and curate which writers to focus on in the book, and that not everything could be included. The introduction offers the explanation for the lack of analysis of comics journalism that "there is already a substantial literature on cartoons and television's 'comedic, satire journalism'" (8), but I wouldn't agree that we are glutted with texts addressing comics journalism from the kind of perspective offered in *The Funniest Pages*, or that it didn't deserve to be included alongside the other forms covered. Particularly since comics, unlike television, still fall under the criteria of being published in print (or digital, as per section four of the text) journalism. A follow-up volume, perhaps? Though the book is well executed, it is not a comprehensive collection, nor could it be and still remain the reasonably sized text well suited to the classroom that it is. I can think of a number of areas to explore beyond those which the book has dealt with, and Swick and Keeble themselves propose in their afterword that the "four sections of *Funniest Pages* mapped out a few more critical areas that it is hoped literary journalism academics will use as the basis for future research" (268) and offer suggestions for publications and journalists that may invite future research, as well

as the note: "While this text provides an international perspective many parts of the world are, alas, not represented: Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Arab world, to name a few. So the territories still left to explore are vast. . . ." (268). A follow-up volume then—yes, please.

The Funniest Pages contains, my one qualm about the lack of analysis of comics notwithstanding, a nicely diverse set of chapters, which even the knowledgeable academic will likely find offers new things to consider—I, for instance, was not previously familiar with any Chilean journalism, and found Antonio Castillo's chapter "The Clinic: Satirizing and Interrogating Power in post-Pinochet Chile" a highly informative and insightful read. The range of chapters likewise means that readers are likely to find something that speaks to their particular research interests—I myself found this kind of appreciation in Hendrik Michael's "Words! Wisdom! Gibberish!: Verbal Irony in *Fear and Loathing: On the Campaign Trail '72*," which I wish to praise here for arguing from the position "that Thompson, contrary to his public image, should be primarily understood as a *political* journalist whose peculiar methods of reporting are not just play and pranks but a serious journalistic experiment of writing about politics" (93); emphasis in original. Humorous journalism does not necessarily mean frivolous journalism, a point well argued by Michael and indicative of the stance of the collection as a whole.

For literary journalism scholars, while *The Funniest Pages* is not expressly approaching analysis in any of the chapters from the perspective of literary journalism discourse, there are links to be made in its discussion of literary journalism practitioners. For instance, Ben Stubbs's chapter on travel writing comments on the links between the fictional work and the journalism of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain.

The editors' afterword to the book, "Putting Fun into the Curriculum," addresses a salient point: academic debate over many of the authors and works discussed within the pages of *The Funniest Pages* is common, yet how much of our academic debate pauses to consider and really appreciate the humor of the works themselves? As Swick and Keeble observe, "how often do we respond to wry wit or droll irony with a smile, or to a hilarious joke with laughter? Intriguingly, little academic discussion of print and online media—and, indeed, media in general—has highlighted the *pleasure* of reading or the humor of the text (267)"; emphasis in original. Nor do they lay this solely at the feet of those of us who teach courses about journalism, but also those who teach courses in the practice of journalism: "Humor writing also rarely features in university journalism programmes. It's difficult to know precisely why. Are journalism academics particularly serious? Hardly. Writing wittily is, certainly, difficult—but that should not be a turn-off for students and their tutors" (267). The afterword's argument suggests addressing the lack of humor plaguing both halves of the journalism academic community is one of the text's primary goals: "Our main purpose here has been to do precisely that, to focus on the funniest pages. . . . The rewards for academics and their students in studying—and practicing—humorous journalism are immense. Above all: it's fun!" (267–68). Swick and Keeble have succeeded in this goal. A highly entertaining and informative course on the role of humor in journalism could be created using this anthology as a textbook touchstone.

If you're going to set a comprehensive academic text for your students to read, it may as well be one that both you and, hopefully, they can take pleasure in reading. (While writing this review, I nearly upset my cup of coffee all over the book when laughing at Dickens's instructions for exiting a London horse-drawn carriage: "We have studied the subject a great deal, and we think the best way is to throw yourself out and trust to chance for the alighting on your feet. If you make the driver alight first, and then throw yourself upon him, you will find that he breaks your fall materially" (41), in Stubbs's chapter "Travel Writing and Humor: From Dickens and Twain to the Present Day." It's a tie between Stubbs's and Matthew Ricketson's chapter, "John Clarke and the Power of Satire in Journalism," for the one that made me laugh the most.

This is not to say that the entire book is humorous—it is, after all, a book about humor rather than a work of humorous journalism itself. The analysis in Dermot Heaney's "Bowling Them Over and Over with Wit: Forms and Functions of Humor in Live Text Cricket Coverage," for example, is particularly dry and lacking in levity. Nor are the chapters of *The Funniest Pages* only valuable when humorous: the aforementioned chapter by Castillo on the *Clinic* is not humorous, but it is compelling. And Asif Hameed's "Speaking Truth to Power in 140 Characters or Less: Political Satire, Civic Engagement and Journalism" likewise contains no laughs but is an insightful and well-written look at the emergence of social media's role in the development of modern online journalism: "The world is changing—and so too are the definitions of journalism. . . . Change is the climate in which we find ourselves. As mobile technology and social media create great change, it is important that our institutions and discourses progress as well" (229–30). Still, on the whole, *The Funniest Pages* is notably more entertaining than the average collection of academic essays, and well worth the read whether you intend to use it for a course or not—even if you don't intend to, you too may find yourself inspired after reading.
