

It's hard to believe that some three decades ago when I started teaching literary journalism at the University of Minnesota, a number of academics still viewed the term as an oxymoron. Then, most English departments in the United States disdained the prospect of teaching yet a second, "lesser" literary nonfiction form. (The first was the essay.) Thus, it was largely journalism faculty who developed the literary journalism curriculum, teaching students both to appreciate reading it and to produce it.

In the old days, a conventional working journalist, much like the young Hemingway, might have aspired, when off-duty, to write the next great American novel. Indeed, he kept pages of his novel-in-progress in his desk drawer. Today that journalist might as easily be a woman, and she or he is far more likely to produce a memoir or book-length literary journalism on the side. This is because literary nonfiction, especially literary journalism, has demonstrated its ability to address the complexities of the modern age in the meaningful, eloquent way that has long been thought to be the territory of literary fiction. And so literary journalism has vigorously expanded as part of the college curriculum, now taught not only in journalism schools, but also in departments of English, American studies, and comparative literature, among others.

The genesis of the IALJS, a history recounted elsewhere in this issue, speaks to the prominence of literary journalism in our age, both as a genre and as an area of scholarly inquiry. The development of the latter is particularly impressive over the past decade or so. This essay will note some strengths of the scholarship during this period, with an eye toward charting where it next might fruitfully go.

Literary Journalism Theory

When Tom Wolfe famously defined literary journalism as reading like a novel or short story, he inadvertently reminded us of the need to study it on its own terms.¹ For example, just as scholars of colonial U.S. women's history have rejected the conceptual framework of traditional "male" history (i.e., military, diplomatic, political history) in favor of a lens informed by women's historical experience (i.e., social history), so too we need to view literary journalism through its own categories of analysis.

Over the years, several scholars have taken steps to do just that, starting with Norman Sims in his 1984 introduction to *The Literary Journalists*, the first anthology of literary journalism. Here he identified certain specific, signature characteristics of literary journalism, such as immersion reporting, factual accuracy, the use of complex structures, symbolism, and distinctive voice.² In 1992, in the first book-length scholarly analysis of literary journalism, the editor, Thomas B. Connery, contributed a pathbreaking introduction

that tackled the challenge of "defining and naming"³ this newly recognized genre. Literary journalism, Connery wrote, is a "distinct literary form" and "a type of cultural expression" that flourished especially during three distinct periods in the United States: the late nineteenth century, the nineteen-thirties, and the nineteen-sixties and beyond.⁴ In a subsequent, 1995 anthology that Sims edited with Mark Kramer, the latter laid out what he called the "breakable rules" of literary journalism, which included: "Literary journalists immerse themselves in subjects' worlds and in background research . . . work out implicit covenants about accuracy and candor with readers and with sources . . . write mostly about routine events . . . develop meaning by building upon the readers' sequential reactions."⁵

Sims had also edited a 1990 anthology of scholarly articles entitled *Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century*, which greatly advanced inquiry. The book included an important chapter by David Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," which laid out two distinct ways that literary journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Hunter S. Thompson, Gay Talese, and Norman Mailer respond to reality. These writers' reports, Eason wrote, "can best be understood as embodying two different ways of responding to the problem of social and cultural diversity and of locating the reporter in regard to the traditions of journalism and the broader history of American society." Eason termed these different responses to reality as "realist" and "modernist."⁶ He argued that the former, characteristic of literary journalism written by Capote, Talese, and Wolfe, "assures [that] conventional ways of understanding still apply." And "in contrast, modernist texts," such as works by Didion, Mailer, and Thompson, "describe what it feels like to live in a world where there is no consensus about a frame of reference to explain 'what it all means'."⁷ Although Eason's theory of realism and modernism developed specifically from his study of the New Journalism, it continues to inspire much consideration about, as well as application to, the literary journalism of other periods. An example is the thoughtful revision of literary journalism theory shared by Fiona Giles and William Roberts in *LJS* in 2014.⁸ And even more recently, scholars such as Cecilia Aare are publishing new insights about literary journalism theory,⁹ while John S. Bak and Monica Martinez's call for papers on this very same subject for the December 2018 issue of *Brazilian Journalism Research* is very promising. At last, recent scholarship seems to be proving wrong the oft-made assertion over the years that literary journalism's very nature defies taxonomy.

Yet it must be said that much of the scholarship produced over the past decade or so has admirably aimed to interpret literary journalism on its own terms. What has emerged is an increasingly sophisticated and diverse set of

perspectives. The abundance of recent scholarly monographs, books, and scholarly articles about, and collections of, literary journalism attests to the discipline's vibrant growth.¹⁰

International Perspectives

Extensive scholarly study of international literary journalism is the most striking recent development in the field. In his essay "The Problem and the Promise of Literary Journalism Studies," in the inaugural issue of *Literary Journalism Studies*, Norman Sims importantly called for "elucidating the form's international nature and how it relates to different national cultures."¹¹ This was a huge gap in the literature, which scholars across the globe have begun to bridge through many different works. Reflecting the transnational origins of the IALJS, Isabel Soares in *LJS*'s very first issue explored the work of Portuguese journalist Miguel Sousa Tavares,¹² and Beate Josephi of Australia and Christine Müller of Germany studied the concepts of verifiability and authenticity relative to Australian and German views of literary journalism.¹³ From this auspicious start, *LJS* went on to feature guest-edited special issues focused on international topics, such as the Spring 2013 one featuring Norwegian literary journalism, edited by Jo Bech-Karlsen.¹⁴ More recently, the Fall 2016 issue, edited by Isabelle Meuret, focused on francophone literary journalism of France, Belgium, and Canada.¹⁵

Also commendable is the rich trove of research about non-U.S. literary journalism topics that *LJS* has published, and occasionally, as well, important original works of literary journalism, translated into English. The range of this scholarship is impressive. It includes examination of literary journalism in Australia,¹⁶ Britain,¹⁷ Canada,¹⁸ Cuba,¹⁹ Denmark,²⁰ Finland,²¹ Germany,²² Ireland,²³ Latin America,²⁴ The Netherlands,²⁵ Poland,²⁶ Portugal,²⁷ and South and southern Africa,²⁸ as well as comparative, transnational studies.²⁹

The vitality of recent international scholarship is amply demonstrated in books such as *Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds.³⁰ This book represents a major contribution to the development of a comparative understanding of international literary journalism, featuring analyses of, for example, social movements and Chinese literary reportage as well as literary journalism in 1930s New Zealand and in Slovenia. (An earlier work which also contributes to this inquiry is Sonja Marljak Zdovc's *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia*.³¹) Considering that just a dozen years ago there was a dearth of scholarship about international literary journalism, this recent explosion of interest and inquiry should only be encouraged, with the goal of illuminating literary journalism within the context

of the different national cultures that nourish it. This includes, of course, the translation and publication of non-English works of literary journalism, which *LJS* has commendably undertaken from time to time. However, still true today is something that Sims observed in 2009: "The strictly English speakers among us are impoverished by our lack of access to works of literary journalism from China, Russia, Portugal, Brazil and other parts of Latin America, Africa, and eastern Europe."³²

Literary Journalism's Other Voices

Over the past decade or so, scholars have admirably diversified literary journalism's canon through study of individuals and subjects historically overlooked. *LJS*'s recent special issue devoted to women, guest edited by Leonora Flis,³³ is an example of this expansion. The issue's content includes an interview with the contemporary writer Barbara Ehrenreich.³⁴ Another recent addition is Jan Whitt's *Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism*, a book that examines five women writers (Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Joan Didion, Sara Davidson, and Susan Orlean), as well as three male writers of fiction (poetry, short stories, and novels) who were greatly influenced by journalism, yet little studied by literary journalism scholars: Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, and John Steinbeck.³⁵

A different sort of contribution is made by Amy Mattson Lauters, whose book, *The Rediscovered Writings of Rose Wilder Lane: Literary Journalist*, sheds light on Lane (1886–1968), a U.S. writer whose literary journalism was overlooked because it was published in less prestigious periodicals, such as women's magazines.³⁶ Lauters's work reminds us to consider alternative published sources of literary journalism, not just elite ones. So too does a recent book by Noliwe M. Rooks, *Ladies' Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them*.³⁷ As I have argued elsewhere, such alternative, non-elite sources could include: religious tracts and periodicals; social movement publications; African American newspapers; muckraking/investigative reporting; and travel writing.³⁸

Along this line, Katrina J. Quinn shows us a form of narrative literary journalism that scholars have rarely recognized: the epistolary journalism of nineteenth-century U.S. newspapers.³⁹ Jonathan D. Fitzgerald also contributes to this inquiry with a stellar study of "Nineteenth-Century Women Writers and the Sentimental Roots of Literary Journalism."⁴⁰

We need further studies of literary journalism from such unheralded sources. Scholarly scrutiny of them could greatly expand and enrich our understanding of literary journalism. Only then will we achieve a truly representative history of the discipline.

Progress toward this goal is also demonstrated by a superb new anthology of literary journalism by women, edited by Patsy Sims: *The Stories We Tell: Classic True Tales by America's Greatest Women Journalists*.⁴¹ This anthology includes works by such famous journalists as Lillian Ross, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Joan Didion, and Susan Orlean—and by lesser known ones such as Joyce Wadler and Mimi Swartz. A key step in sparking study of women's literary journalism is, simply, to make it available for study, and this volume admirably does that.

Another recent *LJS* special issue has shed welcome light on the understudied subject of African American literary journalism.⁴² Guest edited by Roberta Maguire, it featured articles about Langston Hughes and Richard Wright,⁴³ as well as Ollie Stewart, a writer for the *Baltimore Afro American* who has been little known outside of that community.⁴⁴ Maguire is an exemplary scholar on this subject, as also shown by her earlier work.⁴⁵ Continued inquiry by the scholarly community is needed and strongly encouraged to give us a thorough understanding of African American literary journalism.

Digital Literary Journalism

The promising area of scholarship on digital literary journalism is still in its nascence, although Susan Jacobson, Jacqueline Marino, and Robert E. Gutsche argue in a recent study of fifty long-form, web-produced journalism pieces that literary journalism has reached a new evolutionary phase of digital storytelling: "Such digital storytelling encompasses more than the fragmented, de-centered, hypertextual blocks of the Web and furthers the field's understandings of the Web's potential for dramatic and immersive journalism."⁴⁶ *LJS*'s recent addition of a section on digital literary journalism is needed and timely. Marino's intriguing recent eye-tracking study showed that a sample of millennials paid attention to the text and not just the multimedia (photos and video) components of digital literary journalism.⁴⁷ More research is needed to parse out digital literary journalism's unique characteristics and impact on audiences.

Finally, another area that has attracted more study lately is ethics and literary journalism. Lindsay Morton points the way as she discusses Rebecca Skloot's *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* and Adrian Nicole LeBlanc's *Random Family*, relative to epistemology: that is, how these two literary journalists make and support their claims of fact.⁴⁸ Morton's conceptual framework is based on Lorraine Code's idea of "epistemic location."⁴⁹ Scholarly inquiry into ethics and epistemology is promising and relevant in this digital age of innumerable jousting truth claims.

This brief essay has tried to lay out a few especially promising areas for future research. Of course, others will have their own additions and refine-

ments. As we celebrate the tenth anniversary of *Literary Journalism Studies*, we can surely look forward to the next decade of scholarship.

Notes

- ¹ Wolfe, "The New Journalism," 10–22.
- ² Sims, introduction to *The Literary Journalists*, 3–25.
- ³ Connery, "Discovering a Literary Form," introduction to *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 3–5.
- ⁴ Connery, preface to *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, xi, xi–xiii.
- ⁵ Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists," 22–23, 27, 33.
- ⁶ Eason, "The New Journalism and the Image-World," 192, 204n4; see also Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, 67–73.
- ⁷ Eason, 192.
- ⁸ Giles and Roberts, "Mapping Nonfiction Narrative," 100–117.
- ⁹ Aare, "A Narratological Approach to Literary Journalism," 106–39.
- ¹⁰ The many recent books of note (both scholarly works and collections) include: Bak and Reynolds, *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*; Berner, *The Literature of Journalism*; Boynton, *The New New Journalism*; Caminero-Santangelo, *Documenting the Undocumented*; Canada, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*; Canada, *Literature and Journalism: Inspirations, Intersections, and Inventions*; Chance and McKeen, eds., *Literary Journalism: A Reader*; Connery, *Journalism and Realism*; Farr and Pearson, *Wood Carving*; Flis, *Factual Fictions*; Forde, *Literary Journalism on Trial*; Harrington and Sager, *Next Wave*; Hartsock, *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience*; Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*; Italia, *The Rise of Literary Journalism in the Eighteenth Century*; Joseph, *Behind the Text*; Keeble and Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, 2 vols.; Keeble and Wheeler, *The Journalistic Imagination*; Kramer and Call, *Telling True Stories*; Roggenkamp, *Narrating the News*; Sims, *True Stories*; Underwood, *Journalism and the Novel*; Underwood, *The Undeclared War between Journalism and Fiction*; Whitt, *The Redemption of Narrative*; Whitt, *Settling the Borderland*.
- ¹¹ Sims, "The Problem and the Promise," 7.
- ¹² Soares, "South," 17–30.
- ¹³ Josephi and Müller, "Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible," 67–78.
- ¹⁴ Bech-Karlsen, "Norwegian Literary Reportage," 9.
- ¹⁵ Meuret, "Francophone Literary Journalism," 8.
- ¹⁶ McDonald, "A Vagabond," 65–81; McDonald, "John Stanley James Writes as 'A Vagabond' in 1877," 82–93; Joseph, "Preferring 'Dirty' to 'Literary' Journalism," 100–117.

- ¹⁷ Griffiths, "Literary Journalism and Empire," 60–81.
- ¹⁸ Reynolds, "Recovering the Peculiar Life and Times of Tom Hedley," 79–104; "The Boy in the Moon . . . and Writing," 43–44; Brown, "The Boy in the Moon," excerpts, 45–55; Brown, "Writing What You See," 57–62; Gillespie, "The Works of Edna Staebler," 58–75.
- ¹⁹ Pérez González, "Revolution Is Such a Beautiful Word!" 9–28.
- ²⁰ Isager, "Playful Imitation at Work," 78–96; Sabroe, with Isager, "Overreacting with Style," 97–104.
- ²¹ Kero, "Bangkok," 31–38; Lassila-Merisalo, "Exploring the Reality Boundary of Esa Kero," 39–47.
- ²² Poerksen, "The Milieu of a Magazine," 9–29; Schlesinger, "Paul 'Sling' Schlesinger's Crime Reportage," 28–34; McQueen, "Into the Courtroom: Paul 'Sling' Schlesinger," 8–27.
- ²³ McNamara, "Myles of Writing," 29–44.
- ²⁴ Calvi, "Latin America's Own 'New Journalism,'" 63–83; Roe, "An Interview with Alma Guillermoprieto," 118–29; Calvi, "Leila Guerriero," 118–30.
- ²⁵ Grunberg, "Among Soldiers," 51–73; Harbers, "Between Fact and Fiction," 75–83; Vaessens, "Making Overtures," 55–72.
- ²⁶ Horodecka, "The Hermeneutic Relation," 118–31.
- ²⁷ Soares, "South," 17–30.
- ²⁸ Mulgrew, "Tracing the Seam," 9–30; Garman and Rennie, "Alexandra Fuller of Southern Africa," 132–45; Cowling, "Echoes of an African Drum," 7–32.
- ²⁹ Australian and German literary journalism in Josephi and Müller, "Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible," 67–78; and German-French-Polish-U.S. literary journalism in Meuret, "Rebels with a Cause," 76–98.
- ³⁰ Bak and Reynolds, *Literary Journalism across the Globe*.
- ³¹ Zdovc, *Literary Journalism in the United States of America and Slovenia*.
- ³² Sims, "The Problem and the Promise," 10.
- ³³ Flis, "Women and Literary Journalism."
- ³⁴ Dow and Flis, "An Interview with Barbara Ehrenreich," 146–58.
- ³⁵ Whitt, *Settling the Borderland*.
- ³⁶ Lauters, *The Rediscovered Writings of Rose Wilder Lane*.
- ³⁷ Rooks, *Ladies' Pages*.
- ³⁸ Roberts, "Firing the Canon," 81–93. A good example of travel writing is Soares, "South."
- ³⁹ Quinn, "Exploring an Early Version of Literary Journalism," 32–51.
- ⁴⁰ Fitzgerald, "Nineteenth-Century Women Writers," 8–27.
- ⁴¹ Sims, *The Stories We Tell*.
- ⁴² Maguire, "African American Literary Journalism," 8–14.
- ⁴³ Roiland, "Just People," 15–35; Pietila and Spaulding, "The Afro-American's World War II Correspondents," 37–58.
- ⁴⁴ Dow, "Unreading Modernism," 59–89.
- ⁴⁵ Maguire, "Riffing," 9–26.
- ⁴⁶ Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche, "The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism," 527–46; 540.
- ⁴⁷ Marino, "Reading Screens," 138–49.
- ⁴⁸ Morton, "Evaluating the Effects of Epistemic Location," 244–59.
- ⁴⁹ This concept also undergirds Morton, "Rereading Code," 34–50.