

Book Reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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The Uses of Literary Journalism: From History to Future Directions

The Routledge Companion to American Literary Journalism

edited by William E. Dow and Roberta S. Maguire. New York: Routledge, 2020. Notes. Bibliographies. Index. Hardcover, 580 pp., USD\$176; eBook USD\$43.16.

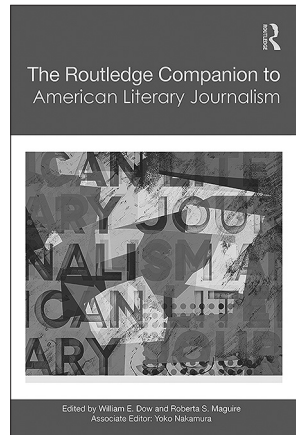
Reviewed by Susan L. Greenberg, University of Roehampton, United Kingdom

This collection is identified as a companion to literary journalism studies in the United States, rather than as an explicitly global survey, but its scope and depth give the work a much broader relevance. It is a *tour d'horizon* that presents recent findings and ideas, situating the discussion in the evolving language of its field while also linking to much broader debates about narrative nonfiction and the current state of literary and media theory. It is both a general reference tool and a thought-provoking work of current scholarship.

Section headings help the reader navigate the thirty-five chapters, offering historical perspectives, cross-cutting themes, theoretical frames and debates, and new directions for inquiry. Each chapter is short and focused, moving outward from specific individuals, publications, or periods to tease out a general insight, or inward to anchor a broad issue to concrete examples. The following highlights are inevitably selective, due to the constraints of a book review, but they indicate how readers might navigate an individual path through the varied material.

For this reviewer, the note of ambition is struck in the very first chapter when Colin T. Ramsey offers a new origin story for literary journalism, its earliest moment yet, by drawing out the importance of letters to both journalism and literature in the eighteenth century. The ambition is sustained even when it reaches more familiar topics from history, such as the New Journalism. Here John J. Pauly—to whom the book is dedicated—weaves a whole cloth of the era, a connected world of journalism and literature in which writers experience difficult practical choices. In the process readers are reminded of the material conditions of the literary market and the social status connected to each genre: in this case, the beguiling kudos of fiction.

Susan Keith's look at counterculture publications of the 1970s gives a historical treatment to a current topic, the consideration of literary journalism as "alternative" media. Keith recognizes upfront that the production of literary journalism requires money and time, factors in short supply in the examples studied here. Her account is a reminder of the ways in which 1970s counterculture has influenced the pervasive



digital culture of today, including its anti-editing rhetoric and the oppositional positioning of “passion” against “writerly style.” Keith draws on a range of definitions for “Alt Media,” emphasizing either their economic and organizational divergence from “hierarchical” commercial models or the ability of the content to “question dominative social relations.” While such definitions apply to the alternative media of the 1970s, one can ask if the same is true for the dominant “alternative” outlets of today such as RT (formerly Russia Today), which are state sponsored.

In part three’s focus on “disciplinary intersections,” Kathy Roberts Forde’s attention to the potential affinities of literary journalism and book history are of particular interest. Her analysis also zeroes in on a key difference: while book history privileges the reader, “historians of any form of journalism necessarily conceive of readers as publics” (316). Evoking Michael Schudson’s argument that the history of U.S. print culture should reflect what print means to people, Forde draws a parallel: “what literary journalism means to the public is what matters most for literary journalism studies” (316). This opens up, in turn, a debate about the uses of Jürgen Habermas’s “public sphere” and Jeffrey Alexander’s “civil sphere” to explain how literary journalism operates in public life.

In part four, on new directions, Roberta S. Maguire is persuasive in making the case that generalizations about U.S. literary journalism are not transferable to the work produced by African Americans, because the subjective voice as a distinguishing marker does not exist in that journalistic tradition. Instead, subjectivity is at the heart of the entire African-American press, because of its role in providing a voice for people who were otherwise “spoken for” by others. As one writer is quoted as saying, “The black press was never intended to be objective because it didn’t see . . . the white press being objective” (401). The insight leads to a nuanced analysis of craft issues such the use of the second-person point of view—usually a rare choice because of its inherent instability—to foreground subjectivity.

The section on new directions includes Robert Alexander’s examination of literary journalism’s potential as a fitting genre for ecocriticism. One possible affinity identified in the chapter is the use of “slow” techniques such as immersion: for example, as a potential technique for intuiting the communications of nonhuman animals, just as it helps to intuit otherwise inaccessible information about other people. Alexander also describes as a “powerful resource” literary journalism’s “ability to shift among various rhetorical modes, between different spatial and temporal scales, and to link the abstract and unseen with the concrete” (487).

Pascal Sigg provides a rare focus on postmodern theory and its potential to inform literary journalism studies. He is right to argue that post-structuralist ideas about reality deserve a nuanced analysis, and the chapter provides some grounds for the argument that the big beasts such as Derrida do not deny reality as such. Sigg goes on to provide an enjoyable close reading of several less predictable nonfiction authors from the last twenty years. However, this pleasantly provocative argument would be stronger if it anticipated a wider range of opposing arguments. One might ask, for example, whether Derrida can be considered a champion of rhetorical theory when any talk of the rhetorical concept of “agency” causes his intellectual descendants to

react like Superman with a rock of Kryptonite. The main objection, in brief, is that whatever interpretation is offered here, the postmodern school as a living practice still poses its own obstacles to nuance about reality.

There is so much more of interest in this collection; my own ersatz tastes prompt a mention of ethnography as a journalistic method (Gillespie), rock journalism as a literary genre (Schack), the relation between words and images (Marino and Jacobson), the inherent disruption of nonfiction narratives (Hartsock), and the uses of the first person (Phillips).

If I have a bugbear about the collection, it is the recurrence of tropes that refuse to die. It is hard to fault such ideas, especially in a multiauthor work, because of their very pervasiveness. But I look forward to the day when references to narrative storytelling techniques as “fictional” or “like a novel” cease to be the default. And to the time when any reference to objectivity adds an automatic disclaimer, citing Thomas Nagle’s distinction between objectivity and neutrality. Too often, people cite each other’s definitions in a circular way and too much weight is put on the term in its weakened form, divorced from its origins and use in science and philosophy.

But that is another discussion. Meanwhile, I salute this collection’s cool nerve and ambition.

Nigerian Identity Positioned

At the Crossroads: Nigerian Travel Writing and Literary Culture in Yoruba and English by Rebecca Jones. African Articulations 7. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: James Currey, an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, 2019. Bibliography. Index. Hardcover, 312 pp., USD\$56.

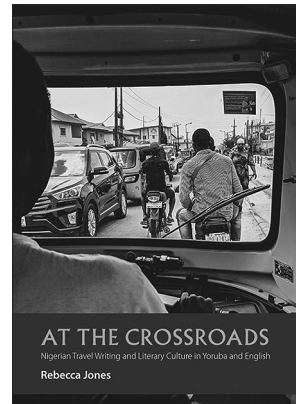
Reviewed by Beate Josephi, University of Sydney, Australia

Audience matters and, in the case of *Literary Journalism Studies*, its readers are presumably most interested in travel writing as a form of literary journalism. This is why it needs to be said first off what Rebecca Jones's *At the Crossroads* does not do. Her book only implicitly deals with the development of travel writing, but it does not address literary travel journalism, in the Yoruba nation, or later Nigeria. Nor does it discuss literary culture from a literary perspective, and questions of literary merit are not raised. Jones is at pains not to judge the writings from her white European perspective.

Travel, for Jones, is the tool to trace the changes in the self-described Yoruba or Nigerian identity. Travel, or movement, leads to encounters which help to establish the boundaries of self and other. Any text that includes travel is used for this purpose, be it travelogues, diaries, poetry, letters, articles in newspapers, fictional texts, or texts intended as travel guides, and, in the last decade, web publications. In this, Jones follows the understanding in parts of the Yoruba region where any narrative was once seen as a journey the storyteller embarked upon and took the listeners with him. For African travel writing, Jones wishes "a reversal of the colonial gaze, rendering Africans the subject of the travel narrative, rather than objects of the traveller's gaze" (268). This, however, is a challenge, inasmuch as African writers have to maneuver within the genre in its Western manifestations.

The book is chronologically arranged. It was intended to cover Nigeria's first century from its amalgamation as a colony in 1914 to its centenary in 2014 but extends via an epilogue to 2018 to take in websites and blogs. Jones makes clear that she does not aim at a comprehensive history of southwest Nigerian travel writing but wishes to make connections across literary genres and forms in order to follow up the ever-evolving modes of subjectivity.

When British colonial rule shaped what is now Nigeria, currently the seventh most populous country in the world, they placed 250 ethnic groups and 500 distinct languages within its borders. Yoruba, in the west, is one of the three largest groups and the country's capital Lagos is within its land. The others are the Islamic Hausa to



the north and Igbo in the east. Nigeria gained independence in 1960 but was torn apart by the Biafran civil war from 1967–70. It took another twenty years before stable democracy was achieved.

Given Nigeria's ethnic heterogeneity, choosing Yoruba writers provides Jones with the opportunity to explore commonalities and difference within Nigeria itself, and to follow the shift from an explicit Yoruba to a less ethnically defined Nigerian perspective. The first writer to be discussed at length is Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a distinguished West African Christian of the nineteenth century. Initially captured as a slave, he later widely traveled present-day Nigeria for missionary work, noting his travels in journals and letters. Crowther's work stands in the tradition of European travel writing, aimed at an audience in Victorian Britain. Later Yoruba authors, such as Nobel Prize-winner Wole Soyinka, decried Crowther's colonial mentality that led him to denounce his African brothers as "backward, heathen, brutish" (44) and focus on cannibalism. Crowther, however, also translated several books of the Bible into Yoruba, thus making both languages part of the beginnings of Yoruba print and literary culture.

In the first three decades of the twentieth century, newspapers played an important role in establishing a Yoruba print tradition. They also served as platforms of travel accounts, often serialized, with new road, rail, and steamer networks connecting Lagos to its hinterland and the southern Nigerian coast. When analyzing these narratives, Jones's main intent is to locate the self-representation and positioning of the writer, as is also the case with Isaac Delano's 1937 *The Soul of Nigeria*: "*The Soul of Nigeria* can be read as co-opting the travel book genre, situating itself within the field of imperial representation of the world, speaking in terms that the British can understand, while retaining an 'authentic' sense of the 'native', positioning the author both inside and outside his or her own culture" (97).

The texts written prior to independence are interrogated as to the extent to which they engender Yoruba-ness or African-ness in differentiation to British colonial imagination, especially as this mindset was intent on uniting very disparate regions. These contested identities show in Delano's own position, where slippages between "Yoruba," "Nigeria," and "Africa" reveal instabilities similar to the way communal identities were perceived in that era.

Chapter four is devoted to the novels of O. D. Fagunwa, written in the late 1940s and 1950s in Yoruba, and one of which, *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, was translated by Wole Soyinka. Fagunwa's novels are not set in a particular historical period, unlike more realist narratives in the lead-up to independence. Fictional travel writing of the time depicts a polyglot nation in which Yoruba and Hausa speakers coexist but are unable to understand each other's language.

Post-independence, these fractures in a vastly heterogeneous country broke into the open, when the Igbo region of southeast Nigeria sought to become the independent nation of Biafra. Jones chooses to focus on the unifying efforts post-civil war and has picked, among others, texts written by participants of Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). These narratives point a way towards a multi-ethnic and detribalized Nigeria and are also the first among the selected texts written by women,

thus introducing the gender perspective. They show “ ‘worlds in collision’ mediated through the figure of the unmarried ‘sexually self-determining woman,’ who is punished for her sexuality . . . [they] also seem to dramatize a broader anxiety about the shift from home to the national space, and thus about the meaning and dangers of the nation itself” (178).

For the twenty-first century, Jones turns to tourism journalism and to diasporic travel narratives, written by those born outside Africa and returning to the land of their fathers. Noo Saro-Wiwa’s travelogue, *Looking for Transwonderland* captures both conventional tourism and personal story. A writer for Rough Guides and Lonely Planet, she is also the daughter of activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed by the military government in 1995. Her travels, although ambivalently, instill in her a new sense of belonging.

The book’s epilogue engages with an online travel writing journal, *Fortunate Traveller*, of which Jones is a cofounder, and which may have been the instigation of her 300-page long, in-depth study of Yoruba and Nigerian identity as expressed in travel writing. *Fortunate Traveller* and other projects, such as “Borders Within,” continue the quest for mapping this highly diverse multi-ethnic nation. The traveler, for Jones, is a liminal figure, standing at the crossroads, able to move between space and cultures, “translating parts of Nigeria, or Nigerians, to each other” (259).

Desire Decoded at Some Cost to Sources

Three Women

by Lisa Taddeo. London: Bloomsbury, 2019. Hardback, 307 pp., USD\$15.99.

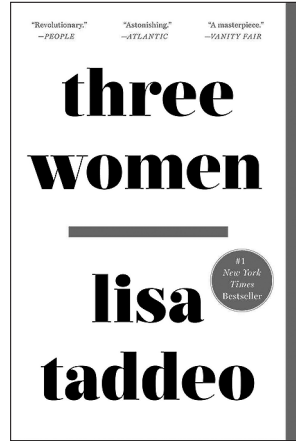
Reviewed by Julie Wheelwright, City, University of London, United Kingdom

Author Elizabeth Gilbert has heartily endorsed Lisa Taddeo's unexpected best-seller, *Three Women*, which chronicles the complex sex lives of its subjects, describing it as "a masterpiece at the same level as *In Cold Blood*." It is an intriguing parallel since this immersive work, composed entirely of interviews that Taddeo conducted over eight years, adheres to many conventions of literary journalism. Her immersive reporting has produced astonishingly detailed accounts as the women tease out questions about longing, about their struggle to express their desires and the powerful social opprobrium they face over their choices.

The stories are told in parallel narratives as each woman describes the arc of a conflict. For Sloane, who runs an up-market restaurant in New England with her husband, the drama focuses on the sex they enjoy with other couples. Sometimes Sloane meets men and records the experience for Richard; sometimes they involve another woman, sometimes a man. There are rules and codes of practice which are breached when Sloane begins an affair, outside of Richard's control or approval, with Wayne, a married chef.

Months after the affair has ended, Wayne's wife confronts Sloane when they meet in a local supermarket. This finely etched description of their painful conversation dwells on their respective power over men, and about how women do "terrible things to one another" (279). But in Taddeo's rendering, and because we, the readers, feel we possess such intimate knowledge of Sloane, we understand that by allowing Richard to dictate the terms of her sexual experiences, she has violated an unspoken contract of sisterhood. As Taddeo writes, "'You're the woman,' Jenny repeated. 'Don't you know you're supposed to have the power?'" (283). Sloane is aware of her power but regards it as "a prescription, there is an exact way to get dressed to get what you want. It's not about being sexy. It's about being everything before the man thinks of what he wants" (280).

Lina, mother of two small children and married to the dullard Ed, yearns to be everything for Aidan, a high-school boyfriend with whom she reconnects on social media. Aidan works in construction, is also married with two children, but when Lina meets him in cheap motel rooms and riverside parking lots, she feels, finally, deeply satisfied. She shares with Sloane the realization that her seductive power lies in



her ability to generate, and perform, a fantasy. As Lina tells her girlfriends, “I roped him in . . . like a cowgirl. I roped him in using Facebook” (171).

Lina’s disclosure of sexual pleasure to her girlfriends is telling since because Taddeo’s subjects all come under harsh scrutiny from disapproving friends and colleagues. After Lina endures a gang rape in high school, her small Indiana town reads her trauma as promiscuity, and it wrecks a budding relationship. Maggie—who at age seventeen was groomed and seduced by Aaron Knodel, her English teacher—suffers a similar fate. When Mrs. Knodel reads a text message from Maggie to her husband, Aaron’s steady stream of affection abruptly ends, leaving his student bewildered, shamed, and deeply hurt. Only years later, when Maggie hears in the local news that Mr. Knodel has won a prestigious “teacher of the year” award, does she decide to press criminal charges in a case that is dismissed as a mistrial. The high school reinstates Knodel, with back pay, and he suffers no consequence of his actions. Maggie, meanwhile, is described in the press as “troubled” and is shunned (201).

A half-century earlier, Taddeo’s Italian mother understood that as a girl with “only a fifth-grade education and a dowry of medium-grade linen dish towels,” no one cared about her welfare (1). As a young woman in Bologna in the 1960s, she was followed through the streets every day by a masturbating man. For Taddeo, the North Dakota court’s failure to give Maggie justice reveals how little has changed: writing in the wake of the Me Too Movement, Taddeo argues, “Even when women are being heard, it is often the right types of women who are actively heard. White ones. Rich ones. Pretty Ones” (299). At the local high school in Fargo where Knodel taught, his female students, in t-shirts and cut-offs, lined up in the street to support him during the trial.

Taddeo bravely probes this forbidden and complex aspect of women’s desire. Although the theme of sexual jealousy runs throughout the women’s stories, it is a conversation with her mother, dying from cancer, that drives home its bitter potency. As the mother whispers to her daughter from her hospital bed, “Don’t let them see you happy,” and when Taddeo asks, “Who?” she replies, “Everyone . . . Other women, mostly. . . If they see you are happy, they will try to destroy you” (297). On girls’ nights when Lina spills over with happiness after a visit with Aidan, “those were the nights when the other women drummed their fingers and tried to drown out her glee” (300).

This is undoubtedly a vivid and illuminating work of narrative nonfiction. But the comparison with Capote, perhaps unintended by Gilbert, points to its ethical entanglements. Just as Capote became involved, even dangerously so, with his subjects, one wonders about the impact of Taddeo’s interviews, which spanned nearly a decade, on Maggie, Sloane, and Lina. In some cases, she even moved into her subject’s town or city to gain better access. The intimacy that Taddeo creates by giving mundane and exquisite details about their lives, also creates disquiet at hearing their inner thoughts.

Taddeo describes her criteria for selecting her subjects, of whom only three agreed to have their names and details published: “What I perceived as these women’s ability to be honest with themselves and their willingness to communicate their sto-

ries in ways that laid bare their desire” (x). The book aims to “convey vital truths about women and desire . . . it is these three specific women who are in charge of their narratives” (x).

But are they? Does Maggie, perhaps through the book’s publication, finally find a platform from which she can claim justice against an exploitative teacher and bind the wounds of her teenage self? And what of the third parties damaged in Sloane’s story—did they also have a say in the exposure of their sex lives? Even Lina, despite her outward brightness, reveals that even in a “perfect moment” Adrian “is terrible to her. It’s not that he’s outwardly cruel but he never considers her heart” (268). The public airing of such painful realizations makes for gripping reading but perhaps at the subjects’ expense.

Invisible People's Felt Lives, with a Dash of Gonzo

The Undocumented Americans

by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio. New York: One World, 2020. Hardcover, 208 pp., USD\$26.

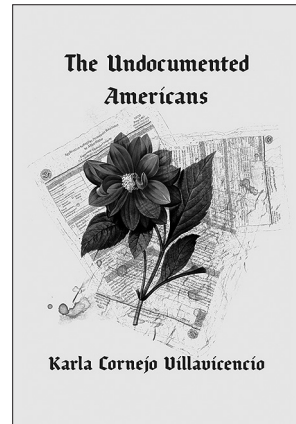
Reviewed by Lisa A. Phillips, SUNY New Paltz, United States

When Karla Cornejo Villavicencio was fifteen years old, her father, an Ecuadorian immigrant, grew depressed about how he was being treated at his restaurant job. He had an abusive new manager who called the delivery men “wetbacks and spics” and threatened to alert ICE. Having just watched *All the President's Men* for the tenth time, she telephoned the restaurant and told the owner she was a newspaper reporter who had received a tip from a customer about racist abuse in the kitchen. Would he comment? He begged her not to write the article. “It’s a pretty good story” (135), she mused. The ruse worked. The new manager was fired. Her father’s mood lifted.

The injustices in the lives of undocumented immigrants, particularly in the Trump-era cauldron of racism and vulnerability, remain a powerful story. In *The Undocumented Americans*, Cornejo Villavicencio finally tells it. Her youthful mission to save her father from despair matures into an adult quest to portray the lives of undocumented immigrants, her own included, to stave off the blunt dualistic thinking of a nation that perceives them as either demon-criminal-lazy resource drains or preternaturally hard workers, martyring themselves to exploitative, precarious working conditions so the next generation can thrive.

Using a participatory reporting method that evokes what cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo calls “deep hanging out” (Clifford, 1997, 56)—participatory, informal immersion in a culture—Cornejo Villavicencio creates nuanced and empathetic accounts of day workers on Staten Island; Ground Zero cleanup workers still contending with the physical and emotional impact of the chaotic 9/11 recovery effort; and families in Flint, Michigan, who cannot get clean water without a state ID. In Miami, she takes readers inside the world of underground pharmacies and healers serving the undocumented community. In New Haven, Connecticut, where she is pursuing a PhD at Yale, she bonds with two teenage girls whose father is in sanctuary in a local church, one of the few places ICE will not forcibly enter.

Cornejo Villavicencio no longer has any use for the hard-boiled reporter persona



that emboldened her as a teen. She states from the outset that because she is an undocumented American herself, “it feels unethical to put on the drag of a journalist” (xvi). Yet she resisted writing the memoir literary agents clamored for after she published an anonymous essay in the *Daily Beast* on being an undocumented soon-to-be Harvard graduate. *The Undocumented Americans* is a powerful hybrid of first-person, creative nonfiction grounded in thorough reporting. She threads the narrative with reflections on her own life as a DACA recipient with a complicated upbringing. When she was a toddler, her parents left her in the care of her relatives for years while they built their lives in the United States, the abandonment leaving a lasting imprint on her psyche.

Her style is a heady combination of punk-rock rage, poetic speculation, and mad pride. “Y hermanxs, it’s time to fuck some shit up,” she announces in the book’s introduction. Other terms of engagement include her translation method, which is literary, not literal, and meant to capture nuances of character, mood, and intellect. She uses pseudonyms and rips up her notes once she has used them to ensure her sources’ safety and keep their trust. She warns readers that she is “just crazy enough” for the task of writing the book, because “if you’re going to write a book about undocumented immigrants in America, the story, the full story, you have to be a little be crazy” (xiii–xvii).

Cornejo Villavicencio means this literally. She lists her multiple mental illness diagnoses and points to extended parent-child separations and time in immigrant detention camps as traumas that cause “permanent psychological and physical changes” in the brain (61). She uses her condition to bond with her subjects, exchanging confidences about symptoms and medications.

But she is also referring to the literary connotations of crazy: passionate, impractically determined, uninhibited. On a trip to Florida to explore how undocumented immigrants, who cannot purchase health insurance, cope with illness and healing, she purchases antipsychotic medication without a prescription at an underground pharmacy and participates in a Haitian “vodou cleansing” (82) meant to protect her undocumented friends and family members from deportation. Out drinking with the women who have guided her through this furtive world, they glibly swap stories in her presence of the hazards of housecleaning—toxic chemicals, psychological abuse from employers, the hazard of deportation from a misstep as quotidian as inputting the wrong PIN number into a home security system, and nightmares about concentration camps. When “Sweet Home Alabama” comes on the bar radio, one of the women loudly sings along, drawing the stares of several white patrons. Nervous, Cornejo Villavicencio imagines one of them rising from his perch, gunning her group down, and walking over their bodies. She fights back her fear by embracing the irony of her companion’s love for a Southern rock classic about homecoming. She joins in the singing and spontaneously pours a drink over her head: “The girls cheer and I let out a bloodcurdling scream. My first ever” (94).

While writing this review, I toyed with the phrase “Latinx Gonzo” to describe the brash center-stage presence of Cornejo Villavicencio’s narrator. But the phrase does not seem quite right, given the vast difference in what is at stake in each writer’s

work. Hunter S. Thompson's Gonzo journalism revels in the performative and in the game, with points scored for theatrical exposure of hypocrisy, gritty sexual and violent detail, a flash of fiction to catalyze his facts, and the bravado of relentless immersion—he rode with the Hell's Angels until they stomped him to the ground to get rid of him. Cornejo Villavicencio and her subjects, in contrast, spend their days resisting being stomped to the ground. Her barstool scream may be catharsis, or performance for the sake of a dramatic story, or both. In any case, the outcry has a clear message: *We should not have to hide or be afraid. Sometimes we are outrageous because our lives are outrageous. Go ahead and stare.*

When Cornejo Villavicencio engages in fictive speculation—another Gonzo trademark—her aim is to awaken the reader to what is unknowable about undocumented lives, not to goad with satire, as Thompson did. Her chapter profiling Latinx day laborers on Staten Island focuses on their willingness to do volunteer clean-up work after Hurricane Sandy hit in 2012, despite risks to their own health and safety. The first responders hoped—in vain, as it turned out—the community's gratitude would make them less vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. The chapter concludes with a detailed imagining of the final hours for a homeless alcoholic who drowned in a basement in the storm. None of the other laborers wanted to talk about who he was, so Cornejo Villavicencio recreated him as a man who found solace in his last moments with a wounded stray squirrel. She describes how he stroked the squirrel as the water rose, because “no creature should have to die alone” (29). She thus blesses him with a humanity readers would not otherwise see in a news brief about his death or a rote count of storm fatalities.

The Undocumented Americans was published in late March 2020, as the globe shuttered doors and borders against the COVID-19 pandemic. Immigration injustices, like many pressing issues, fell off the public's radar. There is a real worry that the unfortunate timing may have diminished the impact of this short but mighty book, which has the potential to transform writing about immigration in the way that *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* transformed writing about poverty. Like James Agee, Cornejo Villavicencio insists on the necessity of the literary in portraying the complexity, paradoxes, pain, and beauty of disenfranchised, soulful human beings. Dry facts and literal translations are not enough. Art must step in.

A Woman through the Berkshires Ceiling

Rebel Cinderella: From Rags to Riches to Radical, the Epic Journey of Rose Pastor Stokes by Adam Hochschild. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020. Photographs. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Hardcover, 303 pp. USD\$30.

Reviewed by David Swick, University of King's College, Canada

Adam Hochschild was looking for something else when he bumped into a photo of Rose Pastor Stokes in a U.S. delegation to Moscow in 1922. Why, he wondered, was a member of one of the wealthiest families in the United States celebrating the fifth anniversary of the Soviet Union? The answer to that question is his tenth book, *Rebel Cinderella*. To write it, he read thousands of letters, a diary, two memoirs, and dozens of surveillance reports by agents working for what would become the FBI.

Hochschild is fascinated by character, by the jumble of influences that guide motivation and action. Often his books feature a great number of compelling people; this time he focuses primarily on Rose. She deserves a book of her own.

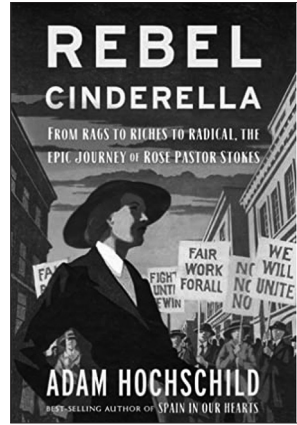
Rose Pastor was born in czarist Russia in 1879; her family emigrated to the United States, settling in Cleveland. When her father abandoned the family, Rose, the eldest child, became the breadwinner for her mother and six siblings. Her job: rolling cigars, for sixteen hours a day (139). This hard work lasted twelve years. When it started, she was eleven.

Despite having only two years of schooling, Rose was smart and spunky. At about twenty she sent a letter describing her work to a New York newspaper—and was asked to start an advice column for young women. A couple of years later, the paper asked her to move to Manhattan. At twenty-three, she did.

Her interviews included Graham Stokes, the scion of one of the richest families in the country, and a rare wealthy man expressing support for the working class. They dated, then in 1905 married, shocking the East Coast Protestant establishment, and thrilling the popular press. The media embraced this unexpected couple—especially Rose. For several years, at the peak of her fame, U.S. newspapers wrote about her more than any other woman.

Hochschild's voice is avuncular, even grandfatherly. He sounds like a wise man, just down from the mountain, revealing discovered wisdom. His voice—touched with small asides, and never making the focus himself—makes his storytelling intimate and profound.

Rose's in-laws' one-hundred-room Berkshires summer home was at the time the



largest private house in the country (4). Rose was not comfortable there or in the family's Madison Avenue mansion, next door to J. P. Morgan, so Graham's mother bought the couple a smaller home of their own, at 88 Grove Street in Greenwich Village. (The house still stands, across the street from the Stonewall Tavern.) Greenwich Village was an activist hotbed, and the couple moved in a circle that included Emma Goldman, John Reed, and Socialist Party presidential candidate Eugene Debs.

Between 1905 and 1920 the United States was torn by a mighty struggle to decide its direction. How democratic, and how capitalist, would it be? Would power be shared by many, or remain in only a few hands? Rose and Graham started speaking at labor rallies—at a time when rallies filled Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden. Early in their relationship Graham was the obvious leader. But it was Rose, overcoming shyness, who best connected with crowds. A poised and powerful speaker, she had the ability to make every listener feel she was talking directly to them. She also had a nose for hypocrisy and no fear of breaking convention. “How can you love God, whom you have not seen,” she asked one audience, “if you do not love your fellow man, whom you have seen?” (145).

Many young idealists at the time joined the Socialist Party; Rose and Graham did too. Its platform sounds mild today: a ban on child labor; an inheritance tax; unemployment, medical, and old-age insurance; a living wage (134). Still, opposition was fierce. Millions of dollars were spent by powerful people—including some of Rose's relatives. Much of the money went to private detectives and goon squads; the result was violence and murder. Even so, Debs in 1912 received more than 900,000 votes. Supporters of an egalitarian society had reasons to believe that history was moving their way. Then came World War I.

Seeing an opportunity to boost the war effort while at the same time destroying unions and other progressive movements, the U.S. government created a massive propaganda machine, the Committee on Public Information. Hochschild is known for deep and thorough research and, like all of his books, *Rebel Cinderella* offers astounding facts and statistics. The Committee sent 75,000 speakers to movie houses and lecture halls and produced 77 million pamphlets. This had the desired effect. “A patriotic frenzy filled the air,” Hochschild says, “and provided the excuse to continue the war at home against organized labor and dissent” (200).

A vast, oppressive, institutional machine versus a small number of people working to create a fairer, saner world is a recurring motif in Hochschild's excellent books. In *King Leopold's Ghost* (1996) he considered the fight to end Belgium's gruesome reign in the Congo. *Bury the Chains* (2005) looked at the people who committed their lives to ending the British slave trade—and those fighting to keep it. Some writers handling such grisly topics move to sarcasm, fury, or denunciation, but that is not Hochschild's way. He is a master of tone—even when examining the muck and terror of appalling cruelty, his voice stays eminently civilized. His tone is fine, compassionate, and smooth. In staying calm, he radiates authority. His theory may be: when you are on the side of the angels, there is no need to raise your voice.

During the war many of Rose and Graham's friends were jailed, beaten, or deported. “Across the country,” Hochschild says,

vigilante groups sprang up with names like the Sedition Slammers and the Knights of Liberty. The largest was the [250,000-strong] American Protective League, or APL, which had the support of the Justice Department. . . . Its ranks filled with businessmen who hated unions, nativists who hated immigrants, and men too old for the military who still wanted to do battle. (182)

Literary journalists and literary journalism scholars will note that while Hochschild offers insights and raises thoughtful questions, he sticks to telling Rose's story, and the story of her era. He provides facts; readers can decide what they mean. During the war, the rich got richer. By its end Britain was spending half its military budget in the United States, and on every sale the company acting as Britain's agent, J. P. Morgan & Co., received a one percent commission. Wartime pressures showed in the marriage. Graham began supporting the government, to the point of betraying friends he thought might be German agents. Rose fought on, with increasing determination. After the war she even stayed loyal to the Soviet Union, long after most of her friends had denounced it for abandoning socialist ideals. Why did she stick with the Soviets, despite overwhelming evidence of atrocities and corruption? Ultimately, Hochschild believes, Rose's character included this kink: it was almost as if she was "seeking a kind of martyrdom" (137).

Brave, intelligent, and achingly idealistic, Rose was a truth teller at a time when this was dangerous and rare. She believed that the United States was built on sand, that its foundations needed repair. After she and Graham separated, but before the divorce was finalized, she was found to be involved in an affair. Confronted by a reporter, she refused to be scandalized. "Love is always justified," Rose said. ". . . The real scandal—the wife who gives herself to the husband without love and the husband who gives himself to the wife without love—the real breach is given a veneer of sanctity by the church and covered with a cloak of decency by the law" (234). When she and Graham divorced, against the advice of her lawyer and friends, Rose declined to ask for alimony (236). In her final years she was often destitute.

Rose and Graham both wrote memoirs (his was never published). Graham spent sixty pages describing generations of his family's business dealings, but never once mentioned Rose. She, in contrast, charted their relationship from happy start to disillusionment and divorce. Rose told an acquaintance that during their final years together Graham had "reverted to type." "Given her fervent belief in the Soviet Union," Hochschild says, "he might well have said the same thing of her" (238).

Was something else at play in their relationship? For years Graham called Rose "girly," and with dismay he watched her grow more confident, assertive, and independent-minded. If this is what most upset him, Hochschild says, "that was a feeling he shared with men from all classes, not just his own. In his era, a truly egalitarian relationship may have been even rarer than one across the barrier of class" (239).

The title of this eminently readable book is imprecise. The Cinderella myth always ends happily; this true story does not. When, at fifty-one, Rose was diagnosed with cancer, her friends, including Upton Sinclair, went to Graham. He refused to help.

A literary journalist and historian who has spent decades increasing awareness about both the heroic and rotten roots of U.S. society, Adam Hochschild ends *Rebel Cinderella* with a wistful look at our own time.

As this book goes to press, the number of billionaires in the United States has increased more than tenfold since the year 2000. And no nation on earth has such a staggering gulf between the salary levels of its CEOs and those of their workers. . . . The net worth of the average American family, by contrast, is less than what it was 20 years ago. You do not have to believe in either magic or communism to hope for an alternative. (245)

Common Ground in the Heartland

American Harvest: God, Country, and Farming in the Heartland

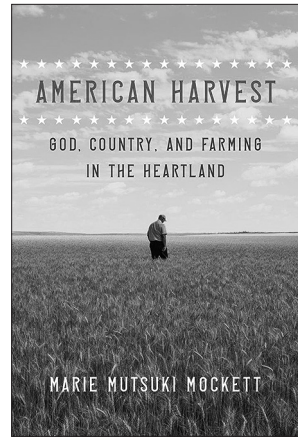
by Marie Mutsuki Mockett. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2020. Hardcover, 408 pp., USD\$28.

Reviewed by Elaine Salisbury, University at Albany, State University of New York, United States

The “amber waves of grain” in the 1890s patriotic song “America the Beautiful” was written with the wheat fields of middle America in mind. Christian European immigrants largely planted these fields, which cover millions of acres beneath “spacious skies,” and they still tend them. God and country are intimately intertwined with patriotism and the hard work of growing the third-largest crop on U.S. soil. But while the grain is nearly ubiquitous in the U.S. diet, not many U.S. citizens think about who grows it. And, if they do, those thoughts are often not kind. “It seems like whenever we interest the national news media . . . like when there is a tornado . . . they seem to pick the most ignorant hick out there to put on camera,” said one Oklahoma pastor in Marie Mutsuki Mockett’s ambitious 2020 memoir, *American Harvest: God, Country, and Farming in the Heartland* (196).

In her memoir, which is also a travelogue, Mockett takes part in a five-month odyssey through the wheat fields of the Great Plains to better understand the mostly conservative, Christian, white farmers who grow the staple. These farmers, many of whom believe the Bible to be infallible, have a worldview that is vastly different from that of the cosmopolitan crowds who consume their harvest, or decry it for its genetically modified seeds and synthetic fertilizers. For the latter, the all-natural stamp on food signals goodness and purity, but the use of the terms is “almost certainly a product of our profound alienation from the natural world,” Mockett writes on page 198, quoting Eula Biss from her book *On Immunity: An Inoculation*.

Mockett’s journey through a part of the country that many U.S. citizens experience only from the window of a plane could not be more relevant in today’s hyper-politicized environment, where an “us” versus “them” mentality has literally spilled out into the streets. Even the term “heartland” in the title will come across to some as politically charged, perhaps rightfully so. The term, which has often been used to refer to the middle states of the United States, is often associated with white, conservative Christian cultural values at the expense of others who populate the region. Former Democratic presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg learned this after his January



2020 tweet when he referred to the country's need for "a president whose vision was shaped by the American Heartland rather than the ineffective Washington politics." According to a CNN article at the time, thousands criticized the former mayor of South Bend, Indiana, a state where wheat is the number-three crop, that his use of the term suggests heartland values "were more important than the values of urban or coastal or southern parts of the country" (" 'Heartland' Values?," para. 3, 4).

Mockett, however, is well positioned to explore this part of the United States. Born to a Japanese mother and a U.S. father and raised on the California coast, she, in her words, does "not precisely look as if I am from any one place. I could be from anywhere too" (310). Her family in Japan runs and owns a Buddhist Temple. Her father's family owns a 7,000-acre wheat field in Nebraska, which during her childhood Mockett visited every summer for the harvest. She had been aware of the admiration her father, an artist and creative type, held for the church-going farmers who planted and cut the fields. These farmers, Mockett recalls, solved problems, fixed equipment, and worked long until after the sun had set. It was not until Mockett became an adult living in New York City that she became aware of the condescension many urbanites held toward this farming population. "I know what I am supposed to think," she writes. "Mall towns, white, ignorant, superstitious—but I don't think these things" (9).

Mockett thoughtfully explores the origins of these assumptions and contemplates what she sees as a growing divide between "country and city." Her reliable guide is Eric Wolgemuth, an evangelical Christian who has been harvesting her family's wheat for decades. In his repeated trips from his Pennsylvania home to the Great Plains to harvest wheat, he too has come to worry about the divide that "once just a crack in the dirt, was now a chasm into which objects, people, grace, and love all fell and disappeared" (24). Wolgemuth invites Mockett to join him for the summer 2017 harvest to share his part of the United States.

Wolgemuth is one of about 450 "custom harvesters" who trek across the plains with oversized loads of equipment and machinery to cut wheat. He is among the more successful harvesters, in charge of nearly a dozen crew members of young Christian men and four semitrucks, whose flatbeds haul combines, tractors, and grain hoppers across a multitude of state lines. The crew, writes Mockett, is intensely loyal to each other and to the farmers who depend on them, using a combination of "skills requiring nothing short of primal masculine mastery" (19).

Mockett's journey is as physical as it is intellectual. By her own admission, she has no discernible skills for harvesting or for cooking for a crowd, a task which is remarkably managed three times a day by Wolgemuth's wife. The team starts in Texas, where the United States' wheat ripens first, and then heads north, wending its way to Montana. They work at the mercy of nature: Wheat ripens at a rate of twenty miles a day, and the weather frequently kicks up hailstorms, rain, and tornadoes. Hordes of wild pigs ransack valuable crops, and Mockett, who has never fired a gun, finds herself taking part in a hunt. When the crew rests on Sunday or is delayed by weather, Mockett visits small towns that have been hollowed out by the difficult economics of farming. She attends church services and talks with pastors and members of a variety

of conservative Christian faiths. Along the way, she finds communities clinging to a way of life that is literally, for them, a biblical calling.

A large part of her exploration comes from the conversations she has with the crew. She shares with them her struggle to understand their Scripture in today's world. How can they, she asks them, not believe in evolution but accept genetically engineered crops? Would the concept of God change if Mars were colonized? What do they think of geology in the context of the age of the earth according to the Bible? Wolgemuth and his son are the ones who take the most interest in these questions and their well-considered responses are often surprisingly inclusive and grounded in love. Other members of the crew are less forthcoming, out of fear she will misrepresent them.

Many works of narrative nonfiction come to a decisive end or carry a clear message about a singular issue. Such books make for a relatively "easy" linear discussion for book clubs and classrooms. Do not expect this for *American Harvest*. Mockett's memoir is as far ranging as the wheat plains themselves, raising issues of race, identity, faith, and the displacement of Native Americans. Too, she contemplates the science behind modern agriculture in the context of United Nations warnings of food shortages in our lifetimes. But if one were to draw an overarching lesson, it would be to convey to all citizens of the United States the importance of taking a journey similar to Mockett's, to find the "others" in our own lives and spend time with them, because with knowledge comes understanding and, hopefully, common ground. In this case, it is the soil upon which we all depend.

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—focusing 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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