

Introduction . . .

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Literary Journalism in the German-Speaking World

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Journalism's information paradigm has been under scrutiny, and not just since the digital transformations of our mediascape in the last few decades. For almost half a century, Gaye Tuchman's diagnosis of a strategic ritual of objectivity has served as a foil against which critiques of conventional news journalism can be projected, most notably its lack of transparency, its bias towards institutional sources and ideologies,¹ and its assumption of an impersonal or objective stance.² The recent crisis of media trust and accountability may have arisen in part from these blind spots.³ At this stage, it is undisputed that journalism needs to reflect and adapt its professional identity and modes of presentation if it wants to continue fulfilling its social function.⁴

With these thoughts in mind, it is worthwhile to examine alternative forms of journalism, for which the approach is to rely more on personal experience, in-depth research, an authentic journalistic voice, and foregrounding different perspectives to overcome social boundaries, with an overall goal to engage readers emotionally. One of these approaches can be found in the concept of literary journalism.⁵ By combining aesthetic forms of literature with journalistic research methods, literary journalism presents readers with a mix of discursive strategies and professional practices that differ substantially from standard reporting.

However, literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, literary reportage, reportage literature, New Journalism, the nonfiction novel, literary nonfiction, and creative nonfiction, is a deep-layered and arbitrary phenomenon. For nearing two decades, the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS) and its journal, *Literary Journalism Studies* (*LJS*), have helped establish a shared foundation of knowledge and explored manifestations of journalistic narratives in various cultural contexts. What has become apparent in this ongoing scholarly debate is that different countries and cultures adopt different names for the phenomenon.⁶

The term literary journalism and its German equivalent, *Literarischer Journalismus*, are not widespread in Germany.⁷ Instead of tapping into the vast research on the subject in recent decades, literary forms of journalism are often discussed in terms of either (mostly North American) New Journalism of the 1960s and '70s or the tradition of the great reportages (e.g., Egon Erwin Kisch's and Joseph Roth's). More generally, it can be stated that an overarching critical scientific discourse about the history, practices, forms, and functions of literary journalism that joins the global debate has not yet evolved in Germany.

Therefore, this special issue of *LJS* seeks to illuminate the phenomenon in the German-speaking world (essentially, Germany, Austria, and the German-speaking parts of Switzerland) from all possible perspectives. How and when did the genre described as literary journalism enter the German language? How

did it evolve over the centuries? What are notable examples in digital media today? Do any continuities exist? These and further questions will be addressed in the studies assembled in this issue.

Traditions in the German-Speaking World

Mapping and tracing the traditions of literary journalism in the German-speaking world is complicated. While, for instance, literary journalism in the United States appears as a “continuous line,”⁸ its German-speaking lineage seems to be rather discontinuous. Several points are to be made that suggest a fragmented, interrupted, and hampered development of the genre, particularly in Germany and Austria. Clearly, this introduction does not allow for diving deeply into the complex political and social history of both countries to lay out the argument in full. Therefore, we want to single out just a few factors that explain why literary journalism has had such a complicated standing in these countries.

First, in comparison with United Kingdom and the United States, a striking lack of press freedom hindered journalistic media throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. German states formed a patchwork of local duchies and kingdoms with their varied regulations and restrictions on printing and publishing, which authorities sometimes changed haphazardly. This made journalistic endeavors prone to censorship. On a systemic level, the problem of censorship stalled journalistic innovations, such as, most obviously, a popular press with mass appeal and a concern for ordinary life that emerged later than in other countries.⁹ The inchoate public setting, in which journalism operated through most of the nineteenth century, made gathering and publishing information difficult. This was particularly true for journalists who dealt with social issues. One notable example is Heinrich Grunholzer’s account of visiting Vogtland, a settlement for the destitute on the outskirts of Berlin, at the advent of the Industrial Revolution in 1843.¹⁰ Grunholzer was a Swiss priest who compiled an eyewitness account of the hardships of the everyday life of Berlin’s poor and extensively interviewed people living in the Vogtland. This kind of social reportage was impossible to publish in the press. However, writer Bettina von Arnim included it in her remarkable social critique, *Dies Buch gehört dem König* [This book belongs to the king] (1843).¹¹

The first half of the nineteenth century marked a phase that Dieter Paul Baumert in 1928 identified as “Schriftstellerischer Journalismus”¹² that is, “authorial journalism.” It was a time when intellectual writers such as Heinrich von Kleist, Friedrich Schiller, and Heinrich Heine would write for newspapers. Nevertheless, except for Heine, who furnished lively accounts from Paris for Friedrich Cotta’s *Allgemeine Zeitung*,¹³ these writers neither practiced the

subjective and experiential style nor the immersive methods of the genre of reportage. Other writer-journalists such as Adolf Glassbrenner, Friedrich Saß, and Ernst Dronke, who were among the first to publish local reports and feuilletonist sketches about the growing cities, faced legal consequences, even imprisonment. Restrictions were less severe in the Austrian press, which is why the Viennese feuilleton is a prominent *genius loci*, a center, of literary journalism in the German-speaking world.¹⁴

Finally, at the end of the nineteenth century, a delayed “unleashing of mass communication”¹⁵ took place in the Wilhelmine and Austro-Hungarian Empires, and literary journalism entered its first real phase. Especially in the Berlin press, popular urban dailies reacted to a changing social landscape. As if to compensate for the pluralization and individualization of lifestyles, the fragmentation and loss of social identity, and the anonymity and restlessness of city life, journalism offered a complementary version of the urban experience. Local reporting now tried to be intimate and authentic by addressing readers in a distinct voice, focusing on ordinary people, and telling stories in a common idiom. Reporters, who often lacked a middle-class background and higher education, practiced the genre by exploring different styles and methods of writing about local events and bringing new perspectives into journalism. The writing itself shifted from the traditional feuilleton sketch toward a new form of reportage that combined literary techniques with ethnographic methods. This practice of social reportage originated in the editorial environment of progressive publications such as *Vorwärts* and *Welt am Montag* in Berlin and the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in Vienna. Reporters drew on their knowledge of certain milieus, which allowed for immersion, and quickly implemented their method and style in leading papers such as *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Berliner Morgenpost*. This contributed to commodifying and institutionalizing the genre of literary journalism in Germany.

After World War I, the newly formed Weimar Republic became a hotbed for literary journalism in the German-speaking world. Not only was the genre now visible in press reports, but the functions and forms of journalistic reportage also became the topic of critical reflection within the context of the literary theory of *Neue Sachlichkeit* (“new sincerity”).¹⁶ Today, that decade remains the epitome of literary journalism. Partly, this golden age came into being through a transformation in media, where journalistic publications diversified even as power concentrated along political lines. Apart from broadsheets such as *Vossische Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, where gifted reporters such as Kisch, Roth, Sling Schlesinger, and Moritz Goldstein found room for practicing literary journalism,¹⁷ high-brow weeklies, most notably Carl von Ossietzky’s *Weltbühne* and Stefan Großmann’s *Tage-Buch*, fervently

warned about the looming catastrophe of fascism in Germany by publishing exposés and biting social commentary.¹⁸ Through their work, a professional journalistic culture became palpable in Germany for the first time. The creative possibilities of literary journalists were further enhanced by popular new radio and film outlets producing documentary accounts of social life and contemporary events.

All this became yesterday's news when Adolf Hitler seized power on January 30, 1933. Swiftly, the Nazis dismantled the free press and other media and banned Jewish journalists from the newsrooms. From then on, there was no leeway for literary journalism in the Third Reich. Many journalists, authors, and other creative agents went into exile (if they could). Under duress, journalists such as Leopold Schwarzschild, Walter Mehring, Maria Leitner, and Leo Lania published from the Netherlands and France until the outbreak of World War II. Others migrated to the United States to establish a *press émigré* there to be a voice of democratic Germany.¹⁹ However, the status of literary journalism in this context remains largely unexplored to date.

After the fall of the Nazis and under the close watch of the Allied powers, German journalism and media were re-established and modeled after Anglo-sphere media systems.²⁰ In this regard, the paradigm of objective reporting narrowed the opportunities for literary journalism in the young Federal Republic of Germany. *Der Spiegel* and *Stern*, news magazines in the tradition of the U.S. *Time* and *Newsweek*, became venues for longform storytelling.

A historical blind spot of literary journalism research in Germany remains the GDR. Intuitively, this is unsurprising, as the party apparatus and the press were closely aligned and hindered independent and objective reporting. While this had left literary journalists room to operate in the GDR, the genre of reportage was held to high standards in the press and journalism education. The journalism section at the Karl Marx University in Leipzig had one of the most dedicated programs to teach journalistic methods and writing.²¹ The idea behind teaching reportage so prominently was to operationalize the potential of the genre to fulfill a specific function in picturing everyday life in the country and relate these vignettes to the ideals and ideology of socialism.

This made literary journalism more of a tool for propaganda, but the depth and detail of reflection produced by the Sektion Journalistik regarding methods and styles of reportage can be found in an updated handbook,²² which remains an invaluable source for studying and practicing the art of reportage in Germany. Apart from this theoretical groundwork, the GDR also produced several literary journalists who went on to German press careers after 1990. Among the most prominent writers is Alexander Osang, whose profiles of ordinary people and GDR celebrities have become iconic.²³

While the traditions of German literary journalism are rich, it seems odd that the term *Literarischer Journalismus*, that is, literary journalism, is largely uncommon in today's German newsrooms. Still, a first inventory has shown that there is a broad and maybe growing number of practitioners who are bringing back to life what their predecessors have cultivated for centuries.²⁴ So how do these contemporary literary journalists define their professional practice? On what structural and organizational bases do they ground their work? And what prospects do they see for their kind of reporting?

Functions of Literary Journalism

An analysis of interviews with practitioners conducted for the exploratory study mentioned above and a broad variety of other self-testimonies show that only some of those identified as literary journalists would describe themselves as such. On the one hand, authors such as Erwin Koch, Marie-Luise Scherer, Helge Timmerberg, and Moritz von Uslar experiment with freer forms of reporting and find their approach aptly described by the term. On the other hand are journalists who emphatically reject it. These include especially those journalists who work as reporters for the quality press, and thus, in the center of the journalistic system. They associate the word "literary" with an inadmissible fictionalization of the thematized material—a feeling that is firmly encapsulated in a statement by Sabine Rückert, currently deputy chief editor of the weekly *ZEIT*:

Literary journalism always has something dubious about it, so the question arises: Hasn't something been written into it? Literature aims at truth in a higher sense. But that doesn't have to be what really happened. Things that are true don't have to be real.²⁵

Such an assessment, however, does not change the fact that Rückert and other contemporary reporters also regularly resort to techniques of literary presentation in their published texts. They, too, deviate from the strict topicality principle of conventional news selection in their choice of topics. In this sense, they also function as a corrective to purely factual-information journalism—a quality that has been described as essential for German literary journalism.²⁶

A literary influence is also noticeable for many actors in the form of historical antecedents and models to which they refer in their journalistic activities: Indeed, formative references for them are often literary writers. Among the role models, important New Journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, and Gay Talese are frequently mentioned. However, the different traditions of German-language literary journalism play only a subordinate role for the current representatives of the genre.

Structures of Literary Journalism

A more detailed look at contemporary literary journalists' collection, selection, and presentation programs reveals that they differ fundamentally from the programs of news-based thematization. Otherwise, they are so diverse that they can hardly be reduced to a uniform denominator.

For genre representatives, text production is more like an artistic, creative process. It is often time-consuming—in all phases of journalistic operations, including the choice of topics, collection of information, as well as the writing process itself. A fitting example of this approach is longtime *Spiegel* author Marie-Luise Scherer, whose slowness is almost legendary:

I spend a whole night looking for the word, for the adjective for what a moth remedy smells like. If you smoke, that is already expensive for the adjective of a moth remedy. And then I have it, though. Strangely enough, I have the certainty that I will find it. That's quite strange, otherwise I don't find myself so equipped, but with the words I know I'll find it.²⁷

All in all, the forms of presentation in literary journalism are, of course, much freer than in news journalism—and, interestingly, there seems to be a fundamental openness to such forms in many German news organizations. In the case of a few media outlets, writers report specific constraints on the formal design of their articles, but overall, this seems to be the exception rather than the rule.

Most important, several actors view the general pressure to cut costs in the media industry with concern—a trend that is not only seen as a threat to literary journalism but also to journalism as a whole. Consequently, many literary journalists are increasingly turning to publications in book form, where the idealistic and financial incentives are apparently even greater than when working exclusively with journalistic newspapers and magazines.

Prospects for Literary Journalism

More than a few literary journalists point out that their timeless journalistic approach could become a unique selling point for the print industry. This argument can be understood by looking at the current economic success of some weekly newspapers and magazines in Germany. As the examples of *ZEIT* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* show, narrative, in-depth journalism can be sold—in some cases quite well.

In fact, the interview-study participants repeatedly expressed the hope that the need for narrative journalism will increase in the future, especially in light of the kind of journalism that currently dominates most online newsrooms. There, the fastest possible, up-to-the-minute news-ticker journalism is cultivated, which is the antithesis of literary journalism. It is in this deceleration that many literary journalists see a model for the future. Wolf Lotter, one

of the founders of *brand eins* magazine, says:

The descriptive, literary journalists who deal with an object that is relatively complex, or even highly complex, and who try to break it down and make it understandable through their description, the storytellers, have a much better future than those who write down facts. Quite simply: because they are complexity workers. That is the difference. . . . For the overall understanding of a more complex world, which often seems complicated, they need stories that summarize, they need round stories, they need basic stories that need to be told, and not fast food.”²⁸

Against this backdrop, some interviewees conclude that literary journalism in Germany need not worry about its future. On the contrary, it could even help print media gain a new appreciation by adapting at least some of the impact principles typical of literary journalism. In the long run, this appreciation could also enable them to assert themselves in the competition among media.

Special Issue

The preceding overview may show that the German-speaking world can look back on a noteworthy tradition of literary journalism—and offers first hints of a no less fascinating present age of the genre in today’s newsrooms. However, a coherent field of research that could make this treasure chest available to an international academic audience is still missing. This lack is not only a consequence of language barriers, but also a result of different research traditions within the academic world that have an interest in the study of literary journalism. Meanwhile, a lively interdisciplinary discourse between literary and journalism researchers, between humanities and social sciences, and between relevant adjacent disciplines remains an unfulfilled wish that is often thwarted by a strange and unreasonable fear of contact. While this special issue of *LJS* will hardly bridge existing gaps, it can perhaps offer the first building blocks for an interdisciplinary history of the genre that opens new horizons for a growing international research community.

To reach this goal, the special issue brings together five original research articles that cast a light on German literary journalism in different historical phases and from different perspectives:

Christine Boven provides an overview that explores the traditions of literary journalism in Germany by focusing on the most prominent forms, the *feuilleton*, and different kinds of reportage. By way of example, Boven introduces important protagonists and their texts, which she links to the historical and journalistic developments of the times in which they were written. At the same time, Boven applies a set of journalistic and literary criteria that characterize literary journalism to discuss similarities traceable through the centuries to identify challenges and trends of literary journalism in Germany today.

Kate McQueen sheds light on the legacy of pioneer journalist Max Winter (1870–1937), who spent nearly his entire journalistic career at Vienna’s *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. McQueen outlines the ways in which ideological conditions at this socialist newspaper de-emphasized the classic literary-journalistic tradition of feuilleton, creating space for Winter’s work to flourish. McQueen offers close readings and stylistic analysis of key texts that establish how Winter’s work expanded city coverage during the important historical and cultural moment known as “Vienna 1900.”

Maddalena Casarini discusses the role of literary journalism in courtroom reports during the Weimar Republic, focusing on the work of Elise Hirschmann (1894–1982), who wrote under her pen name Gabriele Tergit. The study analyzes Tergit’s writing on the highly debated *Paragraph 218*, the abortion article of the German Penal Code. The analysis points out the aesthetic peculiarities of Tergit’s articles and their potential to confront middle-class readers with bourgeois ideology. Further, Casarini questions how formal, political, and economic constraints influenced the development of court reporting as a journalistic and literary genre in the interwar years.

Peter Auf der Heyde’s contribution focuses on contemporary narrative sports-writer Ronald Reng, who achieved both critical acclaim and commercial success with his portrait of a goalkeeper who tried his luck as a professional in the English Premier League. Based on interviews with Reng, as well as other authors, Auf der Heyde develops the notion of a distinct field of sports literary journalism in Germany, one which has antecedents both within and outside of the country. In fact, his close reading of Reng’s writings discloses many parallels to the North American New Journalism of the 1960s that crossed the Atlantic with a distinct time lag.

Ina von der Wense and Vera Katzenberger, in the final research article, turn the spotlight on one of the biggest media scandals of the German-speaking world in the recent past. The reporter Claas Relotius had won some of the most prestigious journalism awards for his works in the news magazine *Der Spiegel*. However, his career came to an abrupt halt when a co-worker learned and revealed that most of his writings had been fabricated. The contributors analyze the fraud by engaging in a meta-journalistic discourse about the case and, on a larger scale, the ethical challenges of the verification process in reportage journalism. The study is based on an innovative combination of manual and automated content analyses that also offer methodological inspiration.

In addition to the five original research articles, the special issue also contains several book reviews related to the development of literary journalism in the German-speaking world. As guest editors for this issue, we are grateful to all contributors for their readiness to embark on a publication journey that can only be a point of departure for further explorations of the genre in the heart of Europe—and beyond.

Notes

- ¹ Allen, "The Trouble with Transparency," 323–40.
- ² Schudson, "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism," 149–70.
- ³ Dahlgren, "Media, Knowledge and Trust," 20–27.
- ⁴ van Krieken and Sanders, "What Is Narrative Journalism?" 1393–412.
- ⁵ Connery, "A Third Way to Tell the Story," 3–20.
- ⁶ Bak and Reynolds, *The Routledge Companion to World Literary Journalism*.
- ⁷ Eberwein, "Zur einföhrung: Wenn die blätter fallen" [Introductory note: when the leaves fall], in *Literarischer Journalismus* [Literary Journalism], 16–17. Unless otherwise noted, translations are provided by the article authors.
- ⁸ Fitzgerald, "The Continuous Line," 50, 57.
- ⁹ Birkner, "Journalism 1914," 155–56.
- ¹⁰ Grunholzer, "Erfahrungen eines jungen Schweizers im Vogtlande" [Experiences of a young Swiss in the Vogtland], 534–98. The Vogtland was a slum on the outskirts of Berlin.
- ¹¹ Michael, *Die Sozialreportage als Genre der Massenpresse* [Social reportage as a genre of the popular press], 50; see also, von Arnim, "Erfahrungen eines jungen Schweizers im Vogtlande" [Experiences of a young Swiss in the Vogtland], 534–98.
- ¹² Baumert, "Die Periode des schriftstellerischen Journalismus" [The period of authorial journalism], 35–46.
- ¹³ Pöttker, "Modellfall Heinrich Heine" [Exemplary case: Heinrich Heine], 58–61.
- ¹⁴ Eberwein, "Der 'andere' Journalismus" [The 'other' journalism], 5–16.
- ¹⁵ Wilke, *Grundzüge der Medien-und Kommunikationsgeschichte* [Fundamentals of media and communication history], 155. Original quote: "Entfesselung der Massenkommunikation."
- ¹⁶ For example, Leo Lania, "Reportage als soziale Funktion" [Reportage as social function], 171–73. Original quote: "Neue Sachlichkeit" ("new sincerity").
- ¹⁷ Eberwein, "'Ich zeichne das Gesicht der Zeit': Joseph Roth" ['I paint the face of time': Joseph Roth], 164–66; McQueen, "Into the Courtroom," 9–27; Ubens, ". . . den Stempel 'Inquit' einer Zeit aufgedrückt. Moritz Goldstein–Inquit–der Journalist," 93–121.
- ¹⁸ Fetz, "Zur Produktionsweise von Wien—Berlin Stereotypen," 382–88; Galus, *Heimat "Weltbühne."*
- ¹⁹ Spalek and Bell, *Exile: The Writer's Experience*, 3; Hardt, "Journalism in Exile," 68–81; Schwaiger, *Hinter der Fassade der Wirklichkeit*, 1–464; Leitner, *Mädchen mit drei Namen*.
- ²⁰ Beck, *Das Mediensystem Deutschlands* [The German media system], 35.
- ²¹ Meyen, "Die Erfindung der Journalistik in der DDR," 21–23.
- ²² Kurz et al., *Stilistik für Journalisten* [Style guide for journalists], 141–298.
- ²³ Osang, *Aufsteiger–Absteiger: Karrieren in Deutschland* [Parvenus and people who decline in social status: Careers in Germany].
- ²⁴ Eberwein, *Literarischer Journalismus Heute*, Part C, in *Literarischer Journalismus* [Literary Journalism], 150–215.
- ²⁵ Sabine Rückert, quoted in Eberwein, *Literarischer Journalismus* [Literary

Journalism], 164. (translation, Eberwein's). Original quote: "Literarischer Journalismus hat immer etwas unseriöses, da stellt sich die Frage: ist da nicht irgendetwas hineingedichtet worden? Literatur zielt ja auf die Wahrheit in einem höheren Sinne. Das muss aber nicht wirklich so passiert sein. Dinge, die wahr sind, müssen nicht wirklich sein." Sabine Rückert, seit über 20 Jahren für das "Dossier" der Zeit aktiv und seit Ende 2012 Mitglied der Chefredaktion des Wochenblattes, bringt dies auf den Punkt. Eberwein, *Literarischer Journalismus* [Literary Journalism], 160–61, identifies Rückert (Die Zeit) as one of a list of people interviewed from March 31, 2011, through June 4, 2012.

²⁶ Eberwein, *Literarischer Journalismus* [Literary Journalism], 101–49.

²⁷ Marie-Luise Scherer, in an interview with Knut Cordsen (see Dradio.de from January 2006); <http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/senungen/faxit/4600231/>, quoted in Eberwein, *Literarischer Journalismus* [Literary Journalism], 202–203. (translation, Eberwein's). Original quote: "Ich suche eine ganze Nacht nach dem Wort, nach dem Adjektiv dafür, wie ein Mottenmittel riecht. Das ist dann, wenn Sie rauchen, für das Adjektiv eines Mottenmittels schon teuer. Und dann habe ich es aber. Komischerweise habe ich die Gewissheit, dass ich es finde. Das ist ganz komisch, sonst empfinde ich mich gar nicht so ausgestattet, aber bei den Wörtern weiß ich, dass ich es finde."

²⁸ Wolf Lotter, quoted in Eberwein, *Literarischer Journalismus* [Literary Journalism], 213. (translation, Eberwein's). Original quote: "Die beschreibenden, literarischen Journalisten, die sich also mit einem Gegenstand auseinandersetzen, der relativ komplex ist, oder hochkomplex ist sogar, und die versuchen, den durch ihre Beschreibung runterzuberechnen und verstehbar zu machen, die Geschichtenerzähler, haben eine wesentlich bessere Zukunft als die, die Fakten aufschreiben. Schlicht und ergreifend: weil sie Komplexitätsarbeiter sind. Das ist der Unterschied. . . . Zum Gesamtverständnis einer komplexeren Welt, die oft kompliziert scheint, brauchen sie Geschichten, die zusammenfassen, brauchen sie runde Geschichten, brauchen sie grundlegende Geschichten, die erzählt werden müssen, und keine Häppchen."

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