

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IALJS

LITERARY JOURNALISM

VOL 4 NO 2

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR LITERARY JOURNALISM STUDIES

SPRING 2010

REGISTRATION INFO FOR ANNUAL MEETING IN LONDON IN MAY

The registration for our annual conference in May at Roehampton University in London can be completed on our web site <http://www.ialjs.org/?page_id=37> using your credit card and our PayPal account. You may also register with the form on Page 3 inside. As with past conferences, there is a substantial discount for early registration which we hope that you will find attractive.

FUTURE SITES FOR CONFERENCES

The following future IALJS convention venues have been confirmed.

IALJS-5: Roehampton University, London, U.K., 20-22 May 2010.

IALJS-6: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Brussels, Belgium, 12-14 May 2011.

IALJS-7: Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada, 17-19 May 2012.

IALJS-8: University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida, U.S.A., 9-11 May 2013.

IALJS-9: University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland, 15-17 May 2014.

IALJS-10: Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, 7-9 May 2015.

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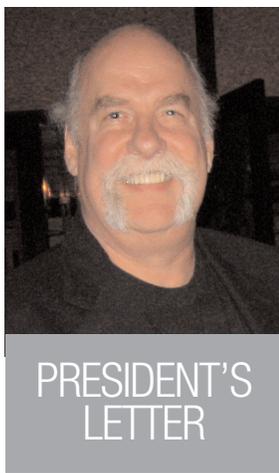
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WWW.IALJS.ORG

LONDON IN THE LATE SPRINGTIME

*Or, if you prefer, at the first blush of
summer...see you at IALJS-5.*

By David Abrahamson, Northwestern (U.S.A.)



It has been said before, but it can perhaps bear repeating: As with almost all learned societies, the underlying purpose of our association is twofold: the organizing of our annual conference and the preparation and publication of our peer-

reviewed scholarly journal, *Literary Journalism Studies*.

I am happy to be able to report that, through the hard work of editor John Hartsock and his staff, the third issue of our journal is in the final steps of preparation. Every member who has paid their 2010 annual dues should be receiving a copy of Volume 2 Number 1 (Spring 2010) by mail sometime next month.

On the conference front, our association's fifth annual convention has—through the tireless efforts of Isabel Soares, the chair of our Research Committee, and Program Committee chair Norm Sims—come together very nicely. An eclectic mix of research paper sessions, work-in-progress presentations and invited panels all speak to the conference's title, "Literary Journalism: Perspectives and Prospects." A complete day-by-day version of the 2010 conference program begins on Page 6 inside.

It is especially rewarding that the host of our annual meeting this year is one

of our association's founding members, Susan Greenberg of Roehampton University. With the generous support of her university's Centre for Research in Creative and Professional Writing and with the kind assistance of the chair of our Conference Planning committee, Maria Lassilo-Marisalo of the University of Jyväskylä, Susan has attended to a wealth of details to insure that the 20-22 May meeting in London will be a memorable one. An interesting article about the Centre, its history and its programs can be found on Page 2.

Given all the accommodation options in London, we thought it best not to have an official "convention hotel" for this annual meeting. However, Roehampton University does have a published list of suggested hotels, and

The deadline for the discounted "early-bird" conference registration is 31 March. Please see Page 6 for the conference program as well.

we have included it, along with a few additional informational web sites, on the Registration Form on Page 3.

I should also note that my two-year term as president ends in May, when I will hand a ceremonial gavel over to Alice Trindade of the Universidade Técnica de Lisboa. A founding member of IALJS, Alice will bring her gracious wisdom, scholarly excellence and, not least, extraordinary kindness to her role as our president—and it is certain that she, along with incoming V.P. Bill Reynolds, will ensure the continued success of our wonderful association.

In closing, my heartfelt thanks to each and all who made my own term such a rewarding experience. ♦

OUR VENUE FOR IALJS-5

Our host is Roehampton University's Centre for Research in Creative and Professional Writing.

By Susan Greenberg, Roehampton University (U.K.)



The host of the 2010 conference in London is ReWrite, the Centre for Research in Creative and Professional Writing, at Roehampton University. The Centre was founded in 2007 by the Creative Writing program, with members drawn from staff and research students across the university. Although we all work in different genres and disciplines, we share a fascination with the overlooked, marginalized or hidden aspects of writing. We see writing as a form of discovery and knowl-

edge in its own right, and ask questions about what we know (and how we know it). We think about disruption, diaspora and translation; the making of texts and the teaching of this process.

The aim of the Centre is to provide a space in which we can explore our overlapping interests, looking at the significance of writing as a professional activity and the nature of creative practice in a way that remains alive to the practitioner. Past events have included a visit by English PEN; a seminar on history and memory; readings of postgraduate students' work and talks on editing, the critical reflection essay, the contemporary free verse sonnet and film adaptation.

The Creative Writing program at Roehampton offers both undergraduate

and postgraduate degrees, including the MRes and PhD. It is one of only a few Creative Writing departments in the U.K. to offer nonfiction, as well as innovative fiction and poetry, writing for children, travel writing, screenwriting, internet publishing and stand-up comedy. All teaching staff are published writers and there is a rolling programme of fellowships—current holders are Jacqueline Wilson and Daljit Khan. The London location provides a base from which to investigate and participate in the capital's varied literary communities.

The university dates back to the 1840s as a collection of teachers colleges that were the first in the U.K. to admit women

Roehampton became an independent university in 2005, but dates back to the 1840s as a collection of teacher training colleges, among the first in the UK to admit women. It is located in southwest London, near Richmond Park (where the deer roam freely).

And one last little known fact: The university is also near the London Wetlands Centre in Barnes. This puts it in fourth place nationally—and first in London—as the university campus with

SET AMIDST A NUMBER OF NEWER AND MORE MODERN BUILDINGS, THE STATELY WHITELANDS ON THE ROEHAMPTON CAMPUS RECALLS A MORE GENTEEL ERA.



IALJS- 5 CONFERENCE SCHEDULE SUMMARY

Wednesday, 19 May 2010

Session 0 16.00 – 18.00 Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, 20 May 2010

Sign in 8.00 – 9.00 Pick up conference materials
 Session 1 9.00 – 9.15 Welcome and Introduction
 Session 2 9.15 – 10.15 Work-in-Progress Session I
 Session 3 10.30 – 11.30 Research Paper Session I
 Session 4 11.45 – 12.30 Keynote Speech
 Lunch 12.30 – 13.45
 Session 5 13.45 – 14.30 Chancellor's Reading
 Session 6 14.45 – 15.45 Work-in-Progress Session II
 Session 7 16.00 – 17.00 Panels I and II
 Session 8 17.15 – 18.15 Research Paper Session II
 Session 9 18.30 – 19.00 Status Report: *Literary Journalism Studies*

Friday, 21 May 2010

Breakfast 7.30 – 8.30 Scholars' Breakfast (per reservation)
 Session 10 9.00 – 10.00 Panels III and IV
 Session 11 10.15 – 11.15 Work-in-Progress Session III
 Session 12 11.30 – 12.30 Research Paper Session III
 Lunch 12.30 – 14.15
 Session 13 14.15 – 15.15 Work-in-Progress Session IV
 Session 14 15.30 – 16.30 President's Address & Annual Business Mtg
 Reception 16.45 – 18.00 Conference Reception
 Dinner 19.00 – 21.00 Conference Banquet (venue tba)

Saturday, 22 May 2010

Session 15 9.00 – 10.00 Panels V and VI
 Session 16 10.15 – 11.15 Work-in-Progress Session V
 Session 17 11.30 – 12.30 Closing Convocation
 Lunch 12.30 – 14.15

the highest density of ducks.

For more information, see:
<http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/research-centres/rewrite/index.html>
<http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/about/location/gallery/index.asp>
http://duckdensity.org.uk/uni_info?uni_ID=surrey ♦



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2010 IALJS CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM
20-22 May 2010
Roehampton University, School of Arts, London, U.K.

1.a. PRE-REGISTRATION FEES (MUST BE POSTMARKED ON OR BEFORE 31 MARCH 2010)		Please indicate the applicable amounts:
Current IALJS Member – \$120 / 80 Euros	<i>(rate for those already having paid their 2010 dues)</i>	
Current IALJS Member retired – \$100 / 65 E	<i>(rate for those already having paid their 2010 dues)</i>	
Student with research paper on program – \$30 / 20 E	<i>(Includes a one-year IALJS membership)</i>	
Student without paper on program – \$60 / 40 E	<i>(Includes a one-year IALJS membership)</i>	
Non-IALJS member – \$170 / 110 E	<i>(Includes a one-year IALJS membership)</i>	
Spouse/Partner – \$50 / 35 E <i>(This fee is required only if a spouse will be attending scheduled research sessions and/or panels)</i>		
1.b. REGISTRATION FEES POSTMARKED AFTER 31 MARCH 2010 <i>(Note: Meals & special events may not be available to those who register after 31 March 2010)</i>		
Current IALJS Member – \$155 / 105 Euros	<i>(rate for those already having paid their 2010 dues)</i>	
Current IALJS Member retired – \$135 / 90 E	<i>(rate for those already having paid their 2010 dues)</i>	
Student with research paper on program – \$65 / 45 E	<i>(Includes a one-year IALJS membership)</i>	
Student without paper on program – \$95 / 65 E	<i>(Includes a one-year IALJS membership)</i>	
Non-IALJS member – \$205 / 135 E	<i>(Includes a one-year IALJS membership)</i>	
Spouse/Partner – \$85 / 55 E <i>(This fee is required only if a spouse will be attending scheduled research sessions and/or panels)</i>		
1.c. ON-SITE REGISTRATION – \$180 / 120 Euros for IALJS members, \$230 / 155 E for non-members <i>(Note: Meals & special events may not be available to those who register on site)</i>		
2. SPECIAL EVENTS: Please indicate the number of meals required next to each item below		
	Number of meals needed:	<i>Regular</i>
Scholars Breakfast* (Friday)	Number attending x \$15 / 10 Euros	<i>Vegetarian</i>
<small>*NOTE: The Scholars Breakfast is a pleasant collegial IALJS tradition at which graduate students present their work and career goals to the association's faculty members.</small>		
<small>Conference Banquet (Friday): This year's somewhat less-formal conference banquet will not require prior registration. Payment will be due at conclusion of meal.</small>		
Make registration checks payable to "IALJS"		TOTAL ENCLOSED:
Please return completed form with a check or bank transfer payable to "IALJS" to >>> To register on-line via PayPal, please see "Payments" at WWW.IALJS.ORG	BILL REYNOLDS, IALJS Treasurer School of Journalism Ryerson University 350 Victoria St., Toronto, Ontario M5B 2K3 CANADA Tel: +01-416-979-5000 x6294 Fax: +01-416-979-5216 reynolds@ryerson.ca	A selection of hotels listed by Roehampton University include: Best Western Lodge Hotel - http://www.thelodgehotellondon.com Holiday Inn Express/London Hammersmith - http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/ex/hotel/lonhs Holiday Inn Express/Wandsworth - http://www.ichotelsgroup.com/h/d/ex/1/en/hotel/lonwd Hotel Lily - http://www.hotellily.co.uk/ London Penn Club - http://www.pennclub.co.uk/ Novotel London West - http://www.novotellondonwest.co.uk/ Travel Inn/Putney Bridge - http://www.premierinn.com/pt/hotelInformation.do?hotelId=23883 London Tourist Board - http://www.visitlondon.com/ B&Bs in SW London - http://www.barnesbedandbreakfast.co.uk/
3. REGISTRATION INFO		
Name:		
Address/Department		
School/University		
City, State, Zip, Country		
Phone		
E-mail Address		
Name of Spouse (if attending)		

READING LIST

Our colleagues in the discipline have particular favorites in the broad canon of

literary journalism that they have found to have special meaning both in and out of the classroom. Their nominees are the books and/or articles they find uniquely useful examples of the craft.

- Rob Alexander (Brock University, Canada) recommends **"Finding Dolly Freed"** by **Paige Williams** from *Poosum Living* (6 January 2010) both "for its fascinating subject and as an example of an alternative business model for long-form narrative journalism. It's notable that Williams refers to her pay-what-you-can model as 'Radiohead Journalism.'" For more information, please see <<http://www.-paige-williams.com>>. In addition, National Public Radio's *On the Media* featured Williams and her story in a segment aired 15 January 2010, archived and available at <<http://www.-onthemedia.org>>.

- Norman Sims (University of Massachusetts-Amherst, U.S.A.) suggests **Michael Paterniti's "Eating Jack Hooker's Cow"** from *Esquire* magazine (November 1997).

WORK OF INTEREST

Association members often have interesting work that is recently published. A some-

what modest but heartfelt celebration of their accomplishments follows:

- **Willa McDonald** (Macquarie University, Australia) has authored a new book, ***Warrior for Peace:***

Dorothy Auchert-lonie Green (Sydney: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2010), a biography of the Australian journalist-activist. A teacher, literary critic and poet, Green had a prominent role in the founding of the Australian Association for Armed Neutrality and the Nuclear Disarmament Party.

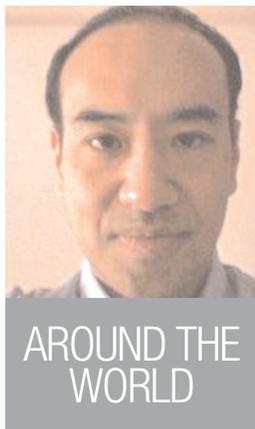


LITERARY JOURNALISM IN JAPAN

A growing interest in long-form nonfiction narratives.

By Miki Tanikawa, Contributor to the International Herald Tribune (Japan)

Literature in all its known forms in the West can be found in Japan: novels, poems, dramas. Virtually all literary varieties known in the Western world exist in Japan in some form, with some dating back to the 11th century when the popular



Tale of Genji was produced. Likewise, journalism's various forms have Japanese peers, including a "literary journalism" tradition that is in ample supply.

Japanese national dailies such as *Asahi*, *Yomiuri* and *Mainichi* regu-

larly run features that open with anecdotal "ledes" followed by what appears to be a "nut graph." Narrative techniques are often used to vividly describe scenes of civil wars in Africa or the social dilemmas faced by *haken shain* or temporary workers who lost their jobs due to recession.

Non-fiction authors have experimented with varying degrees of success employing the literary techniques commonly used by American feature writers and novelists. The American "New Journalism" of the 1960s inspired a cohort of Japanese literary nonfiction writers, who created such works as *Fukushu Suruwa Ware ni Ari* by Ryuzo Saki—which was made into a movie in 1979 with the translated title *Vengeance Is Mine* that one critic called "the finest Japanese film of the 1970s"—and *Teroru No Kessan* by Kotaro Sawaki, which was a report on the assassination of Socialist Party president by a right-wing youth.

The former, which owes its narrative style to the American classic *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote, earned the writer one of the two most prestigious Japanese literary awards, the Naoki Prize. Both authors have become acclaimed non-fiction writers with a wide readership and significant name recognition.

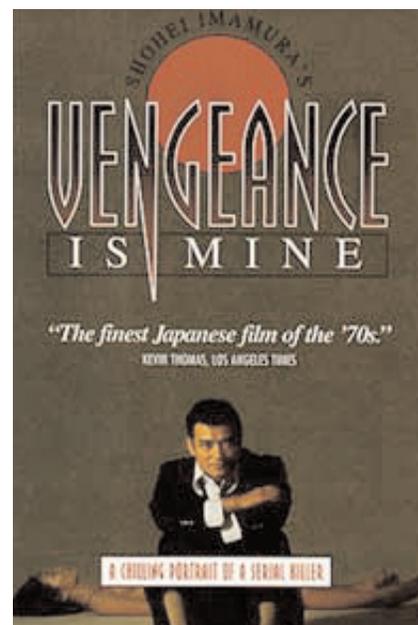
In addition, Japanese academia has convened conferences, symposiums and workshops on the subject of American journalism and narrative journalism, notably by the Japan Society for Studies in Journalism and Mass Communication.

However, despite its growth, there

There is a tendency in Japanese journalism to separate newspapers from their nonfiction brethren

are few efforts either by writers or scholars to define the genre. Admittedly, there is a tendency in Japanese journalism to separate newspaper journalism from its nonfiction brethren that takes the form of books. Most likely, any literary development in newspa-

Continued on next page



AN INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED FILM WAS PRODUCED FROM A WORK OF JAPANESE NONFICTION WHICH ALSO WON THE PRESTIGIOUS NOAKI PRIZE.

JAPAN *Continued from previous page*

per journalism is very likely to be conceived separately from a similar nonfiction style, and maybe even from magazine journalism.

The reason for this is that newspapers and wire services pride themselves on being the only sources of serious print journalism in Japan, which feeds this separatist tendency.

Other than a few examples of literary tendencies in journalism mentioned above, it is difficult to notice any rigor in journalists' efforts to pursue literary or novelistic techniques, especially in newspaper journalism. The objectification of news reporting—which became a fierce trend after World War II in an attempt to divorce itself from the wartime stigma of being a government propaganda—made little room for creative writing. Other than occasional features and investigative pieces that ran inside the newspapers, there was little deviation from the standard hard news style.

Some observers have pointed out that the literary tendencies in news writing were more pronounced before the war, especially during the so-called Taisho Democracy period of the 1910s and the 1920s at a time when newspaper journalism reached its pre-war pinnacle

in terms of readership and enjoyed relative freedom from political meddling. Journalists and editors then often talked about *bibun kisha*, or “stylistic writer,” whose artistic writing styles were both revered and regarded as marketable.

Newspaper and wire service journalists today agree that the appellation, *bibun kisha* (sometimes *meibun kisha*) has fallen into disuse, and no new term has taken its place. This may be because today elaborate writing is not considered the most useful skill for newspaper reporters. Moreover, at least officially, objective, fact-based reporting is what news organizations stand for.



However, one can hope that the seeds of literary journalism have been sowed in Japan—and even may have begun to sprout. Though “straight” ledes and other hard news staples are still largely the norm, there may be a growing interest in Japan in narrative and descriptive long-form journalism that may grow as it flourishes in the West. ♦

TEACHING TIPS *Continued from Page 22*

the long-standing influences and traditions that have shaped literary journalism. William Hazlitt’s brilliant essay “The Fight” becomes much more enlightening, for example, when read alongside an excerpt from Mailer’s *The Fight*; each piece informs the other, deepening students’ understanding of how literary journalism works.

5. Considering students’ interests. By the time students reach my History of Journalism class, I have usually taught them at least once before, generally in another small class. I know them quite well, and have been helping them write and publish stories over a couple of years. I usually know what sort of jour-

nalism they would like to be composing when they join a newsroom. This information is very helpful when choosing

As teachers, we must
consider which
pieces we put in front of students

supplementary examples to add to a class discussion each year; I know, for example, that some of the more introverted and reflective students will love Joan Didion’s work, while the activists will warm to

John Pilger.

It is a challenge to promote literary journalism to students who came to university to learn how to make contacts, conduct interviews, and write in the inverted pyramid format. But being exposed to this genre of writing in the classroom is an important part of their professional development and shouldn’t be overlooked.

As teachers, we need to consider which pieces we put in front of such students and how those pieces will help to convert even the most resistant reader to the joys of literary journalism. ♦

**International Association for Literary Journalism Studies
IALJS-5 CONFERENCE PROGRAM**

**“Literary Journalism: Perspectives and Prospects”
The Fifth International Conference for Literary Journalism Studies**

**Roehampton University
Department of English and Creative Writing
Centre for Research in Creative and Professional Writing (ReWrite)
London, U.K.**

20-22 May 2010



Thursday, 20th May 2010

8.00 – 8:45 Check-in and Registration

Session 1 9.00 – 9:15 Introduction and Welcome

Susan Greenberg (Roehampton University, U.K.)
Jenny Hartley, Head, Department of English and Creative Writing (Roehampton University, U.K.)

Session 2 9.15 – 10.15 Work-in-Progress Session I

Session Title: “Literary Journalism and Subject Specialization”

(NOTE: Poster/Work-in-Progress Presentations are 10 minutes each)

Moderator: David Abrahamson (Northwestern University, U.S.A.)

1. Rob Steen (University of Brighton, U.K.), “Neville Cardus, Roger Angell and the Art of Transatlantic Sports Journalism”
2. Alex Lockwood (University of Sunderland, U.K.), “The Affective Response of Literature in the Long-Form Journalism of Climate Change”
3. Todd Schack and Erica Hendry (Ithaca College, U.S.A.), “Knowing the Enemy: War and the Public Interest in Literary and Conventional Journalism”
4. Linda Keefe (University of Minnesota, U.S.A.), “Narrative Journalism in Podcasts and Streaming Radio: Telling 21st-Century Stories Through an Old Medium New Ways”

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Continued on next page

Session 3 10.30 – 11.30 Research Paper Session I

Session Title: “Literary Journalism Across the Waters”

(NOTE: Research Paper Presentations are 15 minutes each)

Moderator: Norm Sims (University of Massachusetts - Amherst, U.S.A.)

1. Murray Hunter (School of Oriental and African Studies, U.K.), “Writing in Crisis: South African Literary Journalism and the Limits of the ‘National Conversation’”
2. Pablo Calvi (Columbia University, U.S.A.), “An Approach to Narrative Journalism in Latin America and the U.S.A.”
3. Sue Joseph (University of Technology, Sydney, Australia), “Australian Creative Non-Fiction: Perspectives and Opinions”

Q&A – 15 minutes total

Session 4 11.45 – 12.30 Keynote Speech

Introduction: Maria Lassila-Merisalo (University of Jyväskylä, Finland)

Title: “Literary Journalism: Contracts and Double Contracts with the Readers”

Jo Bech-Karlsen (Norwegian School of Management BI, Norway)

Q&A – 15 minutes total

Lunch 12.30 – 13.45 (on your own)

Session 5 13.45 – 14.30 Chancellor's Presentation

John Simpson, Chancellor (Roehampton University, U.K.)

Session 6 14.45 – 15.45 Work-in-Progress Session II

Session Title: “Literary Journalism: Theoretical/Practical Approaches”

Moderator: Isabel Soares (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal)

1. Josh Roiland (St. Louis University, U.S.A.), “Engaging the Public: A Political Theory of Literary Journalism”
2. Tobias Eberwein (Technische Universität Dortmund, Germany), “Bringing in Structure: A Systems Theoretical View on Literary Journalism”
3. Marcel Broersma (University of Groningen, The Netherlands) and Verica Rupar (Cardiff University, U.K.), “The Power of Narrative Journalism: A Comparative Approach to Award-Winning Reporting”
4. Carolyne Lee (University of Melbourne, Australia) and Sonja Merljak-Zdovec (University of Primorska, Slovenia), “Perspectives and Prospects in Teaching Literary Journalism: A Critical Comparison Between Australia and Slovenia”

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Continued on next page

Session 7a 16.00 – 17.00 Panel I

Panel Title: "Ethical Issues in Literary Journalism "

(NOTE: Panel Presentations are 10 minutes each)

Moderator: Tom Connery (University of St. Thomas, U.S.A.)

Tom Connery (University of St. Thomas, U.S.A.)
Kathy Roberts Forde (University of South Carolina, U.S.A.)
Russell Frank (Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A.)
Jenny McKay (University of Stirling, Scotland, U.K.)

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 7b 16.00 – 17.00 Panel II

Panel Title: "Commonalities Across Continents: Revolution and Social Change"

Moderator: John Bak (Nancy-Université, France),

Brian Gabriel (Concordia University, Canada)
Linda Kay (Concordia University, Canada)
Nancy Roberts (State University of New York, Albany, U.S.A.)

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 8 17.15 – 18.15 Research Paper Session II

Session Title: "Contemporary Issues in Literary Journalism"

Moderator: John Hartsock (State University of New York, Cortland, U.S.A.)

1. Amy Snow Landa (University of Minnesota, U.S.A.), "Bridging the Gap Between Literature and Journalism: What Literary Journalism Offers the Field of Biomedical Ethics"
2. Nora Berning (University of Hamburg, Germany), "Narrative Journalism in the Age of the Internet: New Ways to Create Authenticity in Online Literary Reportages"
3. Miles Maguire (University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, U.S.A.), "Post-Traumatic Truth: How war Stories Change from Newspaper to Memoir in the Writings of Dexter Filkins"

Q&A – 15 minutes total

Session 9 18.30 – 19.00 Status Report on *Literary Journalism Studies*

Editor: John Hartsock (State University of New York, Cortland, U.S.A.)

19.00 – ? Informal drinks and Dinner (on your own)

Continued on next page

Friday, 21th May 2010

Breakfast 7.30 – 8.30 Scholar's Breakfast (at Duchesne Building, Room 306, per reservation)

Moderators: Norm Sims (University of Massachusetts - Amherst, U.S.A.) and Joshua Roiland (St. Louis University, U.S.A.)

“The Future of Literary Journalism and Literary Journalism Scholarship”

Session 10a 9.00 – 10.00 Panel III

Panel Title: “Re-Visioning Hunter S. Thompson's Literary Journalism”

Moderator: Bill Reynolds (Ryerson University, Canada)

Robert Alexander (Brock University, Canada)
Jason Mosser (Georgia Gwinnett College, U.S.A.)
Nick Nuttall (Lincoln University, U.K.)
Bill Reynolds (Ryerson University, Canada)
Jen Russell (University of Warwick, U.K.)

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 10b 9.00 – 10.00 Panel IV

Panel Title: “Comparative Nonfiction: The Latin American Perspectives”

Moderator: Rosalind Coward (Roehampton University, U.K.)

Pablo Calvi (Columbia University, U.S.A.)
Roberto Herrscher (Universitat de Barcelona, Spain)
José Luis Ortiz Garza (Universidad Panamericana, México)

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 11 10.15 – 11.15 Work-in-Progress Session III

Session Title: “Literary Journalism and the Primacy of Storytelling”

Moderator: Susan Greenberg (Roehampton University, U.K.)

1. John Bak (Nancy-Université, France), “From Rails to Tales: Literary Journalism’s Fascination with the Railroad”
2. Maria Lassila-Merisalo (University of Jyväskylä, Finland), “Unreliable Narrator and Literary Journalism: The Case of ‘Bachelors Night Out with Sir Vili’”
3. Willa McDonald (Macquarie University, Australia), “*A Vagabond*: The Literary Journalism of John Stanley James”

4. Giulia Bruna (University College Dublin, Ireland), "J. M. Synge the Literary Journalist: the Wicklow Articles and the Reportage in the Congested Districts"

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 12 11.30 – 12.30 Research Paper Session III

Session Title: "Literary Journalism: Influence and Influences"

Moderator: Josh Roiland (St. Louis University, U.S.A.)

1. Ana Maria Ciobanu (University of Bucharest, Romania), "The Influence of Literary Journalism on Romanian Readers"
2. Kathy Roberts Forde (University of South Carolina, U.S.A.), "The Emergence and Expansion of Literary Journalism Studies: Building a Cathedral of Knowledge"
3. Tom Connery (University of St. Thomas, U.S.A.), "America's *Flaneur* and the Stirrings of Literary Journalism"

Q&A – 15 minutes total

Lunch 12.30 – 14.15 (on your own)

Session 13 14.15 – 15.15 Work-in-Progress Session IV

Session Title: "Literary Journalism: The Truth Well Told"

Moderator: Isabelle Meuret (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium)

1. James Polchin (New York University, Paris, France), "'Scene of the Crime: Janet Malcolm's *The Journalist and the Murderer* Twenty Years Later"
2. Roberta Maguire (University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, U.S.A.), "Riffing on Hemingway and Burke, Responding to Mailer and Wolfe: Albert Murray's 'Anti-Journalism' in *South to a Very Old Place*"
3. Paul Ashdown (University of Tennessee, U.S.A.), "*A Night Wind Can Summarize a Continent: James Agee and the Journalism of Literary Assessment*"
4. Jorge Bastos da Silva (Universidade do Porto, Portugal), "When Did Literary Journalism Arise? Remarks on the Early English Periodical"

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 14 15.30 – 16.30 President's Address and Annual Business Meeting/Election

Reception 16.45 – 18.00 Conference Reception (School of Arts)

Dinner 19.00 – 21.00 Conference Banquet, per reservation w/separate checks at "The Bridge" (204 Castelnau, Barnes, near Hammersmith Bridge)

Continued on next page

Saturday, 22th May 2010

Session 15a 9.00 – 10.00 Panel V

Panel Title: “Literary Journalist as Sociologist”

Moderator: Willa McDonald (Macquarie University, Australia)

William Dow (Université Paris-Est and the American University of Paris, France)

Isabel Soares (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal)

Alice Donat Trindade (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal)

Romana Xerez (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal)

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 15b 9.00 – 10.00 Panel VI

Panel Title: “Literary Journalism: Pedagogical Strategies”

Moderator: Robert Alexander (Brock University, Canada)

Susan Greenberg (Roehampton University, U.K.)

John Hanc (New York Institute of Technology, U.S.A.)

Melissa Nurczynski, (Kutztown University, U.S.A.)

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 16 10.15 – 11.15 Work-in-Progress Session V

Session Title: “Literary Journalism's Unblinking Eye”

Moderator: Alice Donat Trindade (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal)

1. Beate Josephi (Edith Cowan University, Australia) and Christine Müller (BiTS, Germany), “The Importance of Being Eyewitness”

2. Leonora Flis (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia), “Transmission/Representation of Fact/History in the Non-Fiction Graphic Novel: Joe Sacco’s Literary Journalism Depicting the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”

3. Isabel Ermida (University of Minho, Portugal), “Literary Glimpses at 9/11: Us and Them in the Age of Terror”

4. Isabelle Meuret (Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium), “Representing America: When Photojournalism Meets Literary Journalism”

Q&A – 20 minutes total

Session 17 11.30 – 12.00 Closing Convocation

Alice Donat Trindade (Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, Portugal)

Call for Submissions

Literary Journalism Studies

Published by the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies

Literary Journalism Studies, a peer-reviewed journal sponsored by the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS), invites submissions of scholarly articles on literary journalism, which is also known as narrative journalism, narrative nonfiction, literary reportage, reportage literature, New Journalism and the nonfiction novel, as well as literary nonfiction that emphasizes cultural revelation. The journal is international in scope and seeks submissions on the theory, history and pedagogy of literary journalism throughout the world. All disciplinary approaches are welcome.

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RUNNING WITH TRUTHINESS

Or the story of the cat in the middle of the night.

By Madeleine Blais, University of Massachusetts, Amherst (U.S.A.)

For more than twenty years, I have taught memoir writing to undergraduates at the University of Massachusetts and to adults in workshops in the United States as well as internationally. These students have one crucial quality in common. They are willing to embark on that most treacherous of journeys—to enter what William Butler Yeats called the abyss of the self. I



GUEST
ESSAY

always urge all my students to keep in mind that even though the word memoir sounds dainty and scented, like bon bon or boudoir, it is not a genre for the faint of heart. First of all, the very material that makes its way into memoir is often heart-breaking. Second, the writers receive criticism not just for the writing, but also for kind of person they admit to being in the course of recounting their stories. Third, as a genre it is filled with potential ethical quagmires of concern to anyone who reads, writes, or teaches memoir, or, as in my case, anyone who does all three.

The moral dilemmas embodied in memoir do not constitute easygoing terrain for practitioners who care about getting it right. Some commonly troubling questions include: What are the limits of memory and how do you overcome them? What about taking other people's memories and presenting them as your own? What are the rules about consolidating scenes, making composites out of various people, and reordering chronology? Is there such a thing as an honest mistake? What about discrepancies that can never really be reconciled? Is it all right to use fake names? What is the relationship between memoir and fiction? Is it all right to make things up on the grounds that psychic truth is more real than any other, which can end up with the writer imputing to people things they didn't do, but which they might have if they had been given half the chance? The following discussion is an attempt to grapple with each of these questions with a frank admission from the start that the answers given here are not so much answers as they are deeper explorations of the questions themselves.

What are the limits of memory and how do you overcome them? On the one hand, there is an observable world out there—even the nihilists who argue that reality is just a social construct agree that at noon it is generally a good time to eat lunch and that when it rains you need an umbrella—and it is to some degree that physical world the memoir writer tries to negotiate, with memory as a guide.

On the other hand, memoir also navigates psychological landscapes, which are personal and interior by definition. In its interiority, memoir is a close cousin of fiction and the writer of memoir operates on an imaginative plane far different from that of

the regular journalist, certainly that of the nuts and bolts reporter who, covering bond issues at a selectmen's meetings, traffics in real time and real money and real spread sheets. Readers get it that in any memoir there has to be some degree of ambiguity. They are not expecting a memoir to be the equivalent of an interrogation room filled with fluorescent lights and lie detectors and sworn affidavits, yet they also want some sense that you are who you say you are and that you are doing the best job possible to tell the truth as you know it, with the understanding that truth operates on more than one level and that truth and fact are often at odds with each other. Unless you count certain sports cars manufactured in Italy, I am not certain there is anything more skittish and less reliable than memory. You can't vet memory. You can't fact check someone's feelings about a playground dispute from thirty years ago. The two-source rule of investigative journalism doesn't work when the people you are writing about are often dead or long gone from your life. As Virginia Holman wrote in *Rescuing Patty Hearst*, "Venturing into the past is like taking a shot over the shoulder and the landscape of memory is, at best, viewed through a small and blighted mirror." Most memoir writers understand, and figure out a way to work with, the flaws and the limitations inherent in the process and to even turn them to advantage.

The conflict between what is knowable and what can only be guessed at is so powerful that many memoir writers feel compelled to make note of how they came to their material, such as Mary Cantwell in *Manhattan, When I was Young*, recalling her first migraine:

Memory, I am told, is selective—but not mine. "Selective" implies choice, and I have none. I recall completely or I am afflicted with amnesia. There is no in-

between. So believe me when I say that I can remember how gray the sky was that afternoon, and how bits of paper were scudding across Second Avenue, and how the smell of my egg salad sandwich kept exploding in my mouth. Above all, I can remember the pain. It was as if someone were hammering a spike through my eye socket."

In the wake of several well-publicized scandals, author's notes at the beginning or the end of a text are becoming increasingly common. As Jennifer Finney Boylan wrote at the start of her book, *I'm Looking Through You: Growing Up Haunted*:

Since this is the story that I have chosen to tell and not necessarily the one that others would relate, given their

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druthers, all individuals appear in the story under pseudonyms; some have been obscured still further, in the hope of making them unrecognizable. The book contains no composite characters. The timeline has been expanded or contracted to fit the story's demands, and dialogue invented, in good faith, when memory failed. The story contains occasional elements of invention, in keeping with the facts of my life, not in order to shamelessly bamboozle the reader but in order to fill in gaps in the narrative, or to dramatize scenes that I did not witness firsthand.

For a strict reading of the constitution on how to maintain a code of ethics while writing memoir, I recommend an essay called "The Writer's Choice" by Walt Harrington, inspired by his time as a reporter at the *Washington Post* in 1981 back when Janet Cooke's article "Jimmy's World" about an eight year old heroin addict was exposed as a fraud. The incident intensified in Harrington what had already been bred in the bone during his early training as a reporter, so that when he wrote his own memoir *The Everlasting Stream*, even the "paragraphs that read omnisciently were actually sourced." Harrington writes:

When I write that the wind was gusting at thirty miles an hour, I had gotten the National Weather Service reports for that day. When I write that there was a waxing crescent moon in the sky, I had an astronomer calculate what kind of moon was in the sky on that date. When I write the green briar bushes have been munched by deer, I had taken a naturalist into the field to confirm this for me. Rain really was falling because I noted it on my pad or into my tape recorder. When I say the men and I lit up and smoked Arturo Fuente Curly Head Deluxe Maduro cigars, we really smoked that brand of cigar, at that moment, in that place.

Like Walt Harrington, I come from the old school of fact-gathering, from the tradition in which a story is either 100-percent accurate or zero percent accurate. There was no officially approved middle ground of being sort of right and sort of not. By those standards, you can be accurate, you can be pregnant, and you can be unique, but you cannot be somewhat accurate, slightly pregnant, or very unique.

So when I read Harrington's essay and his impassioned call to meticu-

lousness, I take it seriously, the obligation to get everything right, even the little things, such as the direction in which the wind is blowing and the number of miles per hour. At the same time, I have to acknowledge that this is often not possible. Memory is a shape-shifter, playing tricks the way light does. At its least reliable, memory is mist, quicksand, and fog, all at once. Applying the standards of daily journalism to the plastic arena of memory seems at best high-minded and at worst delusional. And even though I would like to claim that the real appellate court in memoir is your own conscience

What
about taking other people's
memories
and presenting them as
your own?

as a writer, that you know what is honest and what is fake, and you know it from liftoff to touchdown, that isn't even necessarily true. I have read memoirs in which the author who was so certain her father had abandoned her actually had not or another in which a soldier recalled an act of cowardice that proved to be one of courage upon further examination. And so I find myself talking out of both sides of my mealy mouth, knowing that how you resolve these questions will always boil down in the end to your own sense of what is right and what is wrong. It is not as if there is a squad of memoir police just waiting to arrest potential offenders. It is an honor system in which you get to decide what is honorable. What about taking other people's memories and presenting them as your own?

This temptation may strike you as unlikely, but there have been plenty of examples of writers taking that particular liberty. In Key West in 1996 Annie Dillard admitted that a stunning section of her book *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* was based on an incident that had happened to one of her graduate students and then she presented it as if it had happened to her. The borrowing occurs at the beginning of

her book — the writer's version of waterfront property—which makes the borrowing even more brazen:

I used to have a cat, an old fighting tom, who would jump through the open window by my bed in the middle of the night and land on my chest. I'd half-awaken. He'd stick his skull under my nose and purr, stinking of urine and blood. Some nights he kneaded my bare chest with his front paws, powerfully, arching his back, as if sharpening his claws, or punnelling a mother for milk. And some mornings I'd wake in daylight to find my body covered with paw prints in blood; I looked as though I'd been painted with roses.

Under Dillard's imaginative gaze, "covered with paw prints in blood" becomes "painted with roses." Dillard's book is a classic in the nature-writing genre, filled with sermons in stones and cathedrals in clouds. Are her words less powerful or less memorable if you know that the author cribbed the opening incident, colonizing it for her own purposes?

Another instance of this kind of pilfering occurred on a much larger scale years earlier when a prominent writer lifted the facts of someone else's life and presented them as her own story. Lillian Hellman wrote plays, memoirs, and essays in a career that began in the 1930s with *The Children's Hour*, in which a young girl accuses two female teachers of kissing. Hellman often said that the play is "not about Lesbianism. It's about the power of a lie." When she was summoned to appear before the House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, she refused to testify: "To hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions, even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable place in any political group." Given her streak of righteousness, it behooved her to maintain the same sense of what is fair and what is not in her own writing, but she fell short in 1973 when she published *Pentimento*. According to the Hellman, the lovely title is taken from the Italian term for old paint as it ages on a canvas, which

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“sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman’s dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called *pentimento*, because the painter ‘repented,’ changed his mind.”

In the section entitled “Julia,” the author made up a friendship with a real woman, Muriel Gardiner, who claimed never to have met the author but who was dismayed to see her life story hijacked by Hellman. It turned out they both had a close friend in common, a lawyer, who was the likely source of the information that Hellman generously incorporated into her story of a daring female journalist (read Hellman) who smuggles papers in her hat to a friend in the German underground during World War Two. The boldness of the theft, and its self-serving nature, brought the integrity of the entire account into question, eventually leading the acid-tongued Mary McCarthy to declare to talk show host Dick Cavett that Hellman was dishonest.

“What,” asked the talk show host, “is dishonest about her?”

McCarthy was not one for faking good manners.

“Everything she writes is a lie, including ‘and’ and ‘the.’” Hellman hit McCarthy (and PBS and Dick Cavett) with a \$2.25 million lawsuit. When asked if the threat of a lawsuit might have caused her to think twice about her acid remarks, McCarthy used the opportunity to further bait Hellman: “If someone had told me, don’t say anything about Lillian Hellman because she’ll sue you, it wouldn’t have stopped me. It might have spurred me on.” Hellman died before the case could be resolved, and Gardiner went on to publish her own memoir and to be the subject of a documentary in an effort to set the record straight and to reclaim her own story.

What are the rules about consolidating scenes, making composites out of various people, and reordering chronology? Most writers of memoir will admit that it is impossible not to do some creative juggling if you

are at all concerned with the flow of the story. Consider the case of Vivian Gornick, author of *Fierce Attachments*, who contributed to the continuing controversies about memoir, much to her surprise. While speaking to students in the master’s program for creative nonfiction at Goucher College, she referred offhandedly to the ways in which she tweaked the narrative in her book, from “playing fast and loose with time” in order to compress scenes and also creating “composites out of the elements of two or more incidents—none of which were fabricated—for the purpose of moving the narra-

Memoir
writing is a genre
still in
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readership

tive forward.” These comments, which she had made frequently in public venues over the years, were suddenly treated as a Full-scale Mea Culpa Confession of Literary Fraud and Turpitude. The author found herself “subsequently denounced” by a book critic on NPR’s *Fresh Air*, comparing Gornick to other “liars,” Benjamin Wilkomirski, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Jayson Blair.

Gornick responded, “The giveaway here is this trio of names. I, a memoirist who composed (composed, mind you, not invented) a narrative drawn entirely from materials of my own experience, am being compared to a psychopath who invented a memoir of testament out of whole cloth; a historian who is accused of incorporating other people’s work into her own without attribution; a dishonest newspaper reporter who made up interviews in the *New York Times*. It seems to me that these analogies are proof, if proof be needed, that memoir writing is a genre still in need of an informed readership.”

Is it fair to put all the burden of determining authenticity on the readers? Should not authors bear responsibility for establishing some kind of convention within the genre in which the author lays

bare any dubious or misleading strategies in the story telling itself, any sleights of hand? Should memoir have its own truth-in-packaging law, a statement explaining the liberties, if any, taken in the course of composition? Or should you just do what Molly O’Neill did in her memoir of “family, food, and baseball” and incorporate your equivocation into the very title, *Mostly True*?

Gornick says, “Memoirs belong to the category of literature, not of journalism. It is a misunderstanding to read a memoir as though the author owes the reader the same record of literal accuracy that is owed in newspaper reporting or in literary journalism. What the memoirist owes the reader is the ability to persuade that the narrator is trying, as honestly as possible, to get to the bottom of the experience at hand.”

Where Gornick and I part company is in her use of the term of term literary journalism as if it were the equivalent of “newspaper reporting.” What makes memoir so popular is that it walks an amazing line: it is supposed to read as smoothly as fiction, with all the fancy dance steps and winks and tricks that readers expect and admire in that genre, and at the same time be telling a story squarely, defiantly, often even joyously rooted in the world of fact. What readers may be less attuned to is the relationship between memoir and literary journalism which is an even closer genetic fit. Fiction is to memoir as cousins who may or may not be in constant touch; memoir and literary journalism are siblings who have no choice. Memoir and literary journalism are by definition based in real stories, using some combination of “I” and ‘eye’ to create the narration, told with the best story-telling techniques available to the writer without resorting to the kind of embellishment that crosses the line from nonfiction into fiction. In some ways, the best part is that nothing is made up, and that is often what hooks readers the most: *This really happened*. Newspaper reporting is often dispassionate, often told in the famed pyramid style which means the story can be cut from the bottom and peter out rather than build to a series of big moments in a classic literary manner,

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and often done in a hurry. If, as someone once said, journalism is literature in a hurry, memoir is journalism that takes its time. The same is true for most literary journalism. Gornick's surprise that her admissions caused a stir reveals a misreading of some of the key issues facing writers of all stripes today, which have to do with authenticity and integrity in a culture that sometimes not only tolerates the spurious, but seems to worship it (talk radio, fake shows with fake idols, bloggers on a tear).

Some writers swear off writing memoir altogether, seeing too many traps. In an essay entitled "How Dark? How Stormy? I Can't Recall," Anna Quindlen confesses to a lousy memory, or at the least, a tendency to second-guess her memory to a degree that would paralyze her in any attempt to write a memoir:

Several years ago, I was writing a short essay to introduce a collection of columns, and began with this sentence: "It was very cold the night my mother died." It is the sort of sentence that might begin my memoir. It felt simple, right, central to the entire experience of my life. But that "very cold" drove me crazy. Was it really very cold, or was that just the trick that memory played on a girl who was sick and shivering, at least metaphorically? What is very cold anyhow? Perhaps, ever drawn to warm weather, I had simply misremembered a moderate January day from the safe haven of my computer in June. Finally, I went back to the microfilm for that day in January of 1972, looked up the temperature chart and compared it with the highs and lows for that day in meteorological history.

It was indeed very cold the night my mother died. Verifiably cold, colder than usual. But at that rate, can you imagine how long it would take me to get through 45 years of life?

Surely, there are people with memories sharper, truer, more anecdotal than mine. . . My own sister, just a few weeks ago, spoke to me about dinners I had once cooked for her, clubs to which I'd dragged her as a teen-ager, what we wore, what we said. This is my contribution to her recollections: I'm certain she's my sister, I remember the day she was born; it was warm. I think.

Is there such a thing as an hon-

est mistake?

In the incident described earlier of the cat in the middle of the night, Dillard deliberately misled her readers in a move she obviously considered within the rules, or at least within her rules. What happens even more frequently is that writers of memoir mislead by default, because the facts themselves, such as they are, are often so muddled or because of simple differences of opinion. Tobias Wolff's mother objected when he describes as ugly a mutt named Champion in *This Boy's Life*, preferring to remember the dog as noble and hand-

Memoirists are entitled to
have their own
faulty memories, and readers
have to
accept their own as well

some. Sometimes truth and fact are not the same thing and the best guideline I have heard enunciated about this principle comes from Wolff who wrote: "This is a book of memory, and memory has its own story to tell."

What about discrepancies that can never really be reconciled?

Mary-Ann Tyrone Smith, author of *Girls of Tender Age*, found that even when she tried to get her facts in order, it wasn't easy. In her book the author makes frequent reference to a department store in Hartford, Connecticut, called G. Fox, or Fox's by the locals. She remembers it as having fourteen floors, but when her book appeared she received numerous letters and emails informing her that she was mistaken. It had only twelve floors. She was wrong, said her critics, to count the mezzanine where books were sold and a bargain basement as actual floors. In the next edition, she corrected the "mistake," and said the store had twelve floors, only to be told by an equally irate band of readers that everyone in Hartford and environs knew very well that the store had fourteen floors, including the mezzanine and the bargain basement.

What was her problem? Couldn't

she count? For Smith, this donnybrook quickly entered the category of "You can't win," causing her to conclude, "I learned my lesson. Memoirists are entitled to their faulty memories, and readers have to accept their own as well."

Is it all right to use fake names? Writers of memoir do it all the time, sometimes tipping readers off to the use of pseudonyms, sometimes not. In her work Mary Cantwell refers to her two daughters as Snow White and Rose Red and she refers to one of her lovers, the novelist James Dickey, as The Balding Man. And of course we have Frederick Exley's ex-wife in *A Fan's Notes*, aptly named Patience. Certainly you will want to think twice about taking the liberty of identifying a childhood buddy, even under blameless circumstances because you don't want to be guilty of a thoughtless invasion of someone's privacy. Yet even protecting someone's privacy can backfire.

Mary-Ann Tyrone Smith took care to change the name of characters during a scene in her memoir during which criminal activity was taking place, only to be gently scolded later by people who, it turned out, would have loved it had she used their real names:

I am at my friend Joyce's kitchen table; we are coloring in our coloring books while her father colors in his. He has a notebook and colored pencils and hundreds of tiny slips of paper with numbers on them. Joyce's mother is making us eggplant parm grinders. Suddenly, there is a banging at the door: Joyce's mother stops cooking, comes to the table and swipes all the little papers into a bag which she then dumps into the toilet. She flushes. Joyce's father begins eating the slips of paper remaining on the table. The door rips off the hinges and several policemen and other men barge in. There is a slip of paper on the floor. I put my foot on it. The police tear the house apart while Joyce and I keep coloring. Her dad acts very interested in our work. The police leave and Joyce's mother brings us our grinders. I reach down and get the piece of paper from under my shoe and hand it to Joyce's father. He thanks me. That night, a man comes to our door and brings my father a

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bottle of 25-year-old scotch. The next morning, my mother reads the paper, looks at me and asks if anything happened yesterday at Joyce's house. I tell her, she lets out a hoot, and then calls everyone she knows about the article that's in the paper and my adventure. That night, my father takes me out for a hot fudge sundae. Decades go by and I am reading from my new memoir at the West Hartford Public Library to a full house. In the middle of the crowd I see a face I immediately recognize as Joyce's. After my talk, we hug and she asks, (plaintively, "Why didn't you use my real name?" I apologize and explain that I couldn't possibly have tracked her down and that I didn't think she'd have wanted people to know her father was a bookie. She said, "Everyone knew my father was a bookie. My mother told me that when people ask what Daddy does, just say, 'He's in business for himself.'" I told her how much I admired her father as he always treated me nicely, and because he was the only dad on the street who went to work in a three-piece suit. The rest wore green jumpsuits with their names on the pockets.

What is the relationship between memoir and fiction? Let's agree, for the sake of argument, that there are crucial differences between fiction and memoir, that they are not precisely the same. A novel or a short story may be based on real people and real events, but if it purports to be made up, we call it fiction and read it in that light.

By weaving in real people and real events and acknowledging their presence as such, memoir admits to having roots in reality. The energy generated from the assertion that everything in a memoir happened to flesh and blood people evaporates if we learn that we are being fooled. Yet readers of memoir have come to expect the classic devices of story-telling. Without them, we would have the phone book, alphabetical, fair, accurate, but dull. To make a factual story come alive, we understand some degree of flexibility is necessary, but what are the limits in reordering chronology and in condensing and heightening events?

It used to be, when memoir was first coming into its own, that a polished specimen would win attention for reading "just like fiction," a conviction retailed in a tone of breathless excitement by review-

ers who could not believe their luck. Here was a book, not a novel but a work of nonfiction, that by some miracle possessed the crucial ingredients of metaphor, character, setting, linguistic acumen, and a good story to boot. These days such attributes are table stakes. If your memoir does not read like fiction, you might as well pack it in.

Still, it should not be fiction, as the sorry matter of James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* demonstrated when the author inflated his own escapades as a drug addict, aspiring to a much more badass life than was borne out by the

Frey's publisher convinced
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to make a splash

tame details of his suburban existence, which included attending Denison University in Ohio, with its 500-acre nature preserve, where one-third of the students are in fraternities or sororities, and the squash program is described in the school's literature as a "perennial national contender." Frey's book was already a bestseller when Oprah anointed him with what he called the "stunning shocking, awesome phone call" that writers all fantasize about. *A Million Little Pieces* came under fire after smoking-gun.com accused the author of inaccuracies throughout. Initially, Frey defended his book, telling Larry King that only eighteen pages were in doubt, "less than five percent of the total book" and that he stood by the "essential truth" of what he had written. "So let the haters hate and the doubters doubt, I stand by my book and my life," Frey said with a rhetorical flourish. Later his tune changed, and with glazed eyes and a handdog expression, he submitted to what was widely regarded as a public caning on television conducted by his benefactor in a special edition of her show in which no one, not the author, not his publisher, not the experts brought on board, and certainly not the talk show

host herself came across with a halo. Yet even weeds sometimes yield unexpected fetching blossoms, and we can thank this incident for comedian Stephen Colbert's addition to the English language of the word "truthiness."

In his defense, Frey initially marketed his book as fiction, but publishers convinced him that it needed to be sold as nonfiction to make a splash in the marketplace. In the end, there is something sad about his self-inflations (pretending he had served time in prison, had a root canal without Novocain, and that a near stranger who died was a love interest). At the same time he was ill-served by a system that had no misgivings about appropriating the authority of nonfiction, the gravitas and the good will that accrues because the author has vouched something really happened, and harnessing it to most tempting, if least lofty, of ends, the bottom line. In today's marketplace, it helps to claim that stories are true whether they are true or not. In the aftermath of this extraordinary series of events, the author and his publisher agreed to settle a class action lawsuit with readers who felt they had been defrauded. Anyone who can provide proof of purchase of the book in its various manifestations on or before January 26, 2006 when the deceit was acknowledged will receive a full refund until the \$2.35 million set aside for this purpose is exhausted. Those who purchased the hardback version were supposed to submit page 162, chosen at random, in addition to providing a dated receipt. Paperback buyers had to send in the front cover, audio book buyers a piece of the packaging. It is likely that Frey will still be laughing all the way to the bank. In 2005, *A Million Little Pieces* sold more than two million copies, making it the second highest selling book of the year, after *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and in the end fewer than two thousand readers took advantage of the offer for a refund.

In a column entitled "My True Story, More or Less, and Maybe Not All of It" by Randy Kennedy in the *New York Times*, the author sought to explain why readers of memoir are so willing to

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accept what Kennedy called “truckloads of falsehood”—“inventions much bigger than the reconstructed conversations or narrative elision that have long been the wink-wink conceits of personal history”—concluding in part that readers are so used to the inflation of advertisements that they expect hyperbole and lies. The world is filled with hucksters and megaphone men, with beady-eyed monsters of deception, characters out of hard-boiled detective fiction, guys who play all the angles, who use a marked deck, and who weigh their thumbs along with the cold cuts. We are used to being misled, to being told that the right brand of cigarettes or conscientiously applied dental cream or a certain make of car is all we need to keep anxiety at bay and sexual fulfillment in the picture.

Kennedy quoted several writers who had little patience for Frey and his inventions.

Meghan Daum, a novelist and the author of a collection of personal essays called *My Misspent Youth*, said: “I think it’s sad that when publishers are given a manuscript that doesn’t quite work on its own terms, they just change the genre rather than trying to get it rewritten or, God forbid, buying a better book from all the people out there who are writing good books.” Geoffrey Wolff said, “I think the memoir has some formal properties and some unique challenges, if you will, that make it valuable to write, as opposed to fiction. And if the reader doesn’t care anymore about those distinctions, well then I think it’s a shame. In a book of memories in which the writer has promised to try to get it right and there’s some gross coincidence—you meet your long-lost cousin on a train in Europe and it changes your life—that can be integral to a memoir, while in a piece of fiction it would be seen as the cheapest kind of literary device. There are differences, and they matter.”

Kennedy concluded: “In other words, sometimes life tells a more compelling story than fiction can invent. But usually it does not. Or at least it tells a different kind of story, and readers, Mr. Wolff said, should not allow Mr. Frey or other memoirists to try to sell them the reality-show version.”

It doesn’t help Frey’s case, but it

might hearten him somewhat to realize he is not the first person to re-order reality wholesale in the service of a better story, nor is he likely to be the last.

Another writer who has attracted suspicions in this regard is no less than Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer, who allegedly concocted a couple of cousins for a memory piece she wrote for the *New Yorker* early in her career.

One solution is to write a memoir, and claim it’s not one at all, as Frederick Exley did with *A Fan’s Notes*, in a message to readers at the start:

Though the events in this book bear

She was
sick of people tiptoeing around
the subject in
her presence—the elephant in
the bookcase

similarity to those of that long malaise, my life, many of the characters and happenings are creations solely of the imagination. In such cases, I of course disclaim any responsibility for their resemblance to real people or events, which would be coincidental. The character “Patience,” for example, who is herein depicted as my “wife,” is a fictionalized character bearing no similarity to anyone living or dead. In creating such characters, I have drawn freely from the imagination and adhered only loosely to the pattern of my past life. To this extent, and for this reason, I ask to be judged as a writer of fantasy.

Described by one reader as a “sort of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* for self-loathing depressive alcoholics,” Exley’s book was hailed by James Dickey as one that no reader will ever be able to forget. Time in the long run had been kinder to *A Fan’s Notes* than it was to its author in the short run, who died broken down and disillusioned, a one-book wonder with two wan follow-ups that never had anywhere near the same impact. Published in 1968, *A Fan’s Notes* is still in print and considered a classic in the genre, of memoir, not of fiction. In fact, Exley’s biographer, Jonathan Yardley, who is filled with admiration for

Exley’s book (“Huck Finn gone alcoholic, but still lighting out for the territory putting as much distance as possible between himself and civilization”) argues that the author and his narrator are one and the same. The title of the biography minces no words: “*Misfit*.”

As for Frey, his editor, the legendary Nan Talese, who has published Ian McEwan and Margaret Atwood, among others, spoke out in his defense in the summer of 2007. When asked whether or not Winfrey had been too harsh. Talese said, “When someone starts out and says, ‘I have been an alcoholic. I have lied, I have cheated’, you do not think this is going to be the New Testament.”

In the summer of 2007, at the Mayborn Literary Nonfiction Writers Conference of the Southwest, Talese was asked about the book by Michael Mershel of the *Dallas Morning Herald*. She stood her ground and refused to apologize: “The only person who should be apologetic is Oprah Winfrey.”

Talese added that in her opinion the talk show hostess exhibited “fiercely bad manners—you don’t stone someone in public, which is just what she did.” Talese said her motive for speaking up in public was that she was sick of people tiptoeing around the subject in her presence—the elephant in the bookcase—“as if it were some sort of disgrace.” From the *Dallas Morning Herald*:

Calling Ms. Winfrey’s behavior “mean and self-serving,” Ms. Talese said that readers should be able to decide for themselves about whether to believe an author, and that Mr. Frey was clear about how believable he was . . . Ms. Talese said that when producers invited her to Ms. Winfrey’s program, they told her she’d be sitting on a panel with Richard Cohen of the Washington Post and Frank Rich of the New York Times to discuss “Truth in America.” But moments before the live program aired, she says, she was told the program would be called “The James Frey Controversy.”

She described the Oprah audience as “holier-than-thou” and discussed being on the show as Mr. Frey amended his account of one character’s suicide.

“Oprah kept saying, ‘Did she kill herself? Did she cut her wrists?’ And he said,

Continued on next page

TRUTHINESS *Continued from previous page*

'No, she hung herself.' And the whole audience went, 'Boo! Boo!' It was like being in the Roman circus. And after I said to them, 'The tragedy is not how she killed herself, it's that she killed herself,' they all looked like a treeful of owls – no expressions at all. It was awful." Asked about the book's veracity, she said: "I believe he overblew his character, which he has admitted in his new author's note to the book, and I agree with what Oprah said initially when she championed the book. The essential truth is very powerful. The only difference between us is I have not gone back on the statement."

Is it all right to make things up on the grounds that psychic truth is more real than any other, which can end up with the writer imputing to people things they didn't do, but which they might have if they had been given half the chance?

It may not make James Frey feel better, but he is not alone in his conflations and his imaginings. Temptation is everywhere. One of my favorite examples comes from a book that seemed to me to radiate integrity, until I found out about a glaring fall from grace. *Breaking Clean* by Judy Blunt garnered a wide following for many reasons, including its refreshing take on what it is like to grow up in a remote farming community where in order to continue her education past the eighth grade she had to go to a nearby city and board. It is one thing to say a winter was harsh; another altogether to describe a storm in which cattle froze to death, standing up. She came from a place in which gender roles were well-defined as a matter of survival. Marrying young, she longed for something more than the grueling routine that had her among other obligations serving up huge meals every day to her husband and her father-in-law and the other farmhands, men who sat at the table and ate copious amounts of eggs and pancakes.

"Don't think you're going to run this ranch," her husband told her.

"For once the truth lay between us," the author writes, "flat and unmoving."

In the stillness that followed, his expression never moved, and my gut twisted."

The author's overwhelming impulse was to flee, into a life of books

and the imagination:

I saved for three years and bought my typewriter from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue. I typed the first line while the cardboard carton lay around it in pieces. I wrote in a cold sweat on long strips of freezer paper that emerged from the keys thick and rich with ink. At first I only wrote at night when the children and John slept, emptying myself onto the paper until I could lie down. Then I began writing during the day, when the men were working in the fields. The children ran brown and wild and happy. The garden gave birth and died with rotting produce fat under its vines.

Bottom line:

If you make something up, it is always better not to get caught

Then she reports that the very act of absenting herself happily from the steady drone of domesticity so enraged her father-in-law that one day, "furious because the lunch crew was late," she says he took "my warm, green typewriter to the shop and killed it with a sledgehammer."

The incident is violent, it is repugnant and it is inexcusable, proof positive in case anyone needed it of how demeaning it was to be a ranch wife living with her in-laws.

Only one problem: it never happened.

For a time, after her father-in-law complained in a letter to his local paper that he had been misrepresented, the author retained her certainty that it did happen, but later changed her story to say that he did not smash the machine, but instead "pulled the plug on the typewriter and shouted and screamed, but the machine survived." Blunt's editor dismissed the discrepancy as one small fall from grace, loyally maintaining that the book is "great" and "everybody here was so behind it and still is. It's about much more than all this. It's valuable for a number of reasons."

The emotional truth, as James Frey called it over and over when defending his distortions, or as documentary film director Werner Herzog likes to call it, the ecstatic truth, when he acknowledges a certain degree of directorial intrusion and creative juggling of scenes and characters in his documentaries, might well be that this man wanted nothing more than to see the Judith Blunt's dream in smithereens. But Blunt's father-in-law had the gall to be alive and sentient at the time the book was published, and he took to the airwaves, claiming he never did what she alleged. In subsequent editions of the book, that key sentence—quoted glowingly in just about every review up to that point as iconic proof of how hard life is on the ranch, especially for a woman uppity enough to want to write (than which nothing is more subversive)—is omitted. Bottom line: If you make something up, especially if it is negative and it is about someone who can hire a lawyer, it is always better not to get caught. At its worst, the genre of memoir has been cheapened by writers who want in on the action, not because they have a heartfelt truth to impart but because they are adept at merchandising themselves. In the more corrupt exemplars of the genre, you can almost hear the sales pitch:

Individual stories of great merit for sale!

New to the market!

Open House!

Inquire within!

But those writers—sometimes they are the most successful ones in terms of where they sit on the bestseller list, sometimes their work sinks into instant and deserved oblivion—are not as common as you might imagine. The memoirs I have read and loved are by people offering a gift of their pained and mystified and comical selves so that they, and their readers, may feel less alone. ♦

* * *

Madeleine Blais, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing, is the author of *In These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle* (1995), a National Book Critics Circle Award finalist in nonfiction and one of ESPN's Top 100 sports books of the 20th century; *The Heart Is an Instrument*; *Portraits in Journalism* (1992); and *Uphill Walkers: Memoir of a Family* (2001).

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE IALJS

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THE CHALLENGES OF TEACHING LITERARY JOURNALISM

Tools that might help you to empower your students.

By Nikki Hessell, Massey University (New Zealand)

While many IALJS members teach literary journalism from within an English department, several of us operate out of other academic programs. For example, I teach in a journalism school in New Zealand. My students



TEACHING TIPS

are aspiring reporters, who have entered the program to learn the practical craft of journalism. They are not English majors, and have limited experience in undertaking literary analysis, but they are generally good writers with a strong commitment to becoming more

knowledgeable about journalism. The challenge is how to engage students who have not been previously exposed to the pleasures of reading literary journalism and don't necessarily have the analytical tools to get to grips with the texts easily.

I incorporate literary journalism into my History of Journalism course, an upper-level undergraduate seminar. The course reader includes pieces by Defoe, Steele and Addison, William Hazlitt, Charles Dickens, Norman Mailer and Hunter Thompson, as well as several

pieces published much more recently. There are five basic ideas that have guided these selections and that continue to inform my choices as I prepare to teach the course again and revise some of my decisions.

1. Using recent examples.

Journalism students generally get a great deal of pleasure from seeing that the techniques they are taught at university are

We know
that our students no
longer think
of journalism existing simply
as text

being used in the real world, and this applies to both basic newswriting skills and literary journalism. Nothing is more impressive than showing them a freshly published piece that illustrates some of the ideas we talk about in class. The IALJS newsletter is a great resource for getting ideas about recent stories that work well in the classroom, but so too are many newspapers and magazines from around the world.

2. Using local examples. The

IALJS membership list is proof that literary journalism is a global phenomenon. Just as students like to see that the techniques of literary journalism are current and relevant, they also like to see that these techniques are being used in newsrooms in their own part of the world. Local examples are often easier for students to relate to and remind them of the role that literary journalism plays in the news they're consuming every day.

3. Using multimedia tools. As we all know, our students—and indeed, readers worldwide—no longer think of journalism as existing simply as text. Students' understanding of the literary effects of a piece of journalism is frequently enhanced by reading it alongside some information presented in other media. For example, my students enjoyed Thompson's work far more when it was accompanied by sections of the Johnny Depp film of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and the documentary *Gonzo*, and examples of Ralph Steadman's illustrations.

4. Pairing stories. For some students, the experience of reading an individual piece doesn't add up to much; they can see what's being done, but they're not sure why it's considered significant. Pairing stories, particularly stories from different eras, can help them see

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