

LITERARY JOURNALISM

AS A DISCIPLINE:

Tom Wolfe and beyond

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ABSTRACT – The publication of Tom Wolfe’s *The New Journalism* in 1973 was the seminal moment for the formation of literary journalism as an academic discipline. Wolfe both celebrated the work of more than 20 contemporary journalists whom he dubbed “new journalists” and identified the main elements of their writings. But his concentration on their individual techniques (which has proved so influential in the development of literary journalism in higher education) crucially marginalized consideration of such elements as ideology and political economy, and promoted a problematic form of cultural elitism. In exploring the political economy of literary journalism, this paper will identify similarities between the formation of English as an academic discipline in the UK in the 18th and 19th centuries and the launch of literary journalism in the US in the 1970s and 1980s. And to help literary journalism expand its horizons and draw inspiration from a much wider range of academic disciplines, the paper will argue for its radical democratization. **Key words:** Literary journalism. Academic discipline. Democratization. Political economy. Tom Wolfe.

JORNALISMO LITERÁRIO COMO DISCIPLINA: Além de Tom Wolfe

RESUMO – A publicação do livro de Tom Wolfe *The New Journalism*, em 1973, foi o momento fundamental para a formação do jornalismo literário como disciplina acadêmica. Wolfe celebrou o trabalho de mais de 20 jornalistas contemporâneos, apelidando-os de “novos jornalistas” e identificando seus principais elementos de escrita. Contudo, sua concentração em técnicas individuais (que se mostrou tão influente no desenvolvimento do jornalismo literário no ensino superior) decisivamente segregou a consideração de elementos como ideologia e economia política, promovendo uma forma problemática

de elitismo cultural. Ao explorar a economia política do jornalismo literário, este artigo identifica semelhanças entre a formação do inglês como disciplina acadêmica no Reino Unido nos séculos XVIII e XIX e o lançamento do jornalismo literário nos Estados Unidos nos anos 1970 e 1980. E para ajudar o jornalismo literário a expandir seus horizontes e a inspirar-se em uma gama muito mais ampla de disciplinas acadêmicas, o artigo argumenta a favor de sua democratização radical.

Palavras chave: Jornalismo literário. Disciplina acadêmica. Democratização. Economia política. Tom Wolfe.

EL PERIODISMO LITERARIO COMO DISCIPLINA: Tom Wolfe y más allá

RESUMEN – La publicación del libro *The New Journalism* de Tom Wolfe, en 1973, fue el momento fundamental para la formación del periodismo literario como disciplina académica. Wolfe celebró el trabajo de más de 20 periodistas contemporáneos a los que denominó “nuevos periodistas” e identificó los principales elementos de sus escritos. Pero su concentración en sus técnicas individuales (que ha demostrado ser tan influyente en el desarrollo del periodismo literario en la educación superior) marginó de manera crucial la consideración de elementos como la ideología y la economía política, y promovió una forma problemática de elitismo cultural. Al explorar la economía política del periodismo literario, este trabajo identificará similitudes entre la formación del inglés como disciplina académica en el Reino Unido en los siglos XVIII y XIX y el lanzamiento del periodismo literario en los Estados Unidos en los años setenta y ochenta. Y para ayudar a que el periodismo literario amplíe sus horizontes y se inspire en una gama mucho más amplia de disciplinas académicas, el periódico defenderá su radical democratización.

Palabras clave: Periodismo literario. Disciplina académica. Democratización. Economía política, Tom Wolfe.

1. The mixed legacy of Wolfe's *The New Journalism*¹

The publication of Tom Wolfe's *The New Journalism* – bringing together the work of (largely white, male and American) journalists such as Truman Capote, Joan Didion, Barbara Goldsmith, Michael Herr, Norman Mailer, George Plimpton, Gay Talese and Hunter S. Thompson – in 1973 proved to be the seminal moment in the formation of literary journalism as an academic discipline. Here was a practicing journo (how amazing!) reflecting on his practice, identifying various elements of the unique style he was promoting (the New Journalism, no less) – and being, at the same time, highly combative and confident.

Yet the Wolfe legacy is not without its problematics. The “extraordinary power” of the new literary journalism, he said, was mainly derived from four devices:

- scene by scene construction, “telling the story by moving from scene to scene and resorting as little as possible to sheer historical narrative”;
- realistic dialogue which “involves the reader more completely than any other single device” and “establishes and defines character more quickly and effectively than any other single device”;
- the “third-person point of view,” “the technique of presenting every scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feel of being inside the character’s mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene as he [*sic*] experiences it”;
- the recording of “everyday gestures, habits, manners, customs, styles of furniture, clothing, decoration, styles of traveling, eating, keeping house, modes of behavior toward children, servants, superiors, inferiors, peers, plus the various looks, glances, poses, styles of walking and other symbolic details that might exist within a scene.” These, he said, were all symbolic of people’s *status life* (Wolfe, 1973, pp. 46-47, italics in the original).

Wolfe’s emphasis on literary techniques has had an enormous influence on the evolution of the study of literary journalism. Most seriously it has led to the marginalization of equally important areas such as ideology and political economy. Consideration of the audience and outlet – and its place in the increasingly globalized industry (whether corporate or non-corporate) has also been downplayed. Literary journalism scholarship has tended to highlight, criticize and often celebrate the *unique techniques* of particular writers and ignore the *ideological continuities* running through writers’ works. Significantly, the five definitions highlighted in the Mission Statement of the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS) all concentrate on technique. For instance, according to the magazine *Granta*, “The art and craft of reportage – journalism marked by vivid description, a novelist’s eye to form, and eyewitness reporting that reveals hidden truths about people and events that have shaped the world we know,” while Wolfe, himself, is the last quoted, saying it’s a “journalism that would read like a novel ... or short story.” The statement ends stressing the “need to tell journalistically based narratives empowered by the use of literary technique” (<https://ialjs.org/>). Indeed, Wolfe perhaps betrayed his cultural “conservatism” and his wealth (in comparison with the vast majority of his readers) in his reference to “servants,” while identifying the various elements of status life.

2. New journalism and the american imperial moment

The effect of *The New Journalism* was rather like that of a small earthquake in the fertile ground of Western culture: the after-effects are still being felt. The American academic community and, to a much lesser extent, British academics were the first to respond, and a highly influential series of texts appeared cementing the position of literary journalism as a distinct style. These included Sims (1984), Sims and Kramer (1995), Campbell (2000), Kerrane and Yagoda (1997), Hartsock (2000), Treglown and Bennett (1998), Applegate (1996), Talese and Lounsbury (1995), and Berner (1998).

How can we account for this extraordinary flowering of the literary journalism canon led by Americans (and with a few Brits in the background)? Susan Sontag reminds us of the importance of placing our understanding of artistic, literary styles in their historical and geographical context:

...the notion of style, generically considered, has a specific, historical meaning. It is not only that styles belong to a time and place; and that our perception of the style of a given work of art is always charged with an awareness of the work's historicity, its place in a chronology (Sontag, 1967, p.18).

In part, and in complex ways, it could be argued that the emerging awareness and celebration of literary journalism as a genre in the 1970s and 1980s was a manifestation of the political, cultural and ideological power of America (as the leader of the Western, capitalist world in its confrontation with communist Soviet Union) at the time. As Edward Said commented:

So influential has been the discourse insisting on American specialness, altruism and opportunity, that imperialism in the United States as a word or ideology has turned up only rarely and recently in accounts of the United States culture, politics and history. But the connection between imperial politics and culture in North America, and in particular in the United States, is astonishingly direct (Said, 1993).

Later, in his seminal text, *Culture and Imperialism*, Said was to expand on this idea:

The connection between imperial politics and culture is astonishingly direct. American attitudes to American "greatness," to hierarchies of race, to the perils of *other* revolutions (the American revolution being considered unique

and somehow unrepeatable anywhere else in the world) have remained constant, have dictated, have obscured the realities of empire, while apologists for overseas American interests have insisted on American innocence, doing good, fighting for freedom (Said, 1994, p. 7).

The work of the French media theorist Pierre Bourdieu is also relevant here. For while he is acknowledged as the leading theorist of journalistic autonomy, he also argued that, in the advanced capitalist countries of the West, the journalistic field was increasingly subject to the constraints of economy and politics (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 38).

The emergence of literary journalism is also best seen as part of a great shift in American culture, politics and society during the 1970s. As Schulman comments,

The decade reshaped the political landscape more dramatically than the 1930s. In race relations, religion, family life, politics and popular culture, the 1970s marked the most significant watershed of modern US history, the beginning of our own time (Schulman, 200, p. xii).

While the decade witnessed the Watergate scandal and the downfall of President Richard Nixon (1974), the ignominious end of the Vietnam War with the retreat from Saigon (1975), two assassination attempts on President Ford within seventeen days (1975) and the Iran hostage crisis (1979), America remained a country of contradictions (Brick, 1998). For, in the face of all this adversity, a powerful – and often critical – patriotic spirit shone through the culture. Indeed, the vast majority of the articles featured in Wolfe and Johnson's 1973 collection focused on distinctly U.S. topics.

Moreover, there was a wealth of literary talent among the American journalists Tom Wolfe highlighted in *The New Journalism*. A range of prestigious journals – such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Village Voice*, *Rolling Stone*, *New York Magazine* – were on hand to provide outlets for their writings. In addition, there was an academic community with a long-standing tradition of journalism studies (taking in both practical and theoretical strands) – and a number of imaginative, highly intelligent and risk-taking university lecturers determined to explore and expand on the ideas in Wolfe's inspirational text (Keeble, 2015).

3. The political economy of English as a discipline

It is interesting to compare the history of English as a subject of study in universities with the history of literary journalism – and identify the crucial historical, political and economic factors influencing both.

For the emergence of the study of English essentially accompanied Britain's rise to pre-eminence as a global, imperial, capitalist power in the later part of the 18th century and into the 19th century. The study was, in effect, one of the many manifestations of the cultural and ideological dominance of British imperial values at the time. Significantly, one of the first recorded advocates of the teaching of English was Adam Smith (1703-1790), the eminent Scottish philosopher, economist and author who laid the foundations of the classical free market economic theory. Indeed, Smith's approach to English literature was in keeping with his theories about the need to develop a free market economy to serve the needs of an independent and competitive citizenry. Above all, he stressed that training in literature "served a specific utilitarian function for the sons of the middle class" (Kijinski, 1993, p.339). Studying English literature was a way to teach conduct, not as Renaissance humanists before him had as a measure of "polite learning" for the sons of the aristocracy, "but as a way to transcend class-based distinctions of refinement and to promote English citizenship" (Kijinski, 1993, p.339).

English as an academic subject was also institutionalized in the U.K. in Mechanics' Institutes and working men's colleges. Some critics have even argued that English was literally the "poor man's Classics," a way of providing an education for those who would never attend public schools, Oxford or Cambridge (History of English as a Discipline). The political aspects remained always to the fore: in the early days of the discipline the stress was on solidarity between the social classes, national pride and the cultivation of moral values. In effect, one of the main functions of English was to help prevent social unrest ("History of English as a Discipline"). The rise of English also accompanied the emergence of women as political, social, educational, and cultural activists. As Terry Eagleton comments (with a dash of irony),

The “Softening” And “Humanizing” Effects Of English, Terms Recurrently Used By Its Early Proponents, Are Within The Existing Ideological Stereotypes Of Gender Clearly Feminine. The Rise Of English In England Ran Parallel To The Gradual Grudging Admission Of Women To The Institutions Of Higher Education And Since English Was An Untaxing Sort Of Affair, Concerned With The Finer Feelings Rather Than With The More Virile Topics Of *Bona Fide* Academic “Disciplines” (Eagleton, 1983, p.27-28).

The English poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold (1822-1886) was appointed Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, in 1845, and played an important role in the development of English (Bacon, 1986). And from these British roots, the discipline spread in the latter half of the 19th century to North America, to European countries, such as France and Germany, and to the colonies across the globe. The emergence of English has been associated with the decline in religion (with secular texts replacing Biblical ones) – and this certainly created tensions, for instance, amongst Christian missionaries in India. In 1852-1853, a parliamentary select committee report called for the promotion of British material interests in India and strategies for the representation of Western knowledge as “objective, universal and rational” (Viswanathan, 1987, p.95). Yet as members of the Council on Education, historian Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) and his brother-in-law Charles Trevelyan (1807-1886) were amongst those engaged in the selection and analyzing of texts for the English curriculum to prove the “diffusive benevolence of Christianity” in them (Viswanathan, 1987, p.96). And so the missionaries were won over to support the inclusion of the texts into the Indian curriculum, convinced that the works “were supported in their morality by a body of evidence that upheld the Christian faith” (Viswanathan, 1987, p.96). Professorships, professional associations, subject specializations, the publication of academic journals and textbooks, the identification of a dominant literary canon and pedagogic principles, the creation of working definitions are amongst the crucial elements that go towards the formation of a distinct academic discipline. And all these featured as English became embedded in curricula around the world.

4. Literary journalism emerges (slowly) as a discipline

The early shoots of American Literary Studies appeared in the 1920s when the American Literature Group was created within the Modern Language Association (founded in 1883) and launched its own journal. As H  l  ne Cottet comments (2016),

It took therefore a relatively long time for the study of American literature to be structured according to the criteria of professionalization and specialization upheld by the modern research university – perhaps the most telling indicator of this delay is the fact that Johns Hopkins, founded in 1876, and the model for future research universities in America, recruited its own American literature specialist only in 1941 (Cottet, 2016, p. 4).

Hesitantly, then, literary journalism (otherwise termed literary nonfiction or creative nonfiction) emerged in effect as a sub-discipline of American Studies through the work of Tom Connery, at Ohio State University, and Norman Sims, author of the seminal *The Literary Journalists* (1984), at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in the 1970s.

In Britain, paradoxically, while a vast tradition of literary journalism dates back to Daniel Defoe (1660-1731) and a number of the early seminal texts on literary journalism were by British academics, it has been very slow to emerge as a discipline in universities. As Jenny McKay, writing in 2011, commented,

What university courses in the UK don't usually include at either the undergraduate or the postgraduate level is any serious consideration of journalism as a branch of literature. Among a few exceptions was a course taught at the University of Stirling until autumn 2009, one module in a Master's course at the University of Lincoln and the more recent Master's in literary journalism at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow (McKay, 2011, p.52).

Today, the situation is very different. Type “Journalism and Creative Writing” into the UCAS (U.K. university course database) and information on seventy-seven undergraduate courses appears; at postgraduate level there are thirteen programs. For “Magazine Journalism”, which incorporates feature/long-form/immersive writing, there are eleven undergraduate and eleven postgraduate programs.

According to Isabel Soares, of the Universidade de Lisboa, in Portugal, literary journalism is still not yet an autonomous discipline.² In France, John S. Bak, Professor at the Université de Lorraine, comments bluntly: “As for literary journalism as a discipline in France, it does not exist.”³ In Australia, Matthew Ricketson and Sue Joseph (2015) record the introduction of the program, “Contemporary Writing Practice: Creative Non-Fiction,” at the University of Technology Sydney in 1999, and the “Literary Journalism” course at RMIT, Melbourne, the following year. The formation of IALJS at a conference in Nancy, France, in 2006 proved to be another pivotal moment, as

it helped inspire the development of both the study of the genre and its teaching as an academic discipline across the globe. According to David Abrahamson of Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University: "What might be termed 'Literary Journalism Studies' started to feel like a legitimate academic discipline around 2010 or 2011 following the sixth annual IALJS-conference in Brussels."⁴

5. The waning of the american empire and literary journalism

In recent years, interestingly accompanying the waning of the American empire and the disastrous interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Chad, Yemen and elsewhere, the emphasis in literary journalism studies has been to try to break away from the U.S./U.K. grip and incorporate global perspectives (Keeble, 2015, p.152). Recent papers in *Literary Journalism Studies*, the journal of the IALJS, have included studies focusing on South Africa, France, Germany, Poland, Argentine, Australia and Russia.

Academic texts are also increasingly stressing the international spread of literary journalism. The two volumes of *Global Literary Journalism: Exploring the Journalistic Imagination* (Keeble & Tulloch, 2012, 2014) carry chapters on Brazil, Canada, Cape Verde, Finland, France, India, Ireland, the Middle East, Norway, Portugal, Sweden in addition to Britain and the United States. John C. Hartsock's *Literary Journalism and the Aesthetics of Experience* (2016), while concentrating on American authors, draws on an eclectic range of international theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Wolfgang Iser, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Viktor Shklovsky and covers a number of east and west European writers. Similarly, in *Witnessing the Sixties: A Decade of Change in Journalism and Literature*, edited by Frank Harbers, Ilja van den Broek, and Marcel Broersma (2016), chapters explore the convergence of fiction and journalism in the work of Australian, Dutch, Flemish, German, and U.S. authors. And two texts on the role of humor in journalism (Keeble & Swick, 2015; Swick & Keeble, 2016), while aiming to highlight the importance of humor in scholarly investigations and journalism pedagogy, take in countries as diverse as Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Chile, Spain, Mexico, the Philippines, and the United States.

6. Traveling beyond the “disputed terrain” of literary journalism

Professionalism, academic administrations and curriculum organization all normally require disciplinary clarity. And yet, literary journalism is at its core a messy term. Indeed, it has in its essence a provisional quality that captures many of the uncertainties and contradictions of the writer’s predicament today. As the British critic Mark Lawson observed, “We live in a culture of blur and hybrids” (Lawson, 2008). Too much time is inevitably spent in an endless haggles over definitions and terminology (since the underlying politics of professionalism requires it) when really the blur of the discipline should be celebrated! As John Tulloch and I argue,

... rather than a stable genre or family of genres, literary journalism defines a *field* where different traditions and practices of writing intersect, a disputed terrain within which various overlapping practices of writing – among them the journalistic column, the memoir, the sketch, the essay, travel narratives, life writing, “true crime” narratives, “popular” history, cultural reflection and other modes of writing – camp uneasily, disputing their neighbor’s barricades and patching up temporary alliances (Keeble & Tulloch, 2012, p.3)

With journalism academics duelling with literary studies colleagues, a number upstart notions have appeared on the margins: of creative nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, literary nonfiction, narrative journalism, long-form journalism, book-length journalism; even more recently slow journalism – and so on. Increasingly, a tone of irritation is evident. Ricketson and Joseph highlight the “internecine, obscure turf war” over the definitions of literary journalism and conclude: “The debate has been trundling along for years and, frankly, is getting nowhere” (Ricketson & Joseph, 2015, p.27).

The obsession with genre definitions and disciplinary clarity has also meant, it could be argued, that literary journalism has been slow to embrace a vast range of potentially exciting perspectives. Politics, propaganda, cultural studies, psychology, humor studies, theories of ideology, history, narrative studies, political economy, computer/internet studies, fandom research, media ethics, sociology, ethnography, colonial and post-colonial studies, gender and race studies – all these have appeared in some guise in literary journalism research to date. But, I believe that without the disciplinary constraints the results from the cross-fertilization of ideas would have been far more fruitful.

7. Putting the politics into literary journalism

Let us take, as one specific example, the reporting of the Australian Antony Loewenstein to see how a political approach can expand our understanding of his work and literary journalism in general. Much of his reporting is for alternative sites such as *New Matilda*, *Counterpunch*, and *Green Left Weekly*. His 2010 ABC Radio National feature documentary, *A Different Kind of Jew*, was a finalist in the U.N. Media Peace Awards. And his book, *Profits of Doom: How Vulture Capitalism Swallowing the World* (2013), has been followed up with a documentary film, *Disaster Capitalism*, about aid, development and politics in Afghanistan, Haiti and Papua New Guinea.

Analysis of his work could focus on his writing techniques: for instance, his face-to-face interviews and conversation, his traveling to remote places, his reliance on leaks, his ability to synthesize a vast array of sources, and his use of the “I” voice (Keeble, 2018). But this would miss the essential aspect of his reporting which, above all, reflects his *political activist* stance. As he says in the Introduction to *Profits of Doom*, “I am proud to be an activist and a journalist” (Loewenstein, 2013, p. xvi). In this, he follows in the wake of a tradition of activist journalism highlighted by John Pilger in his *Tell Me No Lies* (2004) – from Wilfred Burchett, Jessica Mitford and Seymour M. Hersh (in the 1945 to 1970 period) to Felicity Arbuthnot and Jo Wilding of today.

The activist is very different from the *campaigning* journalist. Many corporate media (both national and local) run campaigns: to ban free plastic bags, to save the local hospital, to decriminalise cannabis, and so on. Campaigning is, then, consistent with the notions of “professional autonomy and independence” (Keeble, 2009, p.10-11). The activist journalist, on the other hand, sees all journalism as essentially political – given the political economy of the media and its closeness to dominant economic, cultural and ideological forces – and overtly ties their political engagement in society with their journalism (Keeble, 2010).

Thus, Loewenstein, in *Profits of Doom*, visits the site of energy multinational Woodside’s planned \$40 billion LNG (liquefied natural gas) plant at James Price Point, sixty kilometres north of Broome, Western Australia, accompanied by representatives of the Wilderness Society, an NGO dedicated to the environment, fighting climate change and maintaining clean air and water (Loewenstein, 2013, p.63). And when he investigates the Curtin Immigration Centre,

he declares his political bias from the start by traveling with Caroline Fleay, a lecturer at Curtin University's Centre for Human Rights Education "and a tireless advocate for asylum seekers" (Loewenstein, 2013, p.63).

Activism also informs Loewenstein's writing style – which is always intent on highlighting the political, historical, and global aspects of his investigations. For Loewenstein, the privatization of detention facilities, warfare, and intelligence since 9/11 is global phenomenon and can only be fully understood via a radical critique of capitalism: "Every place I investigate is culturally, politically and socially different, but what connects them all is that they are subjected to the predatory ideology of corporations aiming to make money on a global scale" (Loewenstein, 2013, p. 63).

Loewenstein's activist stance permeates all his reporting but is particularly evident towards the end of his investigations, when he indulges in overtly politically rhetorical flourishes. For instance, at the end of his chapter on Afghanistan, he writes:

A different future for Afghanistan must be forged, one in which aid is coupled to sovereignty. Trophy projects must be abandoned and the will of the Afghan people respected. The building of civil and political institutions, without foreign for-profit corporations being intimately involved in the process, is vital (Loewenstein, 2013, p.168).

8. Literary journalism's uneasy relationship with practicing journos

Returning to literary journalism's problematics, its *raison d'être* as a separate academic discipline, leads to an uneasy relationship with the actual world of practicing journalists. I have been a journalist in the U.K. since 1970 and never once heard a colleague describe themselves as a "literary journalist" or a "creative nonfiction writer." Most would find any discussion of the terms alienating: too abstract, academicky and irrelevant. Significantly, all the members of a panel of top Austrian journalists at the annual conference in Vienna in May 2018 of the IALJS said they found the term unhelpful.⁵

Sue Joseph, in her discussions with journos in Australia, finds generally a reluctance to adopt the term "creative nonfiction" – or else hostility (Joseph, 2017). Three of Joseph's favorite authors – David Marr, Helen Garner and Chloe Hooper – went so far as to refuse to

take part. Fairfax war reporter Paul McGeough, the first of Joseph's interviewees, is clearly uninterested in the debate. "I've never thought about it," he says. "Beyond journalist reporter, I've never tried to define myself" (Joseph, 2017, p. 3). Margaret Simons, who won the Walkley Award for Social Equity Journalism for her essay "Fallen Angels" in 2007, says she "hated" the term creative nonfiction. She prefers such terms as "dirty journalism", "disinterested journalism", and even "objectivity with bullshit" (Joseph, 2017, p.132)⁶. Significantly the one person who seriously understands Joseph's question about defining creative nonfiction is fellow academic John Dale (Joseph, 2017, p.98)!

9. Tackling literary journalism's inherent elitism

At the heart of the literary journalism problematic is its inherent elitism which needs to be confronted head-on. Historically, as I have pointed out elsewhere, complex factors (cultural, ideological, political) lie behind journalism's low status in the broader culture (Keeble, 2007). As a result, journalism has long struggled to be considered a worthy academic discipline and genre worthy of special attention for its literary elements. Until quite recently, the journalism of writers such as Charles Dickens, George Sand, Oscar Wilde, Willa Cather, D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Mahatma Gandhi, Marguerite Duras, Mary McCarthy, R. K. Narayan and Angela Carter has not been worthy of attention by the academy.

In the face of journalism's generally low cultural status, advocates of literary journalism have promoted it as a Higher Form of Journalism. As John Tulloch and I wrote in the "Introduction" to a collection of essays on literary journalism worldwide: "The addition of 'literary' to 'journalism' might be seen as dignifying the latter and giving it a modicum of cultural class" (Keeble & Tulloch, 2012, p.5). For each national grouping of literary journalists, there is a dominant canon: with a few writers (for instance, the Belarusian Nobel Prize-winner Svetlana Alexievich) and journals (say, the *New Yorker*) are highlighted as being worthy of serious analysis, critique and celebration. Alongside this, in the academy, literary journalism studies are somehow elevated above the more mundane activities of journalism academics. These busy themselves with teaching students how to bash out lively intros and well-structured stories to deadlines and to use the constantly changing media technologies

while literary journalism colleagues ponder the deeper literary, ethical, epistemological issues buried in the texts.

All this is not to deny, of course, that debates over “quality” do remain central to literary journalism studies. Rather, it is aiming to extend the definitions of “the good” to embrace a much wider body of writing.

10. The radical response 1: democratizing the genre

In response to the condescension of the academy towards journalism as a legitimate field for study, we should argue that, in fact, *all* journalism is worthy of attention as *literature*. So away with the canon, away even with the notion of literary journalism as a separate genre! And away with all those tedious debates about what precisely constitutes literary journalism that have dulled so many conferences over the years. Immediately, the problem of academics confronting practicing journos with a concept they feel uncomfortable with is solved. Their work becomes interesting – not because it falls within a specific genre (that needs careful explaining) but because of its inherent literary elements.

But, you argue, how can tabloid journalism be considered literature? Let us take as an arbitrarily chosen and extreme example the headline in the *Sun* (20 May 2011). This red-top, trashy U.K. tabloid was acquired by Rupert Murdoch in 1969, and its mix of titillation, sleaze, celebrity gossip, sports and randy royals (together with extreme right politics) has helped it secure the largest daily newspaper circulation in the U.K. The headline reads: “Nitwit hits Twitter with writ” above a report about a soccer star who won an injunction to hide his affair with a reality TV star and who is “crazily” suing Twitter.⁷ Notice how it plays with language using puns and alliteration – amounting almost to poetry! But the contrivance behind the paper’s “poetry” is part of its appeal. And its humor contributes to the tabloid’s overall hedonistic approach. No one (not even the Pope, the Queen, the PM) can escape its barbed wit.

Further analysis could examine the headline’s use of vernacular, its bias, its reflection of dominant news values and ideology, the political economy of the newspaper and its crucial propaganda role in Murdoch’s vast global, media empire. And so on. Indeed, what intellectual riches are to be gained when literary

journalism's Great Canon is dismantled, opening up vast swathes of journalistic output (previously ignored by the academy) to scrutiny! In the 5 October 2017 edition of the *Sun*, a report about a factory worker whose boss penned a rhyme about her breasts on her 40th birthday card and won £10,000 compensation was headlined: "Titty ditty not so witty."⁸ Certainly a lot of literary/news values issues to explore critically there, too!

11. The radical response 2: democratizing the discipline

If, then, all journalism is to be seen as worthy of attention as literature, it follows that this democratizing strategy can be applied to literary journalism as a discipline. In other words, the fences separating the many specialisms in the academy need – as far as possible – to be pulled down: all journalism teachers need to see the creative, imaginative elements of the field. English, Creative Writing, Journalism programs too often operate completely separate from each other. Collaborations need to develop – with the ultimate aim of breaking down the disciplinary barriers.

Universities today are highly bureaucratized and, in many ways, inflexible institutions, and such changes are unlikely to happen for many years. Yet radical steps are already being taken – in Europe and North America – to form higher education institutions outside the increasingly market-driven, hyper-specialized public sector, based, instead, on cooperative, social justice, non-hierarchical and ecological principles (Matthews, 2014). Often in these universities, not only is the separation of disciplines being challenged but even that between student and teacher – with all participants being seen as “scholars.” There’s the Free University Brighton,⁹ the Manchester Social Science Centre,¹⁰ Leicester Peoples University,¹¹ and the Ragged University Edinburgh.¹² In the U.S., there’s Tampa Free Skool;¹³ in Canada there’s the Edmonton Free School;¹⁴ in Spain, there’s Mondragon University.¹⁵ And that’s just a few examples. The Lincoln Social Science Centre, another progressive, higher education institution, interestingly comments: “All classes are participative and collaborative in order to ground inquiry in the experiences and knowledges of the participants. ... One key guiding principle of the Centre is that ‘teachers’ and ‘students’ have much to learn from each other.”¹⁶

12. Conclusions

The study of literary journalism has also focussed too much on literary techniques and marginalized equally important consideration of political economy and ideology. Moreover, literary journalism studies have failed to give adequate attention to the subject as an academic discipline concentrating too much on its development as a genre. Why did literary journalism as a discipline emerge in this country at this particular period and not earlier? How important are the political/economic factors? In France, there is a vast tradition of literary journalism in the industry, and yet it is still to emerge as an academic discipline there? Why?

The development of the discipline has certainly been dogged by both constant epistemological disputes in the academy and bewilderment in the industry. The radical solution promoted in this essay – to consider all journalism (and not just the body text but also headlines, captions and standfirsts) worth considering as literature – certainly has significant pedagogical implications. During more than thirty years of teaching journalism, I have always asked my new students why they have chosen the subject. Virtually all come up with the same reply: “Because I like writing.” In other words, the creative/imaginative impulse lies behind the journalistic bug. And those creative/literary dimensions I have tried to incorporate in all my teaching (and writing on) practical journalism. Take, for instance, a conventional hard news story: there’s the conciseness and immediacy of the intro section (capturing the news value); the overall tone to consider, the use of quotations (to invest the coverage with a “human interest” element); the often subtle handling of attribution; perhaps the brief description of a person or place; the insertion, appropriately, of background, contextualizing information; the close attention to the specific style of the publication; the clear structuring of the report. And so on.

Breaking down the disciplinary boundaries in today’s hyper-specialized higher education environment is not going to be easy. But as indicated above, there are many initiatives outside the mainstream challenging the dominant academic ideologies. There is room for optimism.

NOTES

- 1 This essay is adapted from a paper to be published in *Literary Journalism Studies* 10.2 (2018, forthcoming).
- 2 In email to author, September 14, 2017.
- 3 In email to author, September 14, 2017.
- 4 In email to the author, 13 September 2017.
- 5 Panel title: “Literary Journalism in the Trenches” at the 13th IALJS conference in Vienna, May 17, 2018.
- 6 Martha Nandorfy, in her review of Sue Joseph’s *Behind the Text*, comments wryly (and in parentheses) on Simons’s comments: “And I find myself wondering if such course titles might actually increase student enrolments” (Nandorfy, 2017, p. 148).
- 7 Retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/news/558142/nitwit-hits-twitter-with-writ/>.
- 8 Retrieved from <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4614700/lisa-vickers-10k-compensation-after-boss-wrote-filthy-birthday-card/>.
- 9 Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/jan/28/free-university-movement-excluded-learners>.
- 10 Retrieved from <https://sscmanchester.wordpress.com/>
- 11 Retrieved from <https://leicesterpeoplesuni.wordpress.com/>
- 12 Retrieved from <https://www.raggeduniversity.co.uk/>
- 13 Retrieved from <https://freeskoolsproject.wikispaces.com/Tampa+Free+Skool>
- 14 Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/Edmonton-Free-School-183622781751794/>
- 15 Retrieved from <http://www.mondragon.edu/en>
- 16 Retrieved from <http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/about/>

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