

REVIEW

# ***Literary Journalism: an introduction***

GUSTAVO DE CASTRO  
Brasília: Casa das Musas, 2010

Reviewed by **CÉLIA LADEIRA MOTA**

Gustavo Castro, journalist, poet and writer, Professor of Esthetics at the Communication Faculty of the University of Brasília, looks to Literature to find the roots of a narrative of events. He explains, for example, how Honoré de Balzac, in the XIX century, already published his stories in French newspapers, giving an account of the French society of the time, showing characters governed by madness. At the same time, Charles Dickens, in England, became a successful columnist in the *Morning Chronicle*, offering to the readers a vivid portrait of London's inhabitants. The same can be said of Dostoevski and Mark Twain, who was considered the father of *New Journalism*, according to Tom Wolfe. In Brazil, the best-known experience is the book *Os Sertões* (The Backlands), by Euclides da Cunha, a synthesis of Journalism and Literature.

For Castro, however, Literary Journalism did not originate from American *New Journalism* because he adopts the point of view that both Literature and Journalism face a fundamental question: "how to tell a story?". Every day, newspapers around the world tell us many stories, most of them following a literary narrative, reporting the story of a single person to present the overall situation. Castro quotes Martinez (2004) to assert that writing about the fate of a person should condense the fate of all humankind in some special moments. For the writer, this is the big lesson Journalism is learning from Literature. Castro calls this juncture Complexity Literature.

### **Narrative value**

The book shows an interesting comparison between news value and narrative value. News values guide the journalistic practice in the newsrooms, and are based on values such as objectivity, current aspect, relevance, public opinion, factuality and real events, but narrative values favor subjectivity, emotional appeal, what is interesting and not

common in daily events, public interest, exceptionality, metaphors, and we already find many of these narrative styles in the news that we read in newspapers and magazines, and that we see on TV daily.

These narrative values are modeling an alternative practice to the inverted pyramid which became hegemonic for many years in the newsrooms of the world. How are narrative values opposed to the pyramid technique? The latter is based on the objectivity of the events, following the questions “what, who, where, when, how, why”, but Literary Journalism recovers the subjective and emotional processes of characters and events. The challenge faced by journalists and writers such as Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese and Truman Capote, exponents of *New Journalism*, is to put emotion and subjectivity in an objective and rational description of the news. But Castro advises: it is not supposed to be a sensational or a melodramatic report.

We are living at a time of exhausted formulas of the so-called objective journalism. So, the book *Literary Journalism: an introduction* can be seen as essential reading for those who are looking for new ways to write and to tell the stories which challenge us everyday. It is a return to sensitiveness, a way to face and to transform the superabundance of information we suffer from. It is, finally, what the researcher Beatriz Becker is proposing in recent years: the use of new narrative styles is the way to achieve a more qualified journalism.

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