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A Bunch of Distractive Writing

**Why has fact-based and extensively reported American style
narrative journalism not gained ground in Europe?**

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1. Introduction: The genre of telling true stories

“Here, Cahan, is a report that a man has murdered his wife, a rather bloody, hacked-up crime.... There’s a story in it. That man loved that woman well enough once to marry her, and now he has just hated her enough to cut her all to pieces. If you can find out just what happened between that wedding and this murder, you will have a novel for yourself and a short story to me. Go on now, take your time, and get this tragedy, as a tragedy”.

(Lincoln Steffens, city editor of the *New York Commercial Advertiser* to reporter and novelist Abraham Cahan in the 1890’s¹)

In December 2006 I attended The Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism in Boston. The Nieman Foundation for Journalism arranged the conference yearly in Harvard University from 2001 to 2009. It attracted some of the best practitioners and teachers of narrative journalism and hundreds of attendees: writers, editors, photographers, and documentary film directors. For them the conference was a chance to learn more about reporting skills and share thoughts on how to write journalism that is as enjoyable to read as a good book. The lecturers, speakers and attendees in the three-day conference were almost all Americans.

For me, a European features writer, the conference was an eye-opening experience. There was, indeed, a form of long storytelling journalism out there that the Americans call “narrative journalism” or “narrative literary journalism”. I found out that they even teach this kind of writing in journalism schools in the U.S.: many American universities offer courses on narrative nonfiction as part of their journalism programs.

I learnt that narrative journalism has roots much deeper in history than the “New Journalism” of the 1960’s and 1970’s. It is, simply put, “a body of writing that.... reads like a novel or short story except that it is true”². I realized that the best journalistic writing that I had been reading and admiring in magazines like the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times Magazine* was, in fact, narrative journalism. I started to search more such stories but also academic writing on narrative journalism. I soon realized that what I am interested in is very much an American form, and that, unlike in Europe, there is a strong American tradition in the practice of narrative journalism.

Why is narrative journalism so clearly an American journalistic form? This is the key question of this paper. Why is there so much less of it in European magazines, newspapers and newspapers’ weekend pages and supplements than in the American press? What could be some of the reasons for this?

These are not questions that are often asked, like Robert S. Boynton points out in his book *The New New Journalism*: “.... no one asked why [narrative journalism] had seemed to thrive

¹ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 21.

² Ibid., p. 1; see also Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 1.

almost exclusively in America during the second half of the twentieth century. Why, despite their highly developed novelistic and essayistic traditions had neither Europe, Asia, nor South America embraced literary nonfiction?"³

I will try to find some answers to these questions in this paper. It is an interesting challenge, but not impossible, to explore something that does *not* exist⁴. I will first look at the concept of narrative journalism since it goes by many names, and that is causing confusion. I'll then explain what it takes to write good narrative journalism (there is also low quality narrative writing being published). I'll go over some academic research on narrative journalism to look at the history and the present state of the form in the U.S. and Europe. I will then introduce how the American and European journalists, editors and academics that I have interviewed for this study see the differences between American and European narrative journalism scene. Some of them have tried to import the concept of narrative journalism to Europe and have taught narrative non-fiction writing to European journalism students and journalists.

I will include a list of examples of narrative journalism stories as an appendix for those readers who are not familiar with the form. They are examples only, not a Top Twenty. Reading examples can probably give one a better sense of the form than any definitions can.

I'll also briefly look at some of the new long-form journalism digital platforms that have been born recently in the U.S. and in Europe. They are not necessarily concentrating on narratives but some of them seem to run one or two every now and then. They prove that narrative journalism works just as well on digital reading devices, like tablets.

Writing well is difficult, like Mark Kramer and Wendy Call begin their anthology *Telling True Stories*, in which fifty-one respected writers of narrative journalism – all American – explain what narrative journalism is. Writing well alone is even more difficult. Unlike investigative reporters, the few narrative journalists in Europe have currently no network, nor a conference or meeting where they could get together and feel that they are part of a larger movement. My hope is that this paper can function as a way for some of them to find each other.

³ Robert S. Boynton, "Introduction", *The New New Journalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 2005, p. xx.

⁴ David Abrahamson and Ibrahim N. Abudharif, "Literary journalism in the Middle East", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 23-35.

2. What is it?

“Narrative is what I come up with when I put my niece to bed and she says, ‘Tell me a story.’ I tell her a story, I don’t tell her an article.”

(Janet Rae Brooks, *Salt Lake Tribune*⁵)

Nearly every book about narrative journalism, or literary narrative journalism, since the 1970’s has begun with how to define the term. What do we talk about when we talk about narrative journalism? Journalists and scholars haven’t been able to agree even on a name. The form has been called literary journalism, literary nonfiction, nonfiction novel, art-journalism, factual fiction, journalistic nonfiction, New Journalism, creative nonfiction, literature of fact, journalit, and non-imaginative literature. The many names have confused matters, like John Hartsock notes in his book *A History of American Literary Nonfiction*, the most comprehensive study of the roots of narrative journalism⁶.

Hartsock ends up calling the form “literary journalism”. That is the term used by the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS), a group of academics who are committed to insure literary journalism’s (and literary reportage’s, see chapter 4) acceptance as a legitimate academic subject. Hartsock admits that even a better term would be “narrative journalism”, because this kind of journalism “is written largely (but not exclusively) in a narrative mode”⁷. In this paper I will talk about “narrative journalism”. That’s the term chosen by the Nieman Narrative Program in Harvard University and by many well-known journalists and editors. In my opinion, “literary journalism”, because it includes a wider variety of writing, is a more vague term.

In all prose writing narrative is a “scalar” category: there are degrees of *narrativity* — one may intend to write a narrative but whether one succeeds is something readers will judge. Narrative is easier to define “bottom-up” — we recognize a text as narrative while reading it — than to try to come up with an exact definition.⁸

There have been many attempts to define literary narrative journalism. Perhaps the earliest scholar to characterize it was Edwin F. Ford in his 1937 book *Bibliography of Literary*

⁵ <http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/chip-on-your-shoulder/16324/what-is-narrative-anyway/>

⁶ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 3-4

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸ H. Porter Abbot, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 148-149. Norman Sims says it’s easier “to show than tell” what is narrative journalism. That’s why he begins his narrative journalism classes by exposing his students to some strong examples, like “The Long Fall of One-Eleven Heavy” by Michael Paterniti. It’s about the Swiss Air plane crash in Nova Scotia that claimed 229 lives. Says Sims, “As soon as students understand that it is all accurate — not tweaked at all, but written with voice, structure, symbolism, and characters — then we are off and running. They start to get it, that literary journalism has a factual foundation that comes from immersion reporting, from extended observation, often by living with people — or simply hanging around for a long time. To do so effectively, you become one of ‘them,’ but in reality you’re not, so you still have an outside perspective. The literary quality is not added at the end, but something conceived from the beginning”, <http://www.umass.edu/sbs/faculty/profiles/sims.htm> (Retrieved Mar 7, 2013.)

*Journalism in America*⁹. The term “literary journalism” had been used a couple of times earlier, but Ford seems to be the first who used it with its contemporary scholarly meaning (as a form of journalism and not as journalism *about* literature)¹⁰. Ford also notes that literary journalist’s job is “to make people... feel through their senses”. He observes that “different critical perspectives result in different interpretations of reality” and that “The literary journalist personalizes his writing. That is to say, he is more interested in people and their relationship to one another than he is in principles or abstract comment”.¹¹

With Ford the form gained a name. The word *reportage* was also used often at this time, and in the US the two terms overlapped for some time and usually referred to the same works¹².

In 1980, Sarah R. Shaber wrote a scholarly article on Ernest Hemingway’s Spanish civil war dispatches and called him “an accomplished literary journalist”. She noted that his journalism can be called literary because “it sought to tell a story, to communicate a slice of real life to his readers, rather than detail facts, interpretations, or descriptions for their own sake”.¹³

Hartsock seeks to contextualize the form but admits that understanding of it is still only emerging. John S. Bak reaches a similar conclusion when he declares the form “continually evolving”¹⁴. To define literary journalism in strict terms, he says, would be to transform “an organic process, one that is in constant flux, into a packaged product”¹⁵.

There are many reasons for the uncertainty surrounding the identity of narrative journalism. The so-called New Journalists of the 1960’s attracted critical scrutiny with their “impressionistic”, even egoistic style. Academic scholarship of the form has been split between English and journalism departments: English scholars have suspected whether journalism can have literary value, whereas many journalism scholars keep wondering if writing that it is somehow “literary” can be called journalism. The first modern academic work on narrative journalism by English literature scholars was published as recently as in 1997 (*Art of Fact* by Ben Yagoda and Kevin Kerrane).¹⁶

A large majority of journalists, too, seem confused. But when the Poynter Institute asked American reporters, writers, editors, authors and journalism teachers online in 2003 for their opinion of what constitutes narrative journalism, it received surprisingly congruent definitions:

“I think of narrative as storytelling: that is, as a way of ordering events and thoughts in a coherent sequence that makes them interesting to listen to. It therefore has a strong oral heritage. The sequence doesn’t have to be strictly chronological, though it can be; it can include digressions and flashbacks and foreshadowings, just as a story recounted around a campfire can. But because

⁹ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 9.

¹⁰ Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 8.

¹¹ As quoted in John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 242.

¹² Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 9.

¹³ Quoted in Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 11.

¹⁴ John S. Bak, “Introduction” in John S Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p.7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁶ Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, Touchstone, New York, 1998.

narrative is powered by events, its goal is not essentially analytical or critical.” (Anne Fadiman, Editor, *The American Scholar*)

”Narrative is the dirt path that leads us through the impenetrable forest, so we move forward and don’t feel lost.” (Wade Rawlins, *Raleigh News and Observer*)

”Narrative means any technique that produces the visceral desire in a reader to want to know what happened next.” Bob Baker, *Los Angeles Times*

”The narratives that have dazzled here have, of course, carefully drawn characters, a definite chronology, and a conflict line of some sort. There’s also a huge element of writerly control – that is, a concerted, sophisticated, and largely invisible, but detectable, effort by the author to illuminate a larger theme, issue, or concern by painstaking reporting to develop a story that shows or unfolds, rather than just stating or telling.” Craig Matsuda, *Los Angeles Times*

”At a minimum, narrative denotes writing with a) set scenes, b) characters, c) action that unfolds over time, d) the interpretable voice of a teller, a narrator with a somewhat discernible personality, e) some sense of relationship to the reader/viewer/listener, and f) all arrayed to lead the audience toward a point or realization or destination.” Mark Kramer, Founding Director, Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism

”I tend to use the term carefully. Mostly, I talk about ‘storytelling,’ or use other story descriptives (profile, explanatory, etc.) that help define the basic approach or goal of a story. Then we talk about weaving ‘narrative elements’ into those stories. A true narrative, as I understand it, requires 1) core character, 2) facing core conflict, and 3) resolving it through a forward-moving plot. That leaves many, many great journalistic stories off the list. Many of the great journalistic narratives of recent years (done by fellow travelers Jon Franklin, Tom French, Tom Hallman, etc.) require considerable use of reconstruction. In the days post-Jayson Blair, I’m wondering if we need to reprise our discussions about where the line is drawn on reconstruction and credibility. Do we have ways to signal to readers that a piece is true when we all admit we weren’t actually there?” Jacqui Banaszynski, *Seattle Times*, University of Missouri

”To me it means ‘storytelling’ Nearly everyone seems to understand what THAT means (although too few people seem to know how it’s done.) I don’t think it requires definition, but in case it does: “Storytelling” relates a series of connected events, using chronology (what happens *next*) as the main organizational element. Pure storytelling (or narrative) requires a theme (a central point or message). And it requires the classic character/problem/struggle/resolution structure that is part of every story from fairy tales to Melville to the ‘Sopranos’. It also requires a narrator – a speaker or writer who takes control of the material, shapes it, and relates it in an appealing and personal voice. Finally, storytelling (or narrative) elements can be inserted in articles that are not pure narrative from top to bottom. For example, a well-told anecdote in the body of a block organization story is a form of narrative or storytelling.” Bruce DeSilva, Editor, Associated Press

”Narrative is what I come up with when I put my niece to bed and she says, ‘Tell me a story.’ I tell her a story, I don’t tell her an article.” Janet Rae Brooks, *Salt Lake Tribune*

”A narrative or story is a form of vicarious (or substitute) experience. The story transports the reader to a place and a time not otherwise available to the reader. We can problem climb another step up: What’s the purpose of such vicarious experience: maybe empathy, understanding, catharsis.” Roy Peter Clark, The Poynter Institute¹⁷

So there seems to be among some journalists in the US a reasonable understanding that narrative journalism is “story telling journalism”. According to Hartsock narrative journalism

¹⁷ <http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/chip-on-your-shoulder/16324/what-is-narrative-anyway/>

is “a body of writing that.... reads like a novel or short story except that it is true or makes a truth claim to phenomenal experience”¹⁸. Some scholars, like Susan Greenberg, question defining narrative journalism through fiction, though. Greenberg reminds us that narrative prose developed as nonfiction narrative prose. It was only later that writers of realistic fiction adopted the same storytelling techniques. She suggests defining narrative in terms of whether it claims to be true, and whether the writer is following certain rules (transparency), or not.¹⁹ Jenny McKay, too, notes the problem of defining a genre, or form, in terms of what it is *not*. By doing this one implies that he puts more value on the opposite, in this case to fiction²⁰.

The Nieman Narrative Program in Harvard University defined the form as requiring “deep and sophisticated reporting, an appreciation for storytelling, a departure from the structural conventions of daily news, and an imaginative use of language”.²¹ Others have also stressed the reporting it requires: it combines intimacy of fiction “with extraordinary journalistic reporting”²².

There are other forms of nonfictional writing that come close to it, sometimes overlapping, such as profile, travel narrative, memoir, personal essay, historical writing, and investigative reporting²³.

Journalist Tom Wolfe attempted to theorize his version of narrative journalism that he calls New Journalism. According to Wolfe the form is based on two things: unambiguous rhetorical technique and an authorial intention. He lists four characteristics: “scene-by-scene construction” (presenting the narrative in a series of scenes); using third-person point-of-view to put the reader inside the mind of someone else than the writer; using full dialogue instead of quotes found in mainstream journalism; and providing “status” details (appearance, behaviour).²⁴

In the 1980’s other writers of narrative journalism added to the list accuracy, voice, structure, responsibility, symbolic representation and immersion reporting²⁵. According to Norman Sims a list of characteristics can be an easier way to define narrative journalism than a strict definition²⁶. He has listed similar characteristics: “immersion” in the subject matter, structure (some resemblance to Wolfe’s scene-by-scene construction), accuracy (credibility with the reader), a writer’s voice (unlike in the mainstream journalism), journalist’s responsibility to the characters in the narrative, and symbolism or underlying

¹⁸ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 1.

¹⁹ Author’s interview with Susan Greenberg.

²⁰ Jenny McKay, “Reportage in the U.K.”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 54. Says John McPhee, “Whereas nonfiction — what the hell, that just says, this is nongrapefruit we’re having this morning. It doesn’t mean anything”. See Hessler, Peter, “John McPhee, The Art of Nonfiction No. 3”, *The Paris Review*, Spring 2010, No. 192.

²¹ <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/NiemanFoundation/ProgramsAndPublications/NarrativeJournalism.aspx>

²² Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 2005. p. xvi.

²³ Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, “Introduction”, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007, p. 66.

²⁴ Tom Wolfe, “The Emotional Core of the Story”, Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007, p. 150-151.

²⁵ Norman Sims, “The Art of Literary Journalism”, Mark Kramer and Norman Sims, *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995, p. 3.

²⁶ Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 7.

meaning²⁷. Later he has added also access, attention to ordinary lives, and the special qualities of a writer's connection to the subjects²⁸. According to Barbara Lounsberry narrative journalism should have a documentable subject matter, exhaustive research, creation of the scene and something that she calls "fine writing"²⁹.

I will briefly explain some of these central characteristics in narrative journalism:

Structure. This is the architecture of the piece. In a narrative there are people acting through time. Skilful writers can digress from the main narrative, provide background information and return without losing the reader. When the author drops the reader back at the stop where he left the story, "the place feels familiar".³⁰ Stories, by definition, are chronological, not topical. "Narrative without chronology is a disaster".³¹ This does not mean that a writer has to start at the beginning and move straightforward to the end.

Setting and scenes. There are two types of scenes: those the reporter observed, and those she must reconstruct from what others observed³². All the details also in the reconstructed scenes must be accurate. Narrative journalism grows out of good reporting, not great writing. But writing matters, too. A good narrative cannot use wornout language.³³

Dialogue. People in scenes must talk to one another and interact, or the narrative lacks life³⁴. Quoting letters may work as a dialogue. In recreating scenes the journalist has not witnessed, the most questionable aspect is the dialogue: can any witness remember exactly what was said days, weeks or even months after the incident³⁵?

Characterization. Readers enter most stories through the main character(s). That character must be understandable to the reader. Few news stories have characters: they have names speaking quotes³⁶. No nonfiction writer can capture a whole person. Usually the reporter chooses one facet of a character's life.³⁷

Immersion. In a narrative, access is all. One needs to get close to people to get the full story. Reporter's natural instinct is to ask questions, but sometimes it's better to observe and to minimize one's presence.

²⁷ For Norman Sims' characterization of narrative journalism see e.g. David Abrahamson, "Collegial Discovery", *Literary Journalism Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2010. p. 90.

²⁸ Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 12.

²⁹ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 256.

³⁰ Mark Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists", Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995, p. 31.

³¹ Jon Franklin, "Character", Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, p. 128.

³² Adam Hochschild, "Reconstructing Scenes", Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, p. 132. Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda (ed.), *The Art of Fact*, New York, 1997, p. 15, 161.

³³ Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda note that there is also bad narrative journalism since many journalists end up writing like bad novelists – doors are being slammed, grins grinned and coffee sipped, *The Art of Fact*, Touchstone, New York, 1998, p. 218.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁵ Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, Touchstone, New York, 1998, p. 161.

³⁶ Don Fry and Roy Peter Clark, "Rebirth of the Narrative", *The Quill*, May 1994.

³⁷ Jon Franklin, "Character", Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, p. 1128.

Accuracy. Narrative journalism is truth seeking³⁸. One cannot alter the material one has collected. The material alters the writer's initial conceptions, not the other way around. Narrative journalism requires a tedious method of reporting because writing grows from the material. Getting a slice of life down authentically is hard labour. For every sentence the writer must have a mental footnote: how do I know this? When editing, the editor has to ask over and over, "How do we know?" "You have a general idea but the materials start shaping you. If they don't, God help you," says John McPhee.³⁹

Voice. Narrative voice is a major element in the construction of a story. Voice is the way a writer *talks*. A writer is *speaking* to his readers.⁴⁰ In narrative journalism a writer has a personality. This is something daily news reporters dutifully avoid because they see it as unprofessional and not objective. "The defining mark of literary journalism is the personality of the writer, the individual and intimate voice of a whole, candid person not representing.... any institution."⁴¹ There is a great range though: the narrator may also be a "virtual person whose personhood can be reduced to zero"⁴². *Distance* refers to a narrator's degree of involvement in the story she tells: a writer can devise a narratorial voice that gives the impression of complete emotional non-involvement in what she narrates, i.e. no evaluative terms to indicate personal judgment.⁴³ In narrative journalism voice is "[p]robably the hardest to teach".⁴⁴ Says Michael Paterniti, "The voice of every piece varies, but it's always a mystery how you get there, how you find that voice"⁴⁵.

Theme. This is the piece's central argument, the "moral of the story," what the work is really about⁴⁶. The story has to work on more than one level. David Halberstam talks about "the idea": for what is the story, how it connects to the human condition. In narrative journalism the writer must be able to point to something larger.⁴⁷ Some scholars talk about narratives' open-endedness: readers are engaged in creating their own meanings.

Time. When one reads a non-narrative text, like an essay, the only time involved is the time it takes to read. When reading a narrative we are aware of the time of reading and the order in which things are read, *and* the time the story's events are supposed to take and the order in which they are supposed to occur.⁴⁸

³⁸ John Tulloch and Richard Lance Keeble, "Introduction", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 8.

³⁹ Norman Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism", Mark Kramer and Norman Sims, *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995, p. 17. See also John McPhee's interview in *The Paris Review*, <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5997/the-art-of-nonfiction-no-3-john-mcphee>, Mar 12, 2013.

⁴⁰ Susan Orlean, "On Voice", Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007, p. 158-159.

⁴¹ Mark Kramer, "Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists", Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995, p. 26.

⁴² H. Porter Abbot, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 72.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁴ David Abrahamson, "Collegial Discovery", *Literary Journalism Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2010. p. 90.

⁴⁵ Paige Williams, "Michael Paterniti on narrative voice, the power of rewrite, Bill Clinton, old cheese, and flying Spaniards (part one)", <http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/2010/11/29/michael-paterniti-on-narrative-voice-the-power-of-rewrite-bill-clinton-old-cheese-and-flying-spaniards/>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

⁴⁷ David Halberstam, "The Narrative Idea", Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007, p. 12-13.

⁴⁸ H. Porter Abbot, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 74-75.

The boundary between conventional feature writing and narrative journalism is not always clear but there are basic distinguishing characteristics. In a conventional feature expository discourse dominates, and the purpose of a descriptive scene is only to illustrate “a discursive or expository – and thus abstract” – point that will follow (the “nut-graf”).⁴⁹

John Hartsock chooses to call narrative journalism a “form”, not a “genre”.⁵⁰ According to Bak it is not even a form but a discipline⁵¹. To call it a discipline, he argues, would put a moratorium “on the barrage of definitions and defences that have hindered the advancement of literary journalism studies”⁵².

Ethical concerns

The greatest controversies in the history on narrative journalism, particularly in the 1960’s, have been about the accuracy of the writing⁵³. There are ethical problems, because “life is not a narrative, but messy” as Ian Jack says⁵⁴. There is an unwritten contract with the reader and clear rules what the writer cannot do, and these rules are much more rigid today than they were in the 19th or 20th century. Mark Kramer has divided ethical concerns into two areas:

1) The writer’s relationship to *readers*. There are certain rules: a narrative journalist is not allowed to combine or improve scenes, aggregate or combine characters, refurbish quotations, mis-state chronology, falsify the discernible drift or proportion of events, invent quotes, nor attribute thoughts to sources unless the sources have said they had had those very thoughts. There may not be unacknowledged deals with subjects involving payment or editorial control. In short, the narrative journalist may in no way alter what the writer knows to be the nature of his material.⁵⁵ Occasionally writers agree not to use actual names and identifying details in return for on-going access, but they tell readers they have done so.

It hasn’t always been like this. Joe Mitchell, the genre’s grand old man, has admitted using composite characters and scenes in his 1948 story “Old Mr. Flood”. Jon Hersey did the same with the main character of his 1944 article “Joe Is Home Now”. As far as it is known, neither writer did it again. Truman Capote apparently recast some events in his 1966 story “In Cold Blood”. According to Kramer, “None violated readers’ expectations for the genre, because there weren’t yet strong expectations – or much of a genre, for that matter – to violate”. If one reads those stories now knowing that they include constructed events, one finds oneself guessing what was real. “Today, literary journalism is a genre readers recognize and read expecting civil treatment,” Kramer writes. He notes that in recent years, a few narrative journalists have drawn heavy criticism for breaking readers’ trust. One of them

⁴⁹ John Hartsock, “It Was a Dark and Stormy Night”, *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007, p. 257-284.

⁵⁰ Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000.

⁵¹ John S. Bak, “Introduction” in John S Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 18.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵³ Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Author’s discussion with Ian Jack, London, Oct 5, 2012.

⁵⁵ Mark Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists”, Norman Sims and Mark Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995, p. 23-25.

was Michael Finkel who used a composite character in his cover story in the *New York Times Magazine* in 2001. While the article was based on actual reporting, it was fictionalized; Finkel got caught, and lost his job.⁵⁶ “It is easy to keep readers unconfused and undeceived, just by letting them know what you’re doing,” Kramer notes. He believes it is not accidental that the rise of narrative journalism has been accompanied by “authors’ nearly universal adherence to these conventions”.⁵⁷

It’s worth noting that narrative journalism cannot be written “with the certainty of a fictional narrator who is allowed to know for sure”⁵⁸. Narrative journalist can’t write in the same way as a narrator of fiction about the inner life and motives of her subjects. One must use “formulas of speculation” like: “n must have thought”, or “n may have thought”. The use of free indirect thought is a novelistic liberty that must be out of bounds for a narrative journalist.⁵⁹ John McPhee — known for more than thirty nonfiction books — has said that “you don’t get inside [your characters’] heads and think for them”⁶⁰. In non-fiction there are always questions that remain unanswered because the writer simply cannot know.

2) The writer’s relationship to *sources*. This is an inescapable ethical problem. Immersion reporting is likely to develop into something that resembles partnership or even friendship. Does a person in a story see himself revealing information to a friend or a journalist? A writer has to try to keep the good access without falsifying her intentions. It’s important to be as open as possible with the subjects.

Invention of details means that the writing is no longer journalism. It can also be damaging to other forms of nonfiction that typically have looser standards, like memoir and autobiography. Norman Sims has been interviewing narrative journalists since 1981, and none of those he’s met said it’s all right to make things up. The most important requirement for them was accuracy.⁶¹ Gay Talese, one of the best-known narrative journalism writers of our time, wrote in 1970 that narrative journalism is not fiction even though it often reads like fiction: “It is, or it should be, as reliable as the most reliable reportage although it seeks a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts”⁶².

In his introduction to *Literary Journalism Across the Globe* John S. Bak calls the form “one of the most significant and controversial forms of writing of the last century”⁶³. To understand more deeply what narrative journalism is, it is necessary to look at the history of journalism and see how narrative journalism has served a very different function from factual i.e.

⁵⁶ Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 5. Finkel’s story was called “Is Youssuf Malé a Slave?”, and it ran on Nov 18, 2001.

⁵⁷ Mark Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists”, Norman Sims and Mark Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995, p. 23-25. Norman Sims mentions more cases where writers have broken their presumed contract with readers, Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 4-6.

⁵⁸ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 149.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 149. In Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* one can see early signs of interior monologue which provides an important distinction between the fictional novel and narrative journalism. See John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 119.

⁶⁰ Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 3-4.

⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

⁶² John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 193.

⁶³ John S. Bak: “Introduction”, *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 1.

objective news style⁶⁴. In doing this I rely heavily on John Hartsock's thorough book *A History of American Literary Journalism*.

⁶⁴ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 49.

3. History of narrative journalism

"The city was a dreadful spectacle indeed, the morning after the storm! As soon as people could put their heads out of doors, they met with nothing but unexpected ruin and destruction: Though great desolation was imagined, no one expected the hundred part of what he saw."

(Daniel Defoe, 1769⁶⁵)

By 1890's two dominant styles of journalism had emerged in the English-speaking world. The newer of these two attempted to appear neutral in tone, and it is what we now call *objective reporting*. The other one had been around much longer: it was this type of *subjective* journalistic writing that the modern narrative journalism derives from.⁶⁶

The formula for the objective modern news reporting was simple: the reporter was to place the most important information of her story in the summary news lead. Its purpose is not to tell a story but to provide information. It reveals the major details and answers all major questions so that the story is reduced to the "knowledge of facts"⁶⁷. The lead information was then to be presented in the descending order of importance (the inverted pyramid model). This was partly due to the invention of the telegraph. With the telegraph, the correspondents could not be sure if their entire dispatch would reach the other end. To be certain that the most important facts, at least, were received, it was best to put them at the beginning.⁶⁸

Before the end of the 19th century and the emergence of the objective reporting, narrative nonfiction was being practiced as part of an unbroken tradition. In *A History of American Literary Journalism* John Hartsock gives numerous examples of these early narrative reporters. Many of them were English, like Edward Ward, who wrote sketches of London life in 1698-1700. Ward's monthly paper *London Spy* proved that he was an amazing reporter and had an eye for the casual. "Ward thus sounds every bit a narrative literary journalist of the modern kind," Hartsock writes.⁶⁹

Three other early examples of narrative literary journalists are Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens and George Orwell, all Englishmen who later influenced generations of American writers⁷⁰. Defoe's (1660-1731) book about the storm that ravaged England in 1703 is an interesting example of early narrative writing. An extraordinarily rich form of journalism evolved in the 18th century Britain. That's when the boundaries between the modern novel and narrative journalism were firming up. At that time characterizing a story as true gave it legitimacy that the early fictional novel did not have. Hartsock even claims that the modern fictional novel

⁶⁵ Daniel Defoe, *An Historical Narrative of the Great and Tremendous Storm Which Happened on Nov. 26th, 1703*, W. Nicoll, London, 1769, p. 66.

⁶⁶ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 122.

⁶⁷ John Hartsock, "It Was a Dark and Stormy Night", *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007, p. 257-284

⁶⁸ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 124. Lead's function is to deny questioning "and thus involvement on the part of the reader, unlike the narrative, or story, which attracts the reader by what the reader does not know and can only question". Ibid., 124.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 111-113. The roots go even deeper than that: in ancient Rome, there were *actis urbi*, or city gazettes, that contained what we'd now call human interest stories. Ibid., 81.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. 13.

borrowed technique from nonfictional narratives, and not the other way around.⁷¹ It's worth remembering that the contemporary meaning of the term "novel" was not born until in the late 18th century⁷².

In America, modern literary journalism, narrative in its nature, was born during the post-Civil War period. By the 1890's it had achieved critical recognition. An 1890's *New York Commercial Advertiser* editor Lincoln Steffens seems to have understood the essence of narrative journalism particularly well. His advice to his reporters was "to get the news so completely and to report it so humanly that the readers will see himself in the other fellow's place" — even if "the fellow was a murderer"⁷³. There were texts that can be described as narrative before that, like Mark Twain's "Life on the Mississippi" and Stephen Crane's New York City sketches where he used dialogue, concrete description and detailed scene setting. At this time narrative journalism was more extensive in the United States than thought, and it was practiced by professional journalists.⁷⁴

Why did narrative journalism appear in the U.S. at this time? Hartsock reminds us that it wasn't born in a historical vacuum. He makes a distinction between *discursive*, i.e. the information model of journalism, and *narrative*, i.e. the story model of journalism⁷⁵. Newspapers' new writing style was "fundamentally alienating of subjectivity" — journalist's, subject's, and reader's. Hartsock talks about the "alienated objectivity" of conventional news writing, and suggests that in America modern narrative journalism was a response to readers' alienation from experience that resulted from newspapers' objectified writing style. Narrative journalist's ambition in the 1890's America was to engage the reader by the journalist's subjectivity⁷⁶, and same conditions keep it alive now⁷⁷.

Hartsock notes that only by finding a way to acknowledge the subjectivity and uncertainty that exists in factual discovery is it possible for the writer to anchor this to external reality in a way that is persuasive and trustworthy. According to Greenberg authenticity is also a guard against what one could call "alienated subjectivity" of the popular confessional or opinion journalism of today⁷⁸.

After 1910 narrative journalism started to decline in the U.S. During the First World War newspapers were monitored and censored. This led to efforts to write factual, "objective" news. There was also a shift in critical opinion that began to deny that journalism could be "literary".⁷⁹ As Hartsock sees it, "journalism would be condemned as a merely utilitarian

⁷¹ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 118. Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda call Daniel Defoe "perhaps the first true modern literary journalist" in their *The Art of Fact*, Touchstone, New York, 1998, p. 17.

⁷² Doug Underwood, *Journalism and the Novel*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, p. 3.

⁷³ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 78.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33, 40.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 205. Also Michael Shudson has talked about the "story" model vs. the "information" model of journalism, Michael Shudson, *Discovering the news*, Basic, New York, 1978, p. 89.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁷⁸ Susan Greenberg, "Poetics of Fact", *Times Higher Education*, Aug 10, 2010. See also Susan Greenberg, "Kapuscinski and Beyond", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 137.

⁷⁹ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 154-155.

exercise by the rise of the concept of objectivity” — or “utilitarian without any other value”⁸⁰.

“Objective” news reporting came to dominate journalistic discourse when the U.S was going through an extraordinary social and cultural transformation. This was a time when people would have needed to understand what was happening in America and in their own lives — population boom, mass migration, urbanization, economic upheaval, labour unions, financial panics.⁸¹ But, as Hartsock observes, “in times of social transformation and crisis an objectified rhetoric proves even more inadequate”⁸². During this period, up to the 1930’s, only few writers, like Ernst Hemingway, practiced narrative journalism⁸³.

The second major period of narrative journalism took place in the 1930’s and 1940’s when the great depression prompted a re-evaluation of journalistic practice. Many newspapers had not succeeded in reporting the great depression but had downplayed it because the politicians were afraid of widespread panic. A lot of people saw newspapers as compromised, and there was an emerging need to help Americans understand their lives.⁸⁴ Joseph North, editor of the *New Masses*, a prominent leftist publication, wrote in 1935:

“Reportage is three-dimensional reporting. The writer not only condenses reality, he helps the reader to feel the fact”⁸⁵. “The writer of reportage must... do more than tell his reader what has happened — he must help the reader experience the event. Herein reportage becomes durable literature”⁸⁶.

The reportage of the 1930’s was meant to upset the status quo, and many writers of the form became social advocates. *The New Yorker* had been started in 1925. This was the first time that a group of narrative journalism writers found themselves in the same place and were “able to pursue a vision of literary journalism, even though they did not have a special name for it”⁸⁷. Some people called the form “literary reportage”, but this was not a widely spread term. It was mainly *The New Yorker* writers who kept the form alive after the 1940’s up to the 1960’s. The writers were given time to develop their articles and they had an opportunity to write the kind of features that were not possible in the *New York Herald Tribune* where many of them had worked before.⁸⁸

All these journalists who were writing narrative journalism in the early 20th century paved the way for the New Journalists of the 1960’s. They were the first to have a name for their style of journalistic writing, but the form they were promoting wasn’t, after all, as “new” as they suggested but part of a long history. What was different from before was the amount of attention it now received.⁸⁹ The one who is most identified with the New Journalism

⁸⁰ Ibid., 242.

⁸¹ Ibid., 57.

⁸² Ibid., 167.

⁸³ Ibid., 163. See example Hemingway’s “Italy, 1927” that he wrote for the *New Republic*.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 167. Lives of marginalized groups were explored at his time, the most memorable of such accounts is James Agee’s “Let Us Now Praise Famous Men”, 1941.

⁸⁵ As quoted in John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 169.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 241.

⁸⁷ Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. xx-xxi.

⁸⁸ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 170. *New Yorker* writers of the time included Morris Markey, E. B. White, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Rloss, A. J. Liebling, John McNulty, St. Clair McKelway, and John Hersey.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 191.

movement of the 1960's is Tom Wolfe; he was working as a feature writer in the *New York Herald Tribune* in the 60's and was pushing the boundaries of that form.

The New Yorker now found it had competition. The other publications that published "new journalism" in the 1960's were mainly *Esquire*, the *Village Voice*, the *Rolling Stone*, the *New York Herald Tribune* and its supplement *New York Magazine*. From the mid-60's onwards "new journalism" started to be published also in book form (e.g. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, and Tom Wolfe's *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*).⁹⁰ According to Kerrane and Yagoda much of the fresh writing of the 1960's and 1970's was a direct response to the events that were transforming the American society: war protests, race riots, and assassinations. The "genteel voice" of traditional reportage was no longer enough to show what was happening.⁹¹

New Journalism became discredited in the 1970's. There were accusations that writers made up details.⁹² There were inferior imitators, too. They thought that the word "I" in Hunter S. Thomson's gonzo journalism meant that they could stop interviewing and research altogether⁹³.

In the years after Tom Wolfe's manifesto a group of American writers continued to develop the form further. One of the enthusiasts was Mark Kramer, who, after having published his first nonfiction book *Three Farms*, was appointed as a writer-in-residence in Smith College in 1981. He and John McPhee began to teach some of the first courses on literary journalism; McPhee's course in Princeton University was called The Literature of Fact⁹⁴. One of the first books to train journalists on this kind of writing was Joe Franklin's how-to book *Writing for Story* that appeared in 1986.

A 1992 article in the *Nieman Reports* noted that journalism's most compelling stories are those that use the techniques usually associated with novel writing; that writing plays an important role in best journalism⁹⁵. The public had learnt to devour books, films and television series that cast issues narratively. In 1998 Mark Kramer, now writer-in-resident in Boston University, started a yearly conference on narrative journalism⁹⁶. In 2001 he became the head of the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism in Harvard University and moved the conference to Harvard where it grew hugely popular⁹⁷.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 192.

⁹¹ Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, Touchstone, New York, 1998, p. 18.

⁹² Norman Sims, *True Stories*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 2007, p. xix.

⁹³ Jenny McKay, "Reportage in the U.K.", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 51. John Hartsock writes about Hunter S. Thomson in *A History of American Literary Journalism*: "Part of the difficulty is that while his work is often narrative, it also engages in outrageous satire and the boundary between fiction and nonfiction is unclear".

⁹⁴ Author's interview with Mark Kramer. Kramer's course was placed in American Studies. After Smith College he continued teaching narrative journalism in Boston University. Says McPhee (b. 1931) of his own teaching, "When I was in college, no teacher taught anything that was like the stuff that I write. The subject was beneath the consideration of the academic apparatus". See Hessler, Peter, "John McPhee, The Art of Nonfiction No. 3", *The Paris Review*, Spring 2010, No. 192.

⁹⁵ "Journalism's Quilty Secret", as quoted in John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 252.

⁹⁶ The course was called "Aboard a Narrative Train".

⁹⁷ Author's interview with Kramer. The Nieman Foundation for Journalism in Harvard hosts the most prestigious journalism fellowship program in the U.S. The Conference on Narrative Journalism continued in Harvard until 2009 when the Nieman foundation suspended it for economic reasons; see <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/newsitem.aspx?id=100117>.

At that time it seemed that tough economic times had made editorial management more receptive to some aspects of the narrative form. Editors saw it as a way to attract and hold readers.⁹⁸ It had not been like this before: many narrative journalists had had to wrestle with the tension between narrative and news. When journalist Katherine Boo turned in a story draft for a series about neglect in group homes <for people with mental illnesses>, one of her editors said that Boo had uncovered serious crimes but buried them under “a bunch of distracting writing”. According to the editor Boo’s narrative approach to the story meant that the crimes would not be taken seriously. But, as Boo notes, for some subjects, “*not* choosing narrative means not being read at all”.⁹⁹

An increasing number of newspaper journalists started using narrative techniques in their stories, even in news pieces that were reported in a day or two¹⁰⁰. According to Hartsock they were doing so because they and their editors sensed “the limitations implicit to the objectivist paradigm so long dominant in journalism practice”. A traditional story telling model was returning to newspapers after being pushed out of them for some hundred years. From 1994-2004 at least eight Pulitzer prizes were awarded to narrative pieces or series that were published in newspapers’ news sections. Also, *Best Newspaper Writing*, which publishes the winning and finalist entries in The American Association of Newspaper Editors’ annual awards, included a section called “Narrative Writing” for the first time in its 2005 edition. Even news agencies like the AP were experimenting with narratives. In December 2005 the Nieman Foundation in Harvard unveiled the online *Nieman Narrative Digest*. It is probably the largest collection of journalistic narratives online. At its inception, the *Digest* included 157 examples of narrative journalism of which 151 were from newspapers.¹⁰¹ The newspaper press in overall may not be “narrative supportive” but it has become at least “narrative tolerant”.¹⁰² This does not mean that all newspaper narratives are of good quality, though; naturally there is great variety.

As for magazines, some critics say that they have let down the cause of narrative journalism after the 70’s and 80’s. There are no study results to back this, though. It seems, however, that it has become more usual for writers of narrative journalism to begin with a book contract, whereas earlier large magazine pieces were extended into nonfiction books only after having first been published in magazines. It may be true that large American general-interest magazines are more reluctant to give their writers the long reporting time that is essential to produce ambitious narrative work.

⁹⁸ <http://www.poynter.org/uncategorized/3700/overview-aboard-the-narrative-train/> The conference on narrative journalism is now back in Boston University (<http://www.bu.edu/com/narrative/>). It was last held in April 2013 with a theme “Storytelling journalism goes digital”.

⁹⁹ Katherine Boo, “Difficult Journalism That’s Slap-Up Fun”, Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ In 2000, a survey of 37,000 newspaper readers across the U.S., conducted by the Readership Institute at Northwestern University, identified narrative journalism as more accessible than the inverted pyramid. See John Hartsock, “It Was a Dark and Stormy Night”, *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007. See also <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/100535/The-State-of-Narrative-Nonfiction-Writing.aspx>.

¹⁰¹ John Hartsock, “It Was a Dark and Stormy Night”, *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007, p. 257-284. Hartsock notes that it is not just the big national newspapers that publish narratives but also many others, like the *Portland Oregonian*, the *St. Petersburg Times*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Seattle Times*, the *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, and the *Chicago Tribune*. The Nieman Narrative Digest is now called the Nieman Storyboard (<http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/>).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 257-284.

Robert S. Boynton has looked at the narrative journalists of the post Wolfe/Talese generation. According to him the new generation of narrative journalists experiments more with the way one gets the story than with language. These writers have developed innovative immersion strategies, like Ted Conover, who has among other things worked as a prison guard. They have also extended the time they spend reporting and deepened their involvement with characters. Their most significant innovations have been experiments with reporting; journalists have become part of their characters' lives.¹⁰³ Boynton thinks this freedom to experiment has had a tremendous influence on many journalists who have taken up the form after Wolfe and others.

It's worth noting, as Norman Sims does, that in American journalism narrative journalism has never been "more than a salad or dessert"¹⁰⁴. There is a connection between narrative writing and quality, even though this is not always the case. Maybe it's the scarcity that makes good narrative journalism so memorable: when in 1999 a New York University journalism department project, headed by the historian Mitchell Stephens, came up with a list of the hundred best works of the 20th century American journalism, at least some 40 texts on the list were works of literary journalism¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰³ Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 2005, p. xiii. In Boynton's list of writers are Adrian LeBlanc, Michael Lewis, Lawrence Weschler, Eric Schlosser, Richard Preston, Alex Kotlowitz, Jon Krakauer, William Langewiesche, Lawrence Wright, William Finnegan, Ted Conover, Jonathan Harr and Susan Orlean who all write also book-length narrative nonfiction.

¹⁰⁴ Norman Sims, "The Evolutionary Future of American and International Literary Journalism", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 85.

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/stephens/Top%20100%20page.htm> (retrieved Feb 2013). See also Norman Sims, "The Evolutionary Future of American and International Literary Journalism", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 89-90.

4. European tradition of reportage

"Beginning to read a story should feel like embarking on a journey, starting toward a destination."

(Deneen L. Brown, the *Washington Post*¹⁰⁶)

Many scholars and practitioners of narrative journalism have long acknowledged the form's Anglo-American roots¹⁰⁷. The suggestion that there is something "peculiarly American" about the form is not new. John A. Kouwenhoven wrote as early as 1948 that narrative journalism is a distinctively American phenomenon. He cited John Hersey's *Hiroshima* as an example of a work that has "a foundation of rigorously factual detail which is almost unknown elsewhere".¹⁰⁸ There seems to be a tradition in the U.S. for very precise, fact-based narrative journalism that does not exist even in the U.K.¹⁰⁹, which shares a common history of literary journalism with the U.S. (see chapter 3).

European journalists often assume that narrative journalism is the same form of journalism as what is called *reportage* or *literary reportage* in Europe. It is not, although there is some overlapping. Bak talks about "U.S.-led literary journalism" and "European-produced literary reportage"¹¹⁰. Kerrane and Yagoda included a few British journalists in their 1997 anthology of literary journalism to illustrate "an alternate tradition" of literary reportage and the legacy of George Orwell¹¹¹. According to Hartsock 'literary reportage' of European origin is a problematic term and a much more elastic form than American narrative journalism¹¹². It's a term that is used for a confusing variety of styles, "from the polemic to the more open-ended approach to storytelling that is typical in American narrative journalism"¹¹³. There is a shared ancestry in the 19th century, but in the 20th century the two forms started to develop differently, one in the U.S and the other mainly in Europe. It's been suggested this was at least partly due to the two world wars.¹¹⁴

To show the difference, Hartsock compares the writings of two Russian journalists, Svetlana Alexievich and Anna Politkovskaya. Their work, he notes, is "strikingly different": In Alexievich's work narrative and descriptive modalities dominate, and it is much closer to the American tradition of narrative journalism than Politkovskaya's work which is dominantly

¹⁰⁶ Deneen L. Brown, "To Begin the Beginning", Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007, p. 101.

¹⁰⁷ John S. Bak, "Introduction", *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ As quoted in Robert S. Boynton, "Introduction", *The New New Journalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 2005, p. xxi.

¹⁰⁹ Author's discussion with Ian Jack, Oct 5, 2012, London.

¹¹⁰ John S. Bak, "Introduction", *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 10-11. American Library of Congress defines "reportage literature" as "works on a narrative style of literature that features the personal presence and involvement of a human witness". This seems to suit well the European idea of reportage.

¹¹¹ Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda, *The Art of Fact*, Touchstone, New York, 1998, p. 19. They include Norman Lewis, Piers Paul Read, John Simpson and James Fenton. Read's 1974 book *Alive: The Story of the Andes Survivors* documents an airplane crash and rescue efforts afterwards.

¹¹² John Hartsock, "Literary Reportage", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 23-24.

¹¹³ Susan Greenberg, "Kapuscinski and Beyond", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 124.

¹¹⁴ See John S. Bak, "Introduction", *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 1.

discursive ("expository and argumentative in nature"). Both of them can be described as writers of literary reportage, but only Alexievich is a writer of narrative journalism.¹¹⁵ Politkovskaya's work, instead, is rooted in the polemical European discursive tradition¹¹⁶. Here is the crucial difference: a polemic aims to establish the truth, whereas narrative journalism is open-ended and leaves the reader to make the conclusions. It is as if in the European tradition of reportage the writer "is sitting in front of the story"¹¹⁷. Or as Ian Jack says, "Being a good reporter needs levels of humility; the other person is more interesting than you are, and you're there only to deliver."¹¹⁸

What is called "literary reportage" evolved out of the proletarian European tradition. It prospered in Eastern Europe in the communist era: communists didn't trust the "bourgeois 'objective' journalism which rose during the 1920's and became the professional standard for the capitalist media, particularly in the United States".¹¹⁹ From the Marxist perspective "objective" journalism was so dispassionate that it concealed the miseries of the struggling proletariat.¹²⁰ In the 1950's reportage was a tool of Stalinist propaganda: reporters were sent to the country to write how wonderful collectivization was and how communism was improving the life of the poor¹²¹. Elsewhere in Europe the left wing favoured eyewitness accounts over the "objective" style¹²². In a way this is consistent with American literary journalism theory: narrative journalist should be able to narrow the distance between the reader and the people one is writing about¹²³.

The function of the literary reportage in the Soviet block started changing around 1955. Contrary to what it had been, it now gradually became a subtle tool for criticizing the socialist and communist system.¹²⁴ It was well-suited for that purpose. Journalists learnt to hide universal meanings in the detail of the text. One could not criticize the system but one could turn to individual destinies and show the large in the small.¹²⁵

Probably the best-known European literary reportage writer is Ryszard Kapuściński (1932-2007), a Polish journalist and foreign correspondent. He made clear there are huge differences between what he called two models of the press: the Anglo-Saxon and the Continental European model. The Anglo-Saxon press comes from a liberal tradition and sees

¹¹⁵ John Hartsock, "Literary Reportage", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 23. There is a story by Alexievich, "Boys in Zinc", in *The Granta Book of Reportage*, Bookmarque, Croydon, 2006, p. 275-288.

¹¹⁶ John Hartsock, "Literary Reportage", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 41.

¹¹⁷ Author's interview with Cristian Lupşa, Jan 24, 2013.

¹¹⁸ Author's discussion with Ian Jack, May 24, 2013, London.

¹¹⁹ Susan Greenberg: *Kapuscinski and Beyond*, Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, Global Literary Journalism, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 124.

¹²⁰ One of the central figures of the form was communist writer and journalist Egon Erwin Kisch. He was a Prague Jew who wrote in German. He can be seen as the "foremost international booster" of literary reportage form in his time. See John Hartsock, "Literary Reportage", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 28.

¹²¹ For a detailed description of the Polish school of reportage see Susan Greenberg, "Kapuscinski and Beyond", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 125.

¹²² Ibid., 124.

¹²³ John Hartsock, "Literary Reportage", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 31, 41.

¹²⁴ Susan Greenberg, "Kapuscinski and Beyond", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 125.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 134.

as its duty to express the interests of all citizens, thus the demand for objectivity. Continental European press, on the contrary, arose from political movements, and was openly partial and thus a tool for party struggle. Information and commentary were not separated. As Kapuściński saw it, in the Anglo-Saxon press there has been no room for such a personal product as reportage, so this kind of writing has been published only in books and literary periodicals like *Granta* (e.g. V. S. Naipaul, James Fenton). In continental Europe, however, reportage had an important role in countries where there was censorship because it allowed more freedom for expression. Both journalists and writers wrote it.¹²⁶ It is clear enough that what Kapuściński is talking about is not narrative journalism but reportage, and that he made a difference between them. This may explain why he seemed to accept what he called “rebuilding of reality” by “taking elements of that reality”. For him adjusting the chronology of real events to achieve a better artistic effect was fine, as long as he was conveying the “essence of the incident”. In the American narrative journalism tradition of today this kind of manoeuvring is strictly condemned. For Kapuściński reportage as a form was “going through an evolution from journalism to literature”. He wrote his books long after the events he describes, and he took liberties that today’s narrative journalist could never take. His books can be seen as an ambiguous form between nonfiction and fiction.¹²⁷

Some scholars agree with Kapuściński’s view on how reportage developed in Eastern Europe. In Western Europe one cannot see similar development of literary reportage as in the former Soviet block. The concept of literary reportage is not as widely known there as it is, for example, in Kapuściński’s home country Poland, where the tradition has been, and still is, strong¹²⁸. In Germany, the major criterion for literary reportage seems to be that the journalist restricts herself to eyewitness reports and writes only about what she has experienced first-hand. This will exclude much of the American type of narrative journalism.¹²⁹ John Carey shares this definition of reportage: it must be written by an eyewitness, and this makes for authenticity¹³⁰.

In the United Kingdom, which shares common historical roots with the United States in literary journalism, literary reportage is now more or less ignored by the literary and journalistic establishments: it is almost unthinkable that any journalism might have some literary value.¹³¹ There is something confusing in this, because, as Jack writes, “reporting is an English-language specialism, something we’re peculiarly good at”¹³².

¹²⁶ Ryszard Kapuściński, *Lapidarium III*, 1997, as translated in Artur Domosławski, Ryszard Kapuściński — A Life, Verso, London, 2012, p. 311.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 310. Some scholars have pointed out that Kapuściński wrote his books in a different register from his daily journalistic reportage. Laurence Weschler, professor at UC Berkeley, sees them as “telling-stories-in-recollection-at-a-distance sort of cadence, a quality the intelligent reader picks up at once”. He thinks Kapuściński’s books like *The Emperor* and *Shah of Shahs* rise above the usual fiction vs. non-fiction dichotomy. See Artur Domosławski, *Ryszard Kapuściński — A Life*, Verso, London, 2012, p. 308.

¹²⁸ Susan Greenberg has written about the literary reportage tradition in Poland. See “Kapusciński and Beyond”, Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012.

¹²⁹ Beate Josephi and Christine Müller, “Differently Drawn Boundaries of the Permissible in German and Australian Literary Journalism”, *Literary Journalism Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 2009, p. 71.

¹³⁰ John Carey, “Introduction”, *The Faber Book of Reportage*, John Carey (ed.), Faber and Faber, London, 1987, p. xxix.

¹³¹ Jenny McKay, “Reportage in the U.K.”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 50.

¹³² Ian Jack, “Introduction”, *The Granta Book of Reportage*, Bookmarque, Croydon, 2006. p. v.

According to Greenberg, Britain “clearly lags behind the US in serious non-fiction journalism”. “Why doesn’t Britain have a culture of serious non-fiction journalism like the US?” she asks. She brings out the concept of “the end of the middle”: the middle of the market loses, because it’s now possible to get cheap goods and services that are of reasonable quality. People are prepared to pay more only if they get something special. Greenberg thinks this idea of “the end of the middle”¹³³ can be applied also to journalism: there certainly seems to be some appetite for such journalistic content in Britain. It is reflected in rising sales of literary nonfiction books and growing audiences for serious documentaries (the somewhat equivalent of long-form narrative journalism in television and film). But, as Greenberg notes, this growing interest “has yet to translate into any dramatic changes in publishing”. Newspapers’ content is becoming more like that in magazines, and they may be more willing to run longer pieces, but in reality they are adopting “an increasingly narrow definition of ‘entertainment’ when trying to make themselves more accessible”.¹³⁴

Among British magazines *Granta* is nearly the only one that provides “a prestigious platform” for reportage and travel writing¹³⁵. It is indeed the best-known magazine that has published literary reportage in Europe. *Granta* is a quarterly publication in book form. Launched in its present form in 1979¹³⁶, its purpose was to present a mixture of new reportage and new fiction. It says it has “a belief in the power and urgency of the story, both in fiction and non-fiction, and the story’s supreme ability to describe, illuminate and make real”¹³⁷. Ian Jack, the editor of *Granta* from 1995 to 2007, described the kind of nonfiction writing *Granta* preferred (he called it “narrative nonfiction”):

“A working definition of such pieces would be (a) they’re non-fiction, (b) they tend to be longer than a newspaper could cope with (c) they’re narratives (sorry) not essays, (d) they should illuminate people or events—not necessarily current events—by description and inquiry (e) they should be written in a way that will stand the test of time and for an audience that may not be predisposed to be interested, on the principle that anything can be made interesting so long as it is written about well enough, which can mean, among other things, ‘clearly enough’.”¹³⁸

However, Jack used to find it hard to get people to write high quality nonfiction for *Granta*¹³⁹. *Granta* has never been a commercial success, and it has always tended to sell mainly to an influential literary elite¹⁴⁰. Jack left after a new publisher bought the magazine, and even though it is still committed to “discovering and publishing the finest new fiction and non-fiction from around the world”, its emphasis has shifted almost entirely to fiction

¹³³ Clive Thompson argues that the real losers in journalism are the newsweeklies like *Time* and *Newsweek* that offer stories that are produced a few days after major news events with a bit of analysis. “They’re neither fast enough to be conversational nor slow enough to be truly deep. The Internet has essentially demonstrated how unsatisfying that sort of thinking can be”. See Clive Thompson, “How Tweets and texts nurture in-depth analysis”, *Wired*, Dec 27, 2010.

¹³⁴ Susan Greenberg, “Slow Journalism”, *Prospect*, Feb 2007, p. 15.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³⁶ Students at Cambridge University originally established *Granta* in 1889 as *The Granta*. It ran into financial trouble in 1970’s and was then rescued by a group of postgraduates. See <http://www.granta.com/About> (retrieved Mar 1, 2013).

¹³⁷ <http://www.granta.com/About> (retrieved Mar 1, 2013).

¹³⁸ Justin Webster, “An interview with Ian Jack”, *Granta*, September 2002.

¹³⁹ Author’s discussion with Ian Jack, Oct 5, 2012, London.

¹⁴⁰ Simon Garfield, “From student rag to literary riches”, *The Observer*, Dec 30, 2007. According to Garfield, *Granta* had a passionate owner, Rea Hederman, the publisher of *The New York Review of Books*, who sustained the loss-making enterprise for more than two decades. *The New Yorker* also lost money from the 1980’s up until mid-2000’s after which it has made a slight profit, see <http://www.niemanlab.org/encyclo/new-yorker/>.

during the past few years¹⁴¹. One of the few writers who has written nonfiction for *Granta* in past years is American-born journalist and writer Janine di Giovanni who's lived in Europe for most of her career. She finds the journalistic reportage "a lost art".

"We look to people like Martha Gellhorn and [Ryszard] Kapuściński for inspiration, but where do budding writers of nonfiction go to publish their works? It is hard enough if you are established — there is simply less and less market. But we must not give up doing it."¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ <http://www.granta.com/Contributors> (retrieved Mar 1, 2013).

¹⁴² Email from Janine di Giovanni to author.

5. What's missing in Europe?

"As writers we go out and learn about the world, and then come back and tell others. Any story can be worth telling if the author is passionate about it."

(Pulitzer-winning journalist Susan Orlean¹⁴³)

In Europe there is no tradition of well-researched and fact-based narrative journalism of the kind that American readers have been pampered with. There is what some scholars and European journalists have called "literary reportage" but, as I showed in Chapter 4, this, often polemical, writing is different from what I am focusing on in this paper. There are, no doubt, isolated exceptions — skilled journalists and writers who do this kind of journalism — but these people are not part of a wider movement; often they don't even realize that what they do has a name.

Why is narrative journalism so clearly an American journalistic form? Why hasn't narrative journalism gained popularity in Europe? I will now explore some possible answers to these questions by looking at them from different angles.

When David Abrahamson and Ibrahim Abusharif looked at the relative absence of literary journalism in the Arab world they came up with such possible explanations as market forces, government control of the press, censorship and the legacy of colonialism (e.g. an underlying mistrust of Western phenomena). The factors were highly interrelated, and it was difficult to judge the relative importance of each factor, they concluded.¹⁴⁴ I believe the same applies here: it's difficult to say if these overlapping singular factors amplify the overall effect.

It is, of course, too simplifying to talk about Europe as one. As Hallin and Mancini show, media of the Western countries can be divided roughly in three models: 1) the liberal i.e. the Anglo-American model, 2) the democratic corporatist model of Northern Continental Europe, and 3) the polarized pluralist model of Southern Europe and the Mediterranean countries¹⁴⁵. My examples are mainly from the Northern Continental Europe and the U.K. media, which, according to Hallin and Mancini, is a mixture of the liberal and the democratic corporate models and much more different from the U.S. media than it is commonly thought. I'll also look at Romania, which as a former member of the Soviet block, is outside of the Hallin-Mancini division.

Recognition

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) published about 350 articles in magazines and newspapers during his career, but to his British countrymen he's always been a writer of fiction, and his

¹⁴³ Mark Kramer and Wendy Call, *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, p. 285.

¹⁴⁴ David Abrahamson and Ibrahim N. Abudharif, "Literary journalism in the Middle East", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2012, p. 23-35.

¹⁴⁵ Daniel S. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.11.

achievements as a journalist have been acknowledged only in recent years¹⁴⁶. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), too, was a literary journalist for most of her career. Yet critics have failed to acknowledge the significance of her career as a journalist which, in turn, has produced “a seriously distorted image of her literary project”¹⁴⁷.

In the U.K. it seems to have been common to devalue journalism as a creative profession¹⁴⁸. Literature has often been seen “as the fruit of 'scholarship' — hence pure and disinterested and above market considerations”. Journalistic writing, on the other hand, is thought to be “distorted by the constraints of the market, tight deadlines or word limits”. It also has a mass audience (i.e. uncultivated audience) opposed to an elite, cultivated audience of literature.¹⁴⁹ There is thus a strong belief that only fiction can be literature. To be a writer is to be a novelist¹⁵⁰. John Carey, a former Merton professor of English at Oxford University, thinks the question of whether reportage is literature is not interesting or even meaningful. He says ‘literature’ is not a category to which certain works belong naturally, but a term that culture-controlling groups use to dignify texts to which they want to attach value, for whatever reasons. The question worth asking, Carey says, is thus why intellectuals and literary institutions have been so keen to deny journalistic reportage’s literary status. He thinks one reason is “a wish to promote the imaginary above the real”: “The creative artist is in touch with truths higher than the actual, which give him exclusive entry in the soul of man”. According to Carey such convictions belong to the traditional ambience of priesthoods and mystery cults.¹⁵¹ As a result the worth of narrative journalism or nonfiction is often described in terms of its similarity to fiction. Anna Funder’s *Stasiland* (winner of the Samuel Johnson Award for nonfiction books in 2004) was described by one reviewer as “a masterpiece of investigative analysis, written almost like a novel”¹⁵². A review of Janine di Giovanni’s reportage book *Madness Visible* called her a reporter “with a novelist’s eye for detail”; the other concluded that “her truth is more powerful than fiction”¹⁵³.

Works of narrative literary journalism are homeless in library science. Books like these almost never are categorized as journalism or reportage. Their library category can range from current affairs to biography to nonfiction — and nonfiction can include almost anything that is not fiction. Notes McKay, “As long as there is no straightforward category for journalism or reportage for borrowers or buyers of books to browse through, then they are likely to remain in ignorance of the true richness of what has been published”¹⁵⁴.

There is also the question of outlets that cultivate this kind of journalism. British Sunday and weekend newspapers publish vast amounts of great literary criticism by high-profile writers,

¹⁴⁶ Richard Keeble, “Introduction”, Richard Keeble and Sharon Miller (ed.), *The Journalistic Imagination*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007, p. 4.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁸ See e.g. Justin Webster, “An interview with Ian Jack”, *Granta*, September 2002.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Greenberg, “Slow Journalism”, *Prospect*, Feb 2007, p. 15-16.

¹⁵¹ John Carey, “Introduction”, *The Faber Book of Reportage*, John Carey (ed.), Faber and Faber, London, 1987. p. xxxvi. See also Justin Webster, “An interview with Ian Jack”, *Granta*, September 2002.

¹⁵² Jenny McKay, “Reportage in the U.K.”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 54.

¹⁵³ <http://www.janinedigiovanni.com/reviews.html> (retrieved Mar 15, 2013).

¹⁵⁴ Jenny McKay, “Reportage in the U.K.”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 56. The problem with categorization occurs almost everywhere, also in the U.S. John Hersey’s classic work of narrative journalism, *Hiroshima*, is often categorized under atomic energy or physics.

but the same papers seldom run carefully researched narrative pieces. The *Sunday Times* magazine used to publish long reportages in the 1960's—1980's¹⁵⁵, as did the *Independent on Sunday* in the 1990's, but they hardly ever do it any more¹⁵⁶. "This book is a powerful argument for the resuscitation of an all but dead journalistic genre: the long feature," wrote Christopher Hirst in his review of Ian Jack's book *The Country Formerly Known as Great Britain* (2009), which is a collection of Jack's journalism¹⁵⁷. In the U.K. most magazines rely on celebrity stories and lifestyle pieces. Compared to the U.S., Britain has much fewer serious magazines and literary journals, whereas in the U.S. these kind of periodicals have created their "own ecology". "Narrative nonfiction has lots of different homes in America whereas England has more of a newspaper culture," says John Freeman, editor of *Granta*.¹⁵⁸

"I think there is some excellent nonfiction writing published in Britain by British writers. But that specific magazine form does not seem to exist. You have shorter analysis and on-scene pieces, like in *The Guardian*, and then good non-fiction books. But the in-between doesn't seem to exist."¹⁵⁹

As Jenny McKay observes, "In the U.K. we're a long way from according serious recognition to the literary qualities of the best journalism". According to her even the quality end of the British press "can't be guaranteed to publish serious, challenging reportage".¹⁶⁰ She points out that British journalists don't even know what to call this kind of journalism, and those who write it have difficulties finding a publisher who, in turn, have problems categorizing it.

If journalists in the U.K. want to produce longer, carefully researched narrative journalism today, they will find it difficult to get their work published. James Meeks' literary journalism has been published by *The Guardian* and the *London Review of Books*¹⁶¹. Few magazine or newspaper supplement editors will want to run a piece that is more than four thousand words long. Even two thousand is considered "exceptionally long".¹⁶² Many ambitious British nonfiction writers have turned to writing books¹⁶³, and the same phenomenon can be seen also elsewhere in Europe. In France writing books has been important "to the prestige of journalistic stars"¹⁶⁴. A book, it seems, is regarded more highly than a journalistic article. The journalist will now turn into "an author" and be invited to television and radio talk shows and Hay-on-Wye literature festival to discuss her book, even though the book

¹⁵⁵ The *Sunday Times* encouraged what was called investigative reporting. It had a philosophy that "anything could be made comprehensible and interesting, provided that you wrote about it clearly enough". The magazine could publish stories that were 5,000-9,000 words long. See Justin Webster, "An interview with Ian Jack", *Granta*, September 2002.

¹⁵⁶ Janine di Giovanni, email Mar 19, 2103, and author's interview with Ian Parker. According to di Giovanni only *The Guardian* is continuing its literary journalistic tradition. Ian Parker, who is currently staff writer in the *New Yorker*, worked in *The Independent* during the 1990's.

¹⁵⁷ *The Independent*, Jan 7, 2011.

¹⁵⁸ <http://www.thereviewreview.net/interviews/around-world-granta>. Also author's interview with Joshua Hammer and emails with Janine di Giovanni.

¹⁵⁹ Author's interview with Joshua Hammer.

¹⁶⁰ Jenny McKay, "Reportage in the U.K. A Hidden Genre?" in John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, p. 49, 58. Jason Cowley, former editor of *Granta*, said in 2007 that British newspapers had lost "confidence not only in words on paper, but also the long piece, in creative narrative journalism". See Simon Garfield, "From student rag to literary riches", *The Observer*, Dec 30, 2007.

¹⁶¹ Author's interview with James Meek.

¹⁶² Jenny McKay, "Reportage in the U.K.", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 57.

¹⁶³ James Meek is one of them, even though he's written fiction since university. Author's interview with Meek.

¹⁶⁴ Daniel S. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 111.

would not be much more than an extended version of a long magazine article¹⁶⁵ — and even if it reached a much smaller audience. In Europe, if a nonfiction writer wants to have literary status, she cannot associate herself with journalism. There is quite a longstanding tradition of biographies and travel writing in the U.K., but it's worth noting that these two genres, though more or less nonfiction, have been given other names so that they are not associated with journalism¹⁶⁶.

Why is fiction valued in British culture over non-fiction? Greenberg argues that one answer lies in the legacy of Romanticism that “came to define creativity in opposition to industry”. She quotes Terry Eagleton who writes in *Literary Theory* that the creative imagination was “loftily removed from any sordid social purpose”. In America things were seen differently: creativity became “a way of understanding first-hand experience, making Americans quite comfortable with the concept of ‘creative non-fiction’”.¹⁶⁷

McKay makes an interesting point about British journalists who, she says, see their profession as “rather jokey and lacking in seriousness”¹⁶⁸. She also talks about “the distaste, if not downright disgust, with which journalism has been, and largely still is, regarded by the [British] literary establishment”, i.e. universities, publishers and the literary editors of the press. The situation is quite different with film: film studies, unlike literature studies, has recognized the “documentary” as a legitimate art form worth of study since its early days.¹⁶⁹

In the U.S. narrative journalism has been a recognized form of journalism at least since the 1890's. The New Journalists of the 1960's were the first who had a name for this kind of journalistic writing. Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Joan Didion and a few others managed to get a huge amount of recognition for the form. In most European newsrooms, however, they were looked at with suspicion and ridicule. When Tom Wolfe introduced his *New Journalism* in the early 1970's, the style of writing he described was dismissed in many U.K. newsrooms as “being too self-indulgent, too long, too expensive, and too little grounded in reality”¹⁷⁰.

As described in chapter 3, the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism in Harvard University brought the form unprecedented recognition and acceptance in the U.S. during the first decade of the 21st century.

There are some encouraging signs that may tell of a growing appreciation of the form also in Europe. The Samuel Johnson Prize for nonfiction was launched in the U.K. in 1999, and it is now the most prestigious nonfiction book award in the U.K. However, it is a book not a journalism award, and the definition for what counts as nonfiction seems to be very open. There are still no prizes in European countries that would be equal to the American Pulitzer Prize in feature writing¹⁷¹. The Orwell journalism prize is Britain's most prestigious prize for political writing and is given yearly for the work “which comes closest to George Orwell's

¹⁶⁵ Author's discussion with Ian Jack and interviews with James Meek and Ian Parker.

¹⁶⁶ Author's interview with Susan Greenberg.

¹⁶⁷ Susan Greenberg, “Slow Journalism”, *Prospect*, Feb 2007, p. 15-16.

¹⁶⁸ Jenny McKay, “Reportage in the U.K.”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 49. Also author's interview with James Meek.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 53. See also Richard Keeble, “Introduction”, Richard Keeble and Sharon Miller, *The Journalistic Imagination*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2007, p. 3.

¹⁷⁰ Jenny McKay, “Reportage in the U.K.”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 50.

¹⁷¹ Finalists in feature writing have been announced since 1980.

ambition ‘to make political writing into an art’”¹⁷². In 2011 it was awarded for “beautifully crafted examinations of hardship, welfare and justice” to *The Guardian* writer Amelia Gentleman who uses narrative techniques, like scenes and dialogue, in her writing¹⁷³. The 2012 long list included James Meek who has been one of the leading literary journalists in Britain¹⁷⁴. The Swedish Grand Journalism Prize given yearly by the media house Bonnier has a category for the best storyteller (“Årets Berättare”) but for instance in Finland the same Bonnier awards do not include a similar category¹⁷⁵.

¹⁷² <http://theorwellprize.co.uk/the-orwell-prize/about-the-prize/>

¹⁷³ Sam Jones, “Guardian journalist Amelia Gentleman wins Orwell prize”, *The Guardian*, May 24, 2012. According to *The Guardian* Gentleman’s story about a day in young offenders’ institution is “a condensed account” of three days spent in the prison. This kind of combining of scenes is against the rules of narrative journalism (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/nov/21/young-offenders-institution-ashfield>).

¹⁷⁴ Meek left *The Guardian* in 2005 to write fiction. He is still writing also long-form journalism for e.g. the *London Review of Books*.

¹⁷⁵ See <http://www.storajournalistpriset.se/english/>. In 2003 European literary reportage had its first international award, The Lettre Ulysses Award for the Art of Reportage. It was introduced by the cultural quarterly Lettre International, with the financial support of the Aventis Foundation. It was presented four times until 2006 when the contract with the Aventis expired. After that the prize has not been awarded.

Journalist training

There is very little training on narrative journalism writing in European universities and journalism schools. The handfuls of European journalists who are interested in narrative journalism and want to try it out are left on their own. British journalist James Meek who worked for *The Guardian* for several years learnt to write literary narrative journalism by intuition and by trial and error. He had written fiction since he was in college, but he had no idea that the kind of journalism he was doing has a name¹⁷⁶. Many others seem to have studied the form mostly by themselves, too. They have become interested in narrative journalism by reading American magazines like the *New Yorker* or the Pulitzer feature winners, and then trained themselves with the help of journalism books written by experienced American narrative journalists.

"When I see people getting interested in narrative journalism in Europe now, I see it happening among a handful of people in isolated spots. It hasn't yet woven itself up into the newsroom culture or the institutional culture, which is much the way it was in the 70's and 80's in newspapers in the U.S. There would be a couple of people who wanted to do this, and we would find each other. It wasn't like the newspaper was saying, oh, go do that, because they didn't get it. We didn't have a language for it. I didn't know it was called narrative until much later."¹⁷⁷

Danish journalist Line Holm Nielsen became interested in narrative journalism after she read Thomas French's 1998 Pulitzer winner story "Angels and Demons". Because there was no training available in Denmark she went to courses in Poynter Institute, U.S., and was taught by Thomas French and Jacqui Banaszynski, both of whom are central figures in the American narrative journalism movement. They have taught narrative journalism occasionally also in Europe, e.g. in Finland.

"I had to search for this myself: what's the theory behind this, how do you build a story. You can't learn this unless you do like me, read books and other writers' articles in their spare time, read a lot of American journalism. I read much more American narrative journalism than Danish papers, and I get so much inspiration from that. My point is that you can learn, almost like a carpenter, you can learn how to put these bolts and pieces in the right place, but it takes years and people give up. It's too busy in the newsrooms nowadays. In Denmark you can pinpoint the journalists that you want to read if you are interested in this kind of writing. It's not about the publications but about single people."¹⁷⁸

My own experience is very much like that of Line Holm Nielsen's. Other interviewees, too, seem to have had surprisingly similar kind of experiences¹⁷⁹. Some, like Romanian Cristian Lupşa, studied journalism in the U.S. and became interested in the form there:

"Before I went to the U.S. in 2003 to study, I didn't know narrative journalism existed. I thought the best job you can have in journalism would be to work for a newsweekly like *Time* magazine. In class we were assigned a story by Gary Smith called "The Rapture of the Deep". I just couldn't believe that journalism can read like fiction, it had incredible amounts of action, character development, and it was real. I thought it was unbelievable. I wished I could do something like it. I started reading more things like that, and realized there existed a whole genre that I had had no idea about. There had been nothing like that in Romania. The writing in Romania was borrowing

¹⁷⁶ Author's interview with James Meek.

¹⁷⁷ Author's interview with Jacqui Banaszynski.

¹⁷⁸ Author's interview with Line Holm Nielsen.

¹⁷⁹ Author's interview with Laurens Nijzink.

from the French literary reportage tradition, but the French/European model is very much centred on author's interpretation of the story instead of letting the story speak for itself."¹⁸⁰

Even the English speaking U.K. is not an exception in Europe when it comes to training journalists in narrative storytelling. Professional education of journalists developed later in Britain than in the U.S.. Relatively few British journalists had college degrees until the 1980's¹⁸¹. In journalism degrees in the U.K. classes in literary journalism are rare. In creative writing programs there are a few that "provide a sustained look" at non-fiction in all its forms¹⁸². When the University of Roehampton in London began offering a course called "Telling True Stories" in 2005, it had to be built from a scratch. The course first heavily emphasized journalism, but it has moved towards reported memoirs and travel writing because that seems to be what the students want.¹⁸³

When Reuters news agency a few years ago started an enterprise desk that focuses on long-form investigative, explanatory and narrative stories, it had to start training its reporters to think differently. The real challenge has been to teach news reporters how one reports for a story of 2,000-3,000 words or even more. The ones in the newsroom who have been most familiar with this kind of journalism have been the younger American reporters who have been exposed to it in their journalism training.¹⁸⁴

Jenny McKay has described how surprised she was when she joined the best graduate newspaper training scheme for journalists in the U.K. and discovered that none of her tutors even hinted that journalism has any literary value, or that it might be useful for the beginners to read some of the best journalism written in the past. She was taught law and news values, but no one mentioned Dickens or Defoe or Martha Gellhorn or even Tom Wolfe. Ian Jack has said he learnt to write long magazine stories when he was working for the *Sunday Times magazine* in the 1970's, and that at the time he did not know that magazines such as the *New Yorker* and *Esquire* had been doing the same thing – "and better" – in the U.S. for many years: "The truth is that I didn't know what the *New Yorker* was. They didn't read it in Cambuslang."¹⁸⁵ Because students are not encouraged to read widely and not routinely introduced to the historical and literary contexts of the field, most British journalism students are ignorant of the literary tradition of journalistic writing. Journalism has had to fight hard for its place in British universities. According to McKay it is perhaps "a lingering institutional uncertainty about its worth that makes its position in the academy unstable and somewhat insecure".¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Author's interview with Cristian Lupşa. "The Rapture of the Deep" was originally published in *Sports Illustrated* in June 2003.

¹⁸¹ Daniel S. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 222. Author's interview with James Meek.

¹⁸² Susan Greenberg, "Slow Journalism", *Prospect*, Feb 2007, p. 15.

¹⁸³ Author's interview with Susan Greenberg. University of Strathclyde in Scotland has a course called "Journalism and Creative writing". There are similar ones in the University of Bedfordshire and the Middlesex University London. However, according to course descriptions journalistic and creative writing are seen as separate skills, and narrative literary journalism and reportage writing are not mentioned. Only the University for the Creative Arts Farnham mentions "new journalism, long-form journalism, immersive journalism, and American approaches to journalism". See universities' web pages for more details.

¹⁸⁴ Author's interview with Simon Robinson.

¹⁸⁵ Justin Webster, "An interview with Ian Jack", *Granta*, September 2002.

¹⁸⁶ Jenny McKay, "Reportage in the U.K.", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 51-52.

The situation in the U.S. is quite different. Also there journalism has had to fight over its place in the academia, but when one searches for “literary journalism syllabus” on the web, one finds dozens of American universities and colleges that have courses on narrative journalism¹⁸⁷. The first undergraduate major in literary journalism began in University of California-Irvine in 2003¹⁸⁸.

”In the U.S. you have this critical mass of tradition that dates back almost a hundred years and a university system that teaches that. In Princeton University, where I went, they had a course called “The Literature of Fact” taught by John McPhee. Extremely well known journalists, like [the *New Yorker* editor] David Remnick went through that course. It was highly influential.”¹⁸⁹

There are very few books on narrative journalism in other European languages besides English. Belgian journalist Alain Lallemand recently wrote a college textbook in French. According to Lallemand, finding French text examples for the book was not easy, so Lallemand ended up translating excerpts from American magazines. He has also been teaching a university course for journalism students on narrative journalism, and most probably his course is the only one in the French language in Europe. The newspaper he works for, *Le Soir*, is practically the only paper in Belgium that publishes narrative journalism.¹⁹⁰

In Europe journalists have had nothing that could be compared to the annual Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism that gathered several hundred delegates to discuss the form in Harvard University 2001-2009. It was a way for journalists who were interested in narrative journalism to find each other and develop the form further in a similar way some investigative journalists have spread their expertise to a wider field. The narrative journalism conference now continues annually in Boston University¹⁹¹. In Europe, there are only two similar continuing initiatives, and they are much smaller. A group of Dutch journalists arranged the third conference on narrative journalism in Amsterdam in April 2013. The meeting was started up by a small group of journalists after the American writing coach Mark Kramer visited a gathering of investigative reporters in the Netherlands¹⁹². Romanian journalist Cristian Lupşa has chaired a meeting in Bucharest twice and is building a third one for the autumn of 2013¹⁹³. There has also been one conference in Denmark. In all three countries the main speakers have been American journalists and editors of high standing. The language barriers and a lack of a pan-European meeting mean that those interested in storytelling journalism in Europe seldom find out about each other outside

¹⁸⁷ See <http://www.umass.edu/sbs/faculty/profiles/sims.htm>. As an example of a literary journalism course syllabus see http://www.davidabrahamson.com/WWW/Syllabi/literary_journalism.html (retrieved Mar 18, 2013).

¹⁸⁸ John C. Hartsock, “It was a dark and stormy night”, *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007, 269. The most well known narrative programs are in The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and Berkley Graduate School of Journalism which developed narrative journalism training as part of their core mission.

¹⁸⁹ Author’s interview with Joshua Hammer. See also Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism*, Vintage Books, New York, 2005, p. xvi. The informal, almost deliberately inelegant tone that many of the present American narrative writers use comes straight from McPhee.

¹⁹⁰ Author’s interview with Alain Lallemand. Lallemand’s book *Journalisme narratif en pratique* was published by De Boeck in 2011.

¹⁹¹ See <http://www.bu.edu/com/narrative/>. It was last held in April 2013 with a theme

”Storytelling journalism goes digital”. It is again chaired by Mark Kramer.

¹⁹² Author’s interviews with Paulien Bakker and Laurens Nijzink. Says Nijzink, organizer of the first conference, “There is a huge hunger among journalists for this kind of meeting. The first conference was not well advertised, and still it was sold out in four hours even though it cost 90 euros for one day”. The conference has been arranged by Dutch Narrative Journalism Initiative (INJN), <http://www.verhalendejournalistiek.nl/>.

¹⁹³ See <http://www.decatorevista.ro/storytelling/>.

their own countries. They rarely get a chance to learn from each by sharing experiences they've had with their journalism projects¹⁹⁴.

"I see", or "I think"

Some people that I interviewed for this paper shared an interesting observation on the reporting cultures of Europe and the U.S. As they view it, the press in Europe has a different place in culture and society compared to America.

"When I'm in Western Europe my sense is that the press is more part of the political and intellectual elite than in the U.S. It's part of discussing and debating big ideas and policy, and so when I read Western European journalism, it often it tinges toward analysis and opinion. Journalists are taking on government and policy and talking about how things should be run. There's often a political agenda, and I don't think the press apologizes for that; if anything, it declares it and says, we're the paper of the left or the right."¹⁹⁵

"Newspapers in England are more or less party-based, they have a party history. So they are already intimate, they are talking to fellow cell members. They are one class papers and don't need this [engaging their readers with narratives]."¹⁹⁶

According to Hallin and Mancini, journalists in the Liberal Press Model countries "remain more oriented toward informational and narrative styles of writing" compared with those in the Continental Europe who "give greater emphasis to commentary". For example French journalism has always been more a journalism of expression than a journalism of observation. Hallin and Mancini quote Pierre Albert: French journalism "gives precedence to the chronicle and commentary over summary and reportage". In this regard French journalism is "fundamentally different from Anglo-Saxon journalism."¹⁹⁷ Of British newspapers they note that Britain has a "class-stratified newspaper market", and that the very competitive media market in the U.K. permits the segmentation of the market by class and political affinity. There may be a higher degree of politicization in British society as a whole, which will lead to greater media attention to politics. American style coverage, on the contrary, is driven by journalists' market-oriented judgments of what makes a good story.¹⁹⁸

Could it be that whereas American journalism concentrates on what the journalist *sees*, European journalism outside news is mostly about what the journalist *thinks*¹⁹⁹?

"In European journalism there is a lot of unreported opinion. Journalism in this part of the world is very judgmental. People expect us to point out who needs to fix something. We just want to tell a good story, but other journalists say shouldn't we be blaming the government [or some other authorities] for doing a poor job. Other journalists are not necessarily big fans of what we do. Why? I think it is a combination: they say, well, I read your story but you didn't tell me what to think,

¹⁹⁴ Nieman Narrative Storyboard is a constantly growing web collection of narrative journalism and writers' interviews. In Europe there is no web site like it. Those interested in the form benefit also from aggregator sites like longform.org that curate narrative journalism pieces published elsewhere onto one site.

¹⁹⁵ Author's interview with Jacqui Banaszynski.

¹⁹⁶ Author's interview with Mark Kramer.

¹⁹⁷ Daniel S. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 98, 207.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 215-216.

¹⁹⁹ Author's discussion with Ian Jack.

you didn't pass judgement and I don't know what I'm supposed to do in the end of the story. People feel safer if journalists tell them what's good and what's bad, and a lot of good narrative writing is about uncertainty. We want to do narrative stories without having to explain to people why they have value. It's not easy because people don't really understand what we do. We often struggle with how much we should teach our readers about the journalism we are doing."²⁰⁰

Role of advocates

John Hartsock sees that the reappearance of the narrative form particularly in American newspapers in the 1990's and 2000's is partly due to a small group of advocates, like Joe Franklin. Franklin, a two-time Pulitzer-winning journalist, together with his wife established in 1994 *Writer-L*, a member-based listserve. Its aim was to discuss narrative nonfiction writing and reporting techniques. Franklin's book *Writing for Story* had been one of the central how-to books in narrative journalism since it came out in 1986.²⁰¹

There have been also other reporters and editors who have used the papers where they have worked to promote the form, like Thomas French, whose stories are familiar to many Europeans interested in narrative journalism. It's mostly this same group of individuals who have been invited to give talks in narrative journalism workshops in Europe (e.g. Mark Kramer, Jacqui Banaszynski).

Market size

Comment is cheap, but facts are rather expensive, writes Ian Jack in his introduction to *The Granta Book of Reportage* – an adaptation of the former *Guardian* editor CP Scott's famous dictum, "Comment is free but facts are sacred"²⁰². Narrative journalism is solely fact-based and relies on extensive reporting. Like investigate journalism it is expensive for papers to produce.

The decreasing levels of staff and reductions in the amount of time reporters have to research their stories may explain why some European newspapers don't publish as many well reported long-form pieces as they used to. But these facts don't explain why narrative journalism has been so scarce in the first place, and why long-form journalism (narratives, reportages and feature writing in general) has been the first to suffer from staff cuts in Europe whereas in the U.S. it has been seen as one possible solution to the problem of diminishing circulations and alienation of readers from print (see Chapter 3).

The more decisive factor may be the smaller size of the markets in Europe where many national languages hinder the media from finding larger audiences²⁰³. Some European countries like France don't even have a mass print media of their own²⁰⁴; even the largest

²⁰⁰ Author's interview with Cristian Lupşa.

²⁰¹ John C. Hartsock, "It was a dark and stormy night", *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007, 270-271. The other more prominent names on Hartsock's list are Jack Hart, Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute, AP's Bruce DeSilva, Mark Kramer of the Nieman Foundation, and Jacqui Banaszynski of *The Seattle Times* and University of Missouri.

²⁰² Ian Jack, "Introduction", *The Granta Book of Reportage*, Bookmarque, Croydon, 2006. p. v. CP Scott made his remark in 1921.

²⁰³ Author's interview with e.g. Mark Kramer.

²⁰⁴ Daniel S. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 98.

French newspapers *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde* have circulations of barely over 300,000 — less than the largest daily newspaper in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat*. They are only the third of the size of the *New Yorker* magazine that has a total print circulation of almost 1,044,000 copies of which 1,018,000 copies are subscriptions. The *New Yorker* reaches more than 3.7 million readers weekly, and two-thirds of the audience has graduated from college.²⁰⁵ *Vanity Fair* magazine has a total print circulation of 1,193,000²⁰⁶, *GQ* 963,500²⁰⁷, and *Harper's Magazine* 210,000²⁰⁸. *The Atlantic* has a print circulation of about 464,000²⁰⁹ copies plus 30,000 paying tablet subscribers; on the web, it recorded 13.1 million unique visitors in November 2012 (theatlantic.com)²¹⁰. Compare that to the minuscule British *Granta* which has been widely seen as the most important publisher of European reportage: *Granta* doesn't make its circulation numbers public, but it was estimated that it was selling about 29,000 copies in Britain and about 12,000 copies in the U.S. in 2007²¹¹.

Christian Lupşa started the Romanian magazine *Decât o Revistă* with some colleagues because they wanted to be able to do narrative journalism that was difficult to produce in their previous journalism jobs. The magazine has about 5,000-6,000 dedicated readers, but it cannot support the people who write for it so they have to have second jobs elsewhere.²¹²

There is agreement among my interviewees that funding the long narrative projects is a problem, especially for freelancers²¹³. For staff writers it's more about getting their editors to approve the long reporting time required because there may be pressure to produce more stories. In the Finnish *Helsingin Sanomat* monthly magazine *Kuukausiliite*, where I work, we have been able to carry out stories that take several weeks or even months to report.²¹⁴ There are some other lone islands like this also elsewhere in Europe, but in many cases those who are interested in narrative journalism do it at their own expense. In Finland, as the magazines are becoming more and more reader-targeted, there is room for narrative journalism mainly in newspapers' Sunday pages and weekend supplements²¹⁵. In Spain it is mainly the weekend supplements of *El País* and *El Mundo* (*El País Semanal* and *El Magazine*) that can afford to publish narrative journalism²¹⁶.

"Who do we get to pay for our work? It doesn't pay. The time you invest, it doesn't pay off in money. People do it on the side."²¹⁷

²⁰⁵ <http://www.condenast.com/brands/new-yorker/media-kit/print> (retrieved Mar 15, 2013).

²⁰⁶ http://m.condenast.com/sites/all/files/pdf/media_kit_print_3307.pdf (retrieved Mar 20, 2013).

²⁰⁷ <http://www.condenast.com/brands/gq/media-kit/print> (retrieved Mar 20, 2013).

²⁰⁸ http://harpers.chadwyck.com/infopage/harpers_abt.htm (retrieved Mar 20, 2013).

²⁰⁹ Pew Research Center 2011/ Audit Bureau of circulations

²¹⁰ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jeffbercovici/2013/01/03/the-atlantic-will-experiment-with-online-pay-models-in-2013/> (retrieved Mar 20, 2013).

²¹¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/dec/30/culture.features>

²¹² Author's interview with Cristian Lupşa. <http://www.decatorevista.ro/>

²¹³ Author's interviews with e.g. James Meek and Laurens Nijzink. See also Justin Webster, "An interview with Ian Jack", *Granta*, September 2002.

²¹⁴ *Helsingin Sanomat* is the largest newspaper in Finland and in Scandinavia. *Kuukausiliite* is its monthly supplement that is known for high quality long-form, in-depth and sometimes also narrative journalism. See <http://www.hs.fi/kuukausiliite/>.

²¹⁵ Maria Lassila-Merisalo, "Literary Journalism in Twentieth-Century Finland", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 203.

²¹⁶ Sonia Parratt, "Literary Journalism in Spain", John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p.

142.

²¹⁷ Author's interview with Laurens Nijzink.

In some European countries journalists have managed to get government or foundation funding for long narrative projects, which indicates that there is some support for journalism that takes extensive reporting to produce. Sometimes these projects are labelled “investigative journalism” because of the larger familiarity and the air of seriousness of that term.²¹⁸

There is one more interesting point to make when one discusses the cost of narrative journalism. There is money in the British national press, analysts say. It’s just being spent on extremely high fees for columnists. One of the best-known British journalists, BBC’s Andrew Marr, has criticized this; he says Britain needs more “real reporters” who are not tied to their computers but go out in the world. He’s talked about the “columnization” of the British press and written that for those who believe that newspapers should hold up a mirror to society “the message of the Sunday Times and its competitors is that Britain has gone shopping”. Nick Davies, another leading British journalist, uses the word “churnalism” to distinguish it from journalism, i.e. the traditional form of reporting at its best “that depends on thorough research using primary sources”²¹⁹.

The role of editors

For narrative journalism to become institutionalized, the role of editors is crucial. It seems, however, that it is usually the writers who try to push narrative story ideas in their papers, not the editors.

“Editors in [Danish] newsrooms don’t know anything about it. You have to go with what you feel is right. I’ve realized that even experienced American narrative journalists talk about their editors. Well, my editor is a newsman. We both know he can’t help me. I usually don’t show him my story until I’m finished. Most of the time the editors just leave me alone and trust that I know what I’m doing. But I always feel I have to defend my writing. I’m 8-10 years into my career but I’m still worried that I’m a way out there and that they are not going to like it.”²²⁰

In the Dutch conferences on narrative journalism most attendees have been freelance reporters and writers, and the organizers have had to make a special effort to engage also some editors. Their experience shows that the editors tend to think of narrative journalism as mere long-form and in-depth journalism and that they don’t think they need any new skills to produce it with their reporters.²²¹ In the U.S. there are several examples that the most successful newsrooms in narrative storytelling have been those where an editor is committed to narrative journalism, understands the essence of it, and has a mandate to encourage the form. This may mean assigning extended multi-part series but also constantly encouraging the reporters to use narrative and other unconventional story-telling forms throughout the newspaper in formats of all lengths.²²²

²¹⁸ Author’s interviews with e.g. Alain Lallemand.

²¹⁹ Jenny McKay, “Reportage in the U.K.”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds (ed.), *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011, p. 49, 57.

²²⁰ Author’s interview with Line Holm Nielsen.

²²¹ Author’s interviews with Laurens Nijzink and Jacqui Banaszyinski.

²²² See e.g. John C. Hartsock, “It was a dark and stormy night”, *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007, p. 268, 271.

Reuters news agency made a specific effort to start producing long-form investigative and explanatory stories – some of them also narrative – when it started what it calls an enterprise desk in 2010. Although the desk consists only of 20 people in a newsroom of some 2,800 people, it is a big leap into something Reuters has not traditionally done, and the editors have felt the need to make a strong case for the value in it.

“In some ways what we’re trying to introduce at Reuters is a big cultural change. 95 percent of our reporters are used to doing very quick, straight news stories. So it’s quite a big shift then to ask someone to do a narrative piece.”²²³

For a single journalist without this kind of editorial support in the newsroom the task of pushing the narrative form can be too vast:

“You have to be able to argue the relevance and the ethical issues because a lot of people challenge it; they don’t think it’s true or valid. And you really have to be good at the craft because bad narrative journalism really really sucks; it’s like reading a bad greeting card, it’s awful.”²²⁴

“You can’t do this kind of work without an editor. But we don’t have editors here. We have people who have the title. Here people who act as editors do the work of a copy-editor. That’s one of the main reasons why even regular feature stories or one-day reportages are so bad. If you go out in the field and write something, it’ll appear word by word. Nobody will talk with you about it when you’ve written it, and even worse, nobody is going to talk with you even before you go out to ask what we are looking for, what it is that we are trying to say. But with everyone trying to save their publication from dying, the last thing anyone wants to do is develop a generation of editors; nobody can add an extra layer of staff. When you’re losing money it’s hard to experiment anything new.”²²⁵

²²³ Author’s interview with Simon Robinson. As an example of Reuters long-form narrative story see the four-part series on a woman who called herself Jihad Jane. The series ran in Dec 2012, and it is the most narrative in style among the stories Reuters enterprise desk has run, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/07/us-usa-jihadjane-idUSBRE8B60GP20121207>.

²²⁴ Author’s interview with Jacqui Banaszyinski.

²²⁵ Author’s interview with Cristian Lupşa.

Misunderstandings

There seems to be a few misunderstandings about narrative journalism in Europe that may in part prevent its acceptance as a form similar to investigative journalism. It's common even among experienced European journalists not to realize the amount of reporting narrative journalism takes.

"It takes more reporting than any other kind of journalism outside of investigative journalism. Narrative and investigative journalism have more in common than they have apart. Narrative journalism requires an enormous amount of immersion in a person's life, triangulation interviews so you know that what the person is telling you is as close to the authentic event as can be – especially if you are reconstructing the event. You are not just recording what someone tells you and responds to a question, you're trying to understand more of the complexity of their lived life."²²⁶

Many journalists seem to think that narrative journalism is only about writing beautifully:

"People tend to think that writing can solve whatever reporting gaps you have, that you don't need that much reporting, that you just write and make it nice. We don't believe that. We try to tell people that the reason the story is so good is the amount of work. It's not that the writer is brilliant. He's also good at putting information together. His writing would mean nothing if he hadn't first got all that information."²²⁷

Quite often editors believe that readers don't want long stories, because readers don't have the time or the attention span to read them²²⁸. This may be true of boringly written articles without any storytelling features. One of my interviewees said most stories written by her colleagues are so boring that reading them is like mandatory homework, and that it is close to impossible to process the information in them.

"It's just pain getting through. And it should not be like this. I mean, how can we expect people to buy our papers if they are so boring?"²²⁹

"We think this is a way to get readers interested in reading newspapers and magazines again. You need to do something to attract readers; there is so much information available to choose from that we have to do our stories better."²³⁰

In narrative journalism a story is "a promise that the end is worth waiting for"²³¹, and this will keep the reader engaged and reading. A survey of 37,000 newspaper readers across the U.S., conducted by the Readership Institute at Northwestern University in 2000, concluded that writing which used narrative storytelling was seen as more accessible than the traditional "hard news" or inverted pyramid model²³². It is possible that conventional news reporting is leaving a gap in readers' understanding of the world, and narrative journalism may be able to help filling that gap²³³. When scholars have looked at award-winning reporting the power of narrative reporting strategies over the discursive ones has been

²²⁶ Author's interview with Jacqui Banaszynski.

²²⁷ Author's interview with Cristian Lupşa.

²²⁸ See Clive Thompson, "How Tweets and texts nurture in-depth analysis", *Wired*, Dec 27, 2010.

²²⁹ Author's interview with Line Holm Nielsen.

²³⁰ Author's interview with Paulien Bakker.

²³¹ Mallery Jean Tenore, "Inside a serial narrative", Poynter.org, April 11, 2011, <http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/200728/theres-no-such-thing-as-first-person-omniscient-when-writing-a-personal-story/#.UPb1Npyb2vM.twitter>

²³² <http://blog.washingtonpost.com/story-lab/2010/04/narrative-journalism-a-convers.html>.

²³³ Susan Greenberg, "Poetics of Fact", *Times Higher Education*, Aug 10, 2010.

obvious²³⁴. Narratives seem to attract a much broader audience than just the older, traditional readers of newspapers — an audience that's been reading “junk narrative”, perhaps, and now gets a chance to experience with high-quality journalism. As the Austrian critic Karl Krauss observed, the conventional journalistic styles of the 20th century have not engaged the audience but have had a tendency to paralyze the imagination of the reader²³⁵. In Spain there is a phenomenon called the “reportagization” of news which can be traced to the need to keep the readers interested²³⁶.

Some European journalists seem to be sceptical about narrative journalism because they think the line between fiction and nonfiction is too blurred. The absence of the basic techniques standard journalism uses – attribution and quotation—makes them feel uneasy. Because they fail to recognize the vast amount of reporting narrative journalism takes, they dismiss the elaborate scenes and dialogues as something the writer has made up. They are unaware that ethical rules in narrative journalism are much clearer in the U.S. than in Europe where the form of literary reportage has existed without any clear rules. Ethics are crucial to the legitimacy of narrative journalism, and the form is now held to a higher standard of accuracy than ever before. Part of this is due to journalism prizes, like the Pulitzers.²³⁷ There is no “press code” of narrative journalism in America but the do's and don'ts have been stated on several platforms²³⁸, and there is an on-going discussion about what the writer of journalistic narrative is and is not allowed to do. Because there are rules, American journalists (and to some extent bloggers) are able to keep an eye on each other's ethics, and this has exposed at least the most striking breaches of rules. Sourcing narrative stories in endnotes or “editor's notes “— a good system for indicating how the author obtained the material — is also gaining popularity in the U.S.²³⁹.

There's also the misunderstanding that anything long-form is narrative. It is not, nor does a piece necessarily have to be long to be narrative.

“Narrative journalism takes experience and a certain approach to journalism. A lot of people think it takes a lot of time, and a really deep narrative told over time of course does, but you can do a really great narrative in half a day if you know what you are doing. But it does take a certain attention, you have to find a way of either really thorough interviewing or physical presence.”²⁴⁰

Privacy of the individual

²³⁴ Verica Rupar and Marcel Broesma, “The power of narrative journalism: A comparative approach to award winning reporting”, International Association for Literary Journalism Studies Conference, London, May 2010.

²³⁵ John C. Hartsock, “It was a dark and stormy night”, *Prose Studies*, Vol. 29, 2/2007, p. 272-273.

²³⁶ Sonia Parratt, “Literary Journalism in Spain”, John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, *Literary Journalism Across the Globe*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst and Boston, 2011. p. 144.

²³⁷ Roy Peter Clark, “The Ethics of Attribution”, Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (ed.), *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007, p. 189-193.

²³⁸ See e.g. Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (ed.), *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007; Mark Kramer, “Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists”, Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1995; and David Craig, *The Ethics of the Story*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, 2006.

²³⁹ See Roy Peter Clark, “The Ethics of Attribution”, Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (ed.), *Telling True Stories*, Plume, United States, 2007, p. 189-193; David Craig, *The Ethics of the Story*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, 2006, p. 65-67.

²⁴⁰ Author's interview with Jacqui Banaszynski.

Some interviewees paid attention to cultural differences in how people experience privacy. In the old Soviet block people may still feel fear if asked about personal and intimate issues because in the totalitarian system telling those stories would have put them at risk.

Even in Western Europe people seem to be less open when interviewed compared to Americans, but this observation is, of course, based only on personal experiences without any data to back it. To be successful a narrative journalist needs to get close to the people one is writing about, and this may be a problem if people are totally unaware of this kind of journalism.²⁴¹

It is also possible that most European journalists are hesitant or even reluctant to ask questions that seem too personal to them because they have not been trained in this kind of reporting. They also may not be willing to go back to their sources to do more reporting which is often needed in order to be able to reconstruct scenes.

"It is difficult to get young reporters to really work, not just make phone calls. I try to get them really intimate with their subjects, make them to spend time with their subjects, be there in the action with them."²⁴²

²⁴¹ Author's interviews with Jacqui Banaszyński, Laurens Nijzink and Mark Kramer.

²⁴² Author's interview with Alain Lallemand.

6. Narrative storytelling in digital journalism

"What we've found at Vox is that long-form stories are incredibly attractive to advertisers. People are spending a lot of time with them."

(Jim Bankoff, CEO of Vox Media²⁴³)

Narrative journalism is by nature quite different from web writing: its aim is a high level of craft, whereas web writing "makes a virtue of its raw and instantaneous nature". To many "the unedited voice" on the web has become the ideal, a guarantee of something authentic. Some people now see professional journalistic writing as too polished and fake.²⁴⁴

Still, Jill Abramson, the new executive editor of the *The New York Times*, said in September 2011 that the new digital technology would most likely bolster a "very robust future" for long-form nonfiction narrative. "Tablets and iPhones have given long-form narrative journalism a way to reach a new audience," she said.²⁴⁵ Like Abramson, writers of narrative journalism have generally seen the web as a promise, not a threat because it can provide them a new forum to publish their work where the physical length of the story won't be restricted by paper, printing and delivery costs.²⁴⁶

Long-form journalism and slow journalism are the new catchwords, professional journalists' counterattack to click-on journalism, infotainment and dumbing down. Digital publishers have launched a few long-form websites with original content in a couple of years, such as *Byliner*, *The Atavist*²⁴⁷, *Matter*²⁴⁸, and *Narratively*²⁴⁹. Many of their stories are longer than magazine articles but shorter than books, and they are meant to be read on tablets, not desktops. Some of these new sites are partly crowdfunded. Readers have the ability to buy individual stories (*The Atavist* calls them "e-singles") or subscribe; the price of a single story maybe less than one pound²⁵⁰. There are also sites that curate, or tag, new and classic nonfiction that is published around the web, and provide the reader with a distraction-free and more book-like reading experience²⁵¹. One of these, Longform.org, attracts an audience

²⁴³ Jim Bankoff, CEO of Vox Media, <http://www.npr.org/2013/04/12/176954687/great-long-form-journalism-just-clicks-away?sc=tw&cc=share>

²⁴⁴ Susan Greenberg, "Slow Journalism in the Digital Fast Lane", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, 2012, p. 389.

²⁴⁵ <http://www.bu.edu/today/2011/new-nyt-editor-on-future-of-narrative-journalism/>. Abramson taught a narrative nonfiction writing seminar at Yale University five years before starting as executive editor.

²⁴⁶ About long-form on web in Danish see <http://www.b.dk/nationalt/berlingske-journalist-vinder-onlinepris>.

²⁴⁷ See e.g. David Wolman, "Journalism Done The Atavist Way", *Nieman Reports*, Winter 2011, and <http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/2012/05/03/multimedia-storytelling-the-atavist-one-year-in-hows-it-going-evan-ratliff/>.

²⁴⁸ *Matter* publishes in-depth journalism on science, technology, the environment and medicine. See e.g. Felix Salmon, "Matter's vision for long-form journalism", [wired.co.uk](http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-02/27/salmon-matter-long-form-journalism), Feb 27, 2012 (<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-02/27/salmon-matter-long-form-journalism>).

²⁴⁹ Narrative.ly launched in New York in 2012. It publishes in-depth stories about New York, also photos, audio and multimedia (<http://narrative.ly/about/>).

²⁵⁰ When a new long-form site launched in Finland in January 2013 and charged 3,99 euros for its first story, or "a single", as it was called, there was an uproar that the price was too high (longplay.fi). The price of Amazon's Kindle singles, stories that are longer than traditional magazine articles but shorter than books, was USD 0.50-3.09 in March 2013.

²⁵¹ See e.g. longform.org (2010) and longreads.com (2009). Longreads was founded by a former Time Inc. editor who first introduced the hashtag #longreads on Twitter as a means to share long-

that is interested in long-form journalism and wants to get an overview of what's happening in the field. Their website has 400,000 unique visitors per month, and their tablet application has sold 35,000 copies. The audience is young, mobile and well educated. The stories posted get an average of 4,000 readers. The usage is heaviest between 7 p.m. and 2 a.m. and peaks about at 9 p.m. The number of readers doubles during weekends. 65 % of the visitors complete the stories they read. The publication date of the story doesn't affect its popularity, and a writer's name is more important when choosing which story to read than the name of the publication where it was published. There are thus young, educated and technology-savvy people who hunt for long-form nonfiction stories on the web in their time off.²⁵²

There seems to be a growing community of people who are dedicated to spreading long-form writing, albeit not necessarily narrative, and they do it using "the very technologies that people say are killing long-form journalism."²⁵³ Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter may support reading narrative journalism because users share links to stories they have enjoyed and use hashtags like #longreads to make them easier to find²⁵⁴. There is little research so far on how people use tablets but it seems they are willing to read longer pieces on tablets than on computers because tablets recreate the book/magazine/newspaper-like reading experience that is already familiar²⁵⁵. There is also some evidence that advertisers are finding narrative long-form stories attractive because readers spend more time with them.²⁵⁶

Most of the best-known new digital platforms for long-form and narrative journalism are founded by Americans, and the contributors who write for these sites seem to be, once again, Americans. By April 2013 New York-based *The Atavist* had published 22 original long-form stories. All the writers are American. The writers of the five stories that *Matter* has published so far are Indian, Canadian and American. There are similar, albeit smaller sites, in Europe, too, like Zetland in Denmark and Longplay in Finland.

The danger is, however, that if there won't be enough resources and skills available, the writing online will be just long, not narrative. Sarah Lacy, the founder and editor-in-chief of the online *PandoDaily*, writes about the sudden popularity of long *New Yorker* style journalism online and asks, who is going to write it, because readers will only read it if it is excellent. She believes that web's thirst for speed and volume doesn't encourage learning the craft through mentorship, building of sources and investing in writing and editing:

form journalism. Some sites like Readability, Instapaper and Pocket offer only a read-it-later service.

²⁵² Robert S. Boynton's Keynote speech at the IALJS-8 conference in Tampere, Finland, May 16, 2013.

²⁵³ Bobbie Johnson as quoted in Susan Greenberg, "Slow Journalism in the Digital Fast Lane", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, 2012, p. 387.

²⁵⁴ See also Clive Thompson, "How Tweets and texts nurture in-depth analysis", *Wired*, Dec 27, 2010.

²⁵⁵ Rachel McAthy, "How long-form journalism is getting 'a new lease of life' in the digital world", journalism.co.uk, Aug 21, 2012.

²⁵⁶ <http://www.npr.org/2013/04/12/176954687/great-long-form-journalism-just-clicks-away?sc=tw&cc=share>. It's also worth noting that the theme of the 2013 Boston conference on narrative journalism was "Storytelling journalism goes digital".

"The sad reality is that blogging has given a generation of talented voices a big stage and a loose leash to build a name for themselves far quicker than they could have before. But almost none of them know how to be great reporters or great writers. Even the best bloggers of our age would lose their minds if they had to freelance a piece for, say, *The New Yorker*. There's a level of *de rigueur* editing that yields what is known as 'a New Yorker-style piece' that they just couldn't imagine."²⁵⁷

The Internet is a surprisingly textual place despite its multimedia possibilities²⁵⁸. Most long-form stories online have thus far been mainly text with the occasional add-on photos, maps, music and video. *The New York Times* online narrative about an avalanche in Colorado gained a lot of attention when it was published in December 2012 because of its clever use of multimedia²⁵⁹. The text was an extensively researched traditional narrative based on chronological reconstruction of events, but the purposeful and seamless integration of multimedia took it a step ahead. The story used silent videos that played automatically (some of these videos were informative graphics), and there was a scrolling mechanism that triggered actions, like playing graphic animations, as the user scrolled the story. This may be the direction where online narrative journalism is going — it is worth noting, though, that besides the traditional writer-photographer team there were three video cameramen and eleven graphic designers who put *The New York Times* avalanche story together.

Narrative journalism may have yet another benefit online: staying power. In the online world, scoops are easy to steal and rewrite into news bulletins, and most readers don't care what the original source was. But one can't steal the reading experience of a well-written narrative story. Some stories curated and republished by the new long-form digital platforms are several years old, some from the 1960's. Unlike most news pieces of the same age they don't seem outdated but attract new readers.

²⁵⁷ Sarah Lacy, "Suddenly everyone wants New Yorker style content. Only one catch: Who's going to write it?", pandodaily.com, Oct 12, 2012 (<http://pandodaily.com/2012/10/12/suddenly-everyone-wants-new-yorker-style-content-only-one-catch-who-is-going-to-write-it/>).

²⁵⁸ Susan Greenberg, "Slow Journalism in the Digital Fast Lane", Richard Lance Keeble and John Tulloch, *Global Literary Journalism*, Peter Lang Publishing, 2012, p. 383.

²⁵⁹ See "Snow Fall", <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2012/snow-fall/#/?part=tunnel-creek>. Journalist John Branch was awarded the Pulitzer prize in feature writing 2012 for the story. See also <http://multimediasooter.com/wp/2013/04/21/the-snow-fall-effect-and-dissecting-the-multimedia-longform-narrative/>. In May 2013 *Guardian* used even more multimedia in its narrative story called "Firestorm", <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2013/may/26/firestorm-bushfire-dunalee-holmes-family>.

7. Conclusions

“You have this precious, incredibly privileged thing which is the reader’s attention for a little while. And you can make the slightest misstep and the reader will put you down. People will say that the reader lives in a busy world. But that’s not the reason why. The reason is that the writer blows it, and loses the reader’s trust.”

(William Langewiesche, San Francisco Chronicle, 2007)

There seems to be a tradition in the U.S. for extensively reported, fact-based and very precise narrative journalism that hardly exists in Europe, not even in the U.K. And where it exists it’s practiced by individual journalists who barely have a name for the kind of journalism they do, and who feel they are left on their own. The suggestion that there is something “peculiarly American” about the form is not new: John A. Kouwenhoven wrote as early as 1948 that narrative journalism is a distinctively American phenomenon. He cited John Hersey’s *Hiroshima* as an example of a work that has “a foundation of rigorously factual detail which is almost unknown elsewhere”.

The historical roots of narrative journalism are, however, Anglo-American, as many scholars have acknowledged. Before the emergence of the objective reporting style in the end of the 19th century, literary narrative writing style was being practiced as part of an unbroken tradition. In *A History of American Literary Journalism* John Hartsock gives numerous examples of early narrative reporters, and many of them were English. In the 20th century, however, two distinctive literary styles of journalism began to develop: U.S.-led narrative journalism and European-produced reportage. The European-origin ‘literary reportage’ is a problematic term because of its elasticity: it is used for a variety of nonfiction writing from the polemic to the more open-ended approach to storytelling that is typical in American narrative journalism.

I set out to find some answers to two questions: why is narrative journalism so clearly an American journalistic form, and why it hasn’t gained popularity in Europe. What I found out is based on the interviews I conducted for this paper and on some previous articles by journalists and academics.

Several factors emerged: the overall recognition of journalism in society, journalist training, the role of the press in society and culture, the role of advocates, market size, the role of editors, misunderstandings, and the issue of privacy. Each one of these factors seems to play at least some kind of role; some of them are overlapping, and it’s difficult to say if these singular reasons amplify the overall effect.

I’d like to highlight the issue of journalist training. It seems that at the moment very few European journalism students are introduced to the tradition of narrative journalism. Even in the U.K. courses in journalistic storytelling are rare. If most European journalism students are ignorant of the literary traditions of journalistic writing, it cannot be assumed that they will appreciate this kind of work or be able to produce it themselves. In the U.S. the situation is quite different. Journalism has had to fight over its place in the academia there

too, but dozens of American universities and colleges offer courses on narrative journalism and teach the basics of journalistic storytelling. Some of these courses are led by Pulitzer-winning journalists and other highly regarded professionals. Those individual European journalists who are familiar with the American tradition of narrative journalism have usually trained themselves by reading best American storytelling journalism and writing manuals, and by taking part in courses and conferences in the U.S. In recent years they have also been able to take an advantage of the American *Nieman Storyboard* which is the most comprehensive web site on narrative journalism.

There is also the issue of overall recognition of journalism in society. In the U.K. it seems to have been common to devalue journalism as a creative profession, and I'm afraid this is still the case today in many other European countries, too. There is the confrontation of a cultivated elite audience (literature) vs. an uncultivated mass audience (journalism) and a strong belief that only fiction can be literature: thus, to be a writer is to be a novelist – even though the audience of a mediocre writer is usually much smaller than that of an average journalist. We're still a long way from granting serious recognition to the literary qualities of the best journalism. If we did that, would there be more long-form narrative journalism?

Why should there be more narrative journalism in European media? Why do we need it? Because of readers, the audience. The aim of narratives is to attract and hold readers – sometimes not choosing a narrative may mean being not read at all. By using narrative form journalists can make impalpable subjects readable. Reading journalism should not feel like something one is obliged to do to stay informed. Reading should be enjoyable, not boring, not a struggle.

The objectivist paradigm so long dominant in journalism practice has its limitations: because reporters were meant to write “as machines without prejudice, colour, and without style, all alike”²⁶⁰, the paradigm ends up alienating the reader. Alienation may result in the audience getting the factual information but not fully understanding what is happening in society. The ambition of narrative journalism is to narrow the gulf between subject (the reader or the writer) and object (the world that is written about), not widen it. It aims not to divorce readers from experience. In doing this narrative journalist may be able to narrow the distance between the reader and the people one is writing about. The strength of a good narrative is also its resistance to closure: it unfolds and shows, but it leaves the conclusions to the reader. But not all narrative is good narrative: one also has to be aware of overvaluing and fetishizing storytelling techniques.

I'd like to bring out some of the interesting notions John Carey makes when he writes that advantages of reportage over imaginative literature are clear. Carey talks about the genre of reportage but the same applies to narrative journalism, probably even more. Narrative journalism, too, “lays claim directly to the power of the real, which imaginative literature can approach only through make-believe”. When reading narrative journalism the reader knows that all this really happened, and this requires him to respond, if only he knew how. At this level narrative journalism may change its readers, “it may extend – both directions – their ideas about what it is to be a human being”. Traditionally it's been thought that fiction

²⁶⁰ John Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 2000, p. 64.

has this ability but the power of narrative journalism may be stronger because it is true. It is also worth reminding that journalism's potential to reach people is much greater than literature's because it reaches millions of people not touched by literature.²⁶¹

Carey makes a fascinating observation. What existed before reportage was made available to millions of consumers?, he asks. The likeliest answer: religion. Maybe this helps us understand why narrative journalism so often deals with death: murders, accidents, natural catastrophes, wars, people's losses. When narrative journalism tells about deaths of other people, does it make the reader a survivor? Does it have social value like religion once had? As Carey says, "In this way reportage, like religion, gives the individual a comforting sense of his own immortality"²⁶².

When a New York University journalism department project in 1999 came up with a list of the hundred best works of the 20th century American journalism, at least some 40 texts on the list were works of literary journalism. There is something in fine narrative that leaves an imprint on people. It's often powered by events, and its goal is not essentially analytical or critical, but it has a theme that stays with the reader after the story is finished.

Narrative journalism has staying power in the same way good literature does. Some stories curated and republished by the new long-form digital platforms are several years old, some as far as from the 1960's. Unlike most news pieces of the same age they don't seem outdated but are read again and again by new generations.

Narrative journalism is not a fast or a cheap way to attract readers. Ambitious long-form narratives are expensive to produce because of the reporting and writing time and editing resources they take. But, then, they've never meant to be "more than a salad or dessert" in the overall content of journalism. Many publishers would have the money to fund narrative projects just like investigative projects if that is what they decide to prioritize over celebrity columns.

The few European journalists who are engaged in narrative journalism would benefit greatly from a European website similar to the *Nieman Storyboard*. The website would point visitors to exceptional work by linking to narrative stories in European and American publications or by republishing those stories digitally. Translations would not be necessary, because with the help of digital translators one can get a rough idea of the stories. The site could publish Q&As with writers on how their stories were done, and also posts on narrative techniques. The web site would give an idea what narrative journalism is about and it would function as a link between European journalists and editors interested in doing it. By running news on training, workshops and conferences it would introduce young journalists to the craft.

This paper has looked into some of the reasons why narrative journalism has not grown into as strong a form in Europe as in the U.S. There are many questions left unanswered that would further help our understanding, such as: Why has journalism gained more

²⁶¹ John Carey, "Introduction", *The Faber Book of Reportage*, John Carey (ed.), Faber and Faber, London, 1987, p. xxvi-xxviii.

²⁶² Ibid., p. xxxv.

appreciation as a creative profession in the U.S. than in Europe? Why writing which uses narrative storytelling is often seen as more accessible by readers than the traditional “hard news” or inverted pyramid model? Are journalists in the U.S. allowed to dig deeper into private lives of ordinary citizens than in many European countries? How is multimedia best used on tablets so that it will strengthen the written narrative and not distract the reader?

Interviews

Paulien Bakker, video call, Mar 12, 2013.

Bakker, a Dutch freelance journalist, is one of the organizers of the Narrative Journalism Conference in the Netherlands and the founder of Bureau Schrijftkraft. She writes for leading Dutch newspapers and magazines.

Jacqui Banaszynski, video call, Feb 2, 2013.

Banaszynski is the Knight Chair in Editing professor at the Missouri School of Journalism and a faculty fellow at the Poynter Institute. She won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in feature writing for "AIDS in the Heartland," a series about a gay farm couple facing AIDS.

Susan Greenberg, interview, Jan 31, 2013, London.

Greenberg, a British scholar, has worked for 25 years as a writer and editor for newspapers, magazines and web. Since 2005 she's been senior lecturer in non-fiction writing at Roehampton University. She is a founding member of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies.

Joshua Hammer, phone call, Mar 12, 2013.

Hammer is a former *Newsweek* Africa bureau chief and a contributing editor to *Smithsonian* and *Outside* magazines. He writes also for *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*, among others. He's the author of three nonfiction books and has published an e-single on *The Atavist*. He is American and lives in Berlin.

Janine di Giovanni, emails, Mar 19, 2013.

Di Giovanni is an American-born award-winning author and journalist who has been covering war and conflicts since 1980's. She is a contributing editor to *Vanity Fair*, and her writing appears in *The New York Times*, *Granta* and *Newsweek* among others. She lives in Paris.

Line Holm Nielsen, video call, Jan 21, 2013.

Holm Nielsen is journalist in the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*. She's been twice nominated for the Cavling, the most prestigious Danish journalism prize. She is the author of *Kuppet*, a nonfiction narrative book about Denmark's largest robbery.

Mark Kramer, phone call, Oct 8, 2012; video call, Feb 11, 2013; emails in 2012-2013.

Kramer, an American writer, is the founding director of the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism at Harvard University and now writer-in-residence in Boston University. He founded the Nieman conference on Narrative Journalism and has also helped to start similar conferences in other countries. He's written several nonfiction books.

Alain Lallemand, phone call, Jan 18, 2013.

Lallemand is investigative and narrative reporter for Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*. He teaches nonfiction writing at the Catholic University of Leuven and has written *Journalisme narratif en pratique*, a French textbook on narrative journalism.

Cristian Lupşa, video call, Jan 24, 2013.

Lupşa is the founder and editor of the Romanian magazine *Decât o Revista*. He is the organizer of narrative journalism conference in Romania and a Nieman fellow at Harvard University 2014.

James Meek, interview, Mar 22, 2013, London.

Meek, a

British author, is a contributing editor for the *London Review of Books* and a former journalist for the *Guardian*. He's written six books of fiction and won the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje prize.

Ian Parker, phone call, June 10, 2013.

Parker has

been a staff writer for the *New Yorker* since 2000. He received the National Magazine Award for profile writing for his article "The Gift" in 2004. Before joining the *New Yorker* he was contributing writer for *Talk*, television critic for the London *Observer* and writer and editor in *The Independent*. He's British and lives in New York.

Laurens Nijzink, video call, Mar 13, 2013.

Nijzink is a

Dutch multimedia freelance journalist and anthropologist and one of the founders of the Dutch Narrative Journalism Conference.

Simon Robinson, phone call, Apr 16, 2013.

Robinson, an

Australian journalist, is an enterprise editor (Europe, Middle East, Africa) at Reuters in London. He worked at *Time* magazine for more than 15 years, including stints as bureau chief in Africa and South Asia, as a correspondent in Iraq, and as an editor in London.

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Appendix: Some examples of acclaimed narrative journalism stories

Catherine Boo, “A marriage cure”, *New Yorker*, August 18, 2003. (A story about state-sponsored seminars in ghettos of Oklahoma. National Magazine Award winner 2004.)

C. J. Chivers, “The school”, *Esquire*, March 14, 2007. (An account of the experience of terror in the Beslan school hostage drama.)

Pamela Colloff, “The innocent man”, *Texas Monthly*, November and December 2012. (A two-part series, a total of 28,000 words, on a wrongful conviction, <http://www.texasmonthly.com/story/innocent-man-part-one>.)

Ted Conover (b. 1958), “A snitch’s dilemma”, *The New York Times Magazine*, June 29, 2012. (A story about Alex White, a snitch for the Atlanta police, who tried to do the right thing, <http://www.tedconover.com/2012/11/a-snitchs-dilemma-2/>.)

Joan Didion (b. 1934), “Some dreamers of the golden dream”, *Saturday Evening Post*, 1966. (A story about a murder. Didion didn’t arrive on the scene until after the trial so all the details are not from firsthand observation but from meticulous reporting and research.)

James Fenton (b. 1949), “The fall of Saigon”, *Granta*, Issue 15, Spring 1985. (A strange record of the collapse of a city at war. Fenton remained in Saigon when most of the foreign press had already left. He is a British writer and poet.)

David Finkel (b. 1955), “A road that never ends”, *Washington Post*, July 1999. (Last story in a series that Finkel wrote about the conflict in Kosovo in 1999. Finkel focuses on one family only.)

Jon Franklin, “Mrs. Kelley’s monster”, *Baltimore Evening Sun*, Dec 1978. (“Franklin followed a brain surgeon through a tense operation on a woman named Edna Kelly and wrote a tight, timeless narrative that stands as a model of precision reporting and evocative writing.”²⁶³ Pulitzer winner 1979.)

Thomas French, “Angels and demons”, *St. Petersburg’s Times*, Oct-Nov 1997. (A multi-part narrative about efforts to track down the murderer of a mother and two daughters, Pulitzer features winner in 1998.)

Tom Hallman Jr., “The boy behind the mask”, *The Oregonian*, Oct 2000. (Four-part series of a disfigured 14-year old boy who elects to have life-threatening surgery. Pulitzer features

²⁶³ Paige Williams in Nieman Storyboard which also has an analysis of the story, <http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/2012/08/24/line-by-line-mrs-kellys-monster-how-jon-franklin-wrote-a-classic/>.

winner 2001, <http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2001-Feature-Writing>.)

John Hersey (1914-1993), “Hiroshima”, *New Yorker*, Aug 31, 1946. (Follows six survivors in the weeks after the atomic bomb explosion. Based on extensive interviews. The first serious work to attempt a novelist factual narrative on a large scale. It took up the entire editorial space of one *New Yorker* issue. Later a book.)

Ian Jack (b. 1945), “12.10 to Leeds”, *Granta*, Issue 73, 2001. (The Hatfield rail crash in 2000 killed four people, injured 70 and led to public anger in Britain. Jack explores the crash, its aftermath, and the privatization and ruin of British railway system. Also published as *Granta Special* in 2002, *The Crash That Stopped Britain*. The story can be found in Jack’s book *The Country Formerly Known as Great Britain* which is a collection of his writings 1989—2009.)

Julia Keller, “A wicked wind takes aim”, *Chicago Tribune*, December 2004. A three-part series meticulously reconstructed a 10-second tornado. Pulitzer features winner.)

William Langewiesche (b. 1955), “Rules of engagement”, *Vanity Fair*, Nov 2006. (How U.S. marines massacred 24 civilians in Haditha, Iraq. It’s Langewiesche’s voice that takes the reader through the 15,000-word story,
<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2006/11/haditha200611>)

Sonia Nazario (b. 1960), “Enrique’s journey”, *Los Angeles Times*, Sept-Oct 2002. (A multi-part narrative about the journey of a fifteen-year-old Guatemalan boy who entered the U.S. illegally to look for his mother. Later published as a book.)

Susan Orlean (b. 1955), “The American man at age ten”, *Esquire*, 1992. (The main character of the story is an ordinary ten-year-old boy.)

Ian Parker (b. 1961), “The story of a suicide”, *New Yorker*, Feb 6, 2012. (About homosexuality, bullying and college life,
http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/02/06/120206fa_fact_parker.)

Michael Paterniti, “The long fall of one-eleven heavy”, *Vanity Fair*, July 2000. (About the events on and after Sept. 2, 1998, when Swissair Flight 111 crashed into the Atlantic Ocean,
<http://www.esquire.com/features/long-fall-one-eleven-heavy-0700>.)

Eli Sanders, “The bravest woman in Seattle”, *The Stranger*, June 15, 2011. (A story of a woman who survived a brutal attack that took the life of her partner. Sanders used the woman’s courtroom testimony and the details of the crime. Pulitzer winner 2012,
<http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2012-Feature-Writing>.)

Barry Siegel, “A father’s pain, a judge’s duty, and a justice beyond their reach”, *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 30, 2001. (A story of a man tried for negligence in the death of his son, and the

judge who heard the case. Pulitzer winner 2002, <http://www.pulitzer.org/works/2002-Feature-Writing>.)

Alice Steinbach (1934-2012), "A boy of unusual vision", *Baltimore Sun Magazine*, May 27, 1984. (Immersion into the life, mind and vision of a 10-year-old blind boy, Pulitzer feature winner in 1985, <http://www.baltimoresun.com/media/acrobat/2010-05/53724358.pdf>.)

Gay Talese (b. 1932), "Frank Sinatra has a cold". *Esquire*, April 1966. (A narrative journalism classic.)²⁶⁴

Gene Weingarten (b. 1951), "The peekaboo paradox", *Washington Post*, Jan 22, 2006. (A story of the history that haunts the most popular children's entertainer in Washington, D.C., <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/18/AR2006011801434.html>.)

Paige Williams, "You have thousands of angels around you", *Atlanta Magazine*, Jan 10, 2007. (A story of a woman who lost her family, survived a war and found a new life in America. National Magazines Award in feature writing 2008.)

²⁶⁴ For a critical view of the story, see Lad Tobin, "Gay Talese Has a Secret", *Fourth Genre*, East Lansing, Fall 2010, Vol. 12, Iss. 2; p. 135-146.