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The underappreciated role of creativity in journalism

Abstract:

The role of creativity in journalism is relatively understudied, though that is changing, with a growing literature about what is variously termed literary journalism, creative nonfiction, long-form journalism and literary nonfiction. Creativity can and should be unshackled from high-minded, even mystical conceptions of it from the Romantic period. By doing this, and by examining a range of journalistic practices, in the conception, researching and writing of journalism, this article argues for a broader understanding of the important role that creativity plays in the craft of journalism.

Biographical note:

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Introduction

To describe a novelist as creative or inventive or imaginative is to pay them a compliment; to say the same about a journalist is anything but. As Paul McGeough, a Walkley award-winning Fairfax Media journalist and author puts it: 'I think the sense amongst Australian journalists, if you dare to sit down on any bar stool in this country and say 'Well, actually I'm a literary journalist', you'd get hit' (in Joseph 2016). The notion that journalism is a creative activity prompts jokes about those reporters who never let the facts get in the way of a good story, or florid headlines like 'Freddie Starr ate my hamster' (Engel 1996: 282). It also brings to mind literary critic Sven Birkerts' put-down of Truman Capote's description of *In Cold Blood* as a 'nonfiction novel': 'an oxymoronic phrase and a moronic idea' (Birkerts 1987: 268). The jokes may arise from the contingent, rough and tumble nature of daily journalism but Birkerts' remark is made in an essay entitled 'Docu-fiction' and went to oft-raised concerns about how and whether it is possible for journalists to draw on techniques associated with fiction to write nonfiction (Hersey 1980; Ricketson 2014: 12–39). Here he argues that art stands apart from any attempt to report on actual life:

> Was it out of sheer blindness—an inability to see the forest for the trees—that man set out to render the world as *other* that what he saw? Hardly. Art (fiction included) came into being precisely because no accounting of the real facts, no matter how expertly done, could ever be enough. Long before Socrates, the perceptive understood that facts were facts, and that truth was what they meant. Meaning only begins when the contingent circumstances have been stripped away (Birkerts 1987: 267–8).

It is possible to agree that even the most expert accounting of the real facts is not enough *and* that such expert accounting may display, may even require, creativity. Art and creativity are not synonyms, of course, but there is a deal of overlap in the two words' meanings.

What is meant by creativity in journalism

The purpose of this article is not to argue that journalism can or cannot be art but to argue that creativity is more important to the practice of journalism than it is given credit for, and that for many important works of journalism it is central. Considerable scholarly attention has been paid to writers of fiction who have also written journalism, such as Joan Didion, Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway and George Orwell, each of whom has been the subject of at least one full-length biography that includes discussion of their nonfiction writing (Daugherty 2015; Tomalin 2011; Baker 1969; Shelden 1991). Scholarly attention has also been paid to writers of journalism whose work is assessed as or aspires to be art, whether in academic journals such as *TEXT: Journal of writing and writing courses* (see, for instance, Brien and Krauth 2000; Carlin and Rendle-Short 2013) or *Literary journalism studies*, the journal of the International Association of Literary Journalism Studies, which is devoted to the topic. The emphasis in this article, however, is on how creativity is manifested in a broader range of journalistic writing.

I could argue that creativity in journalism has not been given enough credit by scholars or by artists but the topic also raises eyebrows if not hackles in newsrooms precisely because of the word's association with the freedom to invent that is integral to novels, plays, or poetry. In part at least this is because much of journalism operates in a heavily contested area of public discourse where the stakes can be high and invention of facts is anathema in journalism, or should be, notwithstanding jokes about journalism that falls well short of its ideals. It may well be that we are living in an age of 'Trumpiness' as Stephen Colbert terms Donald Trump's approach to public discourse. The American television satirist updated the term he coined for

George W Bush's presidency, 'truthiness', during the Republican convention in July 2016 when Trump became the party's nominee for the presidential election (Colbert 2016). Few commentators have argued that either truthiness or Trumpiness are improving public discourse, even if such concerns proved an insufficient barrier to Trump being elected president in November 2016. In this context it is worth noting that in one of the examples discussed below—Nick Davies' work on the phone hacking scandal—a serious factual error was made in a key news article. What is instructive, though, is how seriously Davies took the need to correct the error in his newspaper's online edition; how he openly discussed it in his book *Hack Attack* (2014: 375–78), and that the error, while serious, did not change the essential fact that phone hacking was endemic at *News of the World*.

It is useful, then, to return to first principles. *The Macquarie dictionary* defines creativity as, first, 'having the quality or power of creating' and, second, 'resulting from originality of thought or expression'. The first definition needs to be read alongside *The Macquarie's* eight definitions of 'create', especially the first two: 'to bring into being; cause to exist; produce' and 'to evolve from one's own thought or imagination'. On the face of it, by these definitions journalism is not creative because it is about reporting in a timely way on newsworthy events and people of broad interest to the public. That is, journalism aims to provide an accurate representation of actual events and people rather than create them. There is scope for creativity in journalism, however, partly because the forms that journalism can take extend well beyond news reporting. They extend, first, to feature articles but then to long-form journalism, whether book-length narrative, nonfiction, documentary film, audio podcasts, or multi-media productions. It is also because there is much more to journalism than the form it finally takes. Newsworthy information may be provided to a journalist—the latest unemployment figures for example; or the journalist may have discovered news themselves—that a police commissioner was corrupt, for example. Here the act of discovery is analogous to creation as defined above: 'to bring into being; cause to exist; produce'. A journalist may attend a media conference and ask questions along with the rest of the media pack, or they may spend weeks building the trust of a survivor of family violence in order to interview them. The latter comes closer to the meanings of creativity listed above as the interview would not come into being without the work of the journalist. The interviewee, of course, is an actual person and is essential to the process, but without the work of the journalist their story will not be told, except in the relatively rare cases (and I am thinking here of the remarkable Rosie Batty) where a survivor of family violence has the desire and the wherewithal to tell their own story.

It is valuable, then, to set out a number of brief case studies that demonstrate the role creativity plays in journalism. This will be done along two axes of inquiry: first, by examining the work done before the journalism is written. This includes work done in generating a story idea, in developing a story, and in persuading people to be interviewed. The second axis of inquiry is in examining a selection of the forms beyond news that journalism can take. The first line of inquiry is less well charted than the second, though among journalism textbooks, Jon Franklin's *Writing for story* (1986) is an exception as he devotes as much space to idea generation and research as he does to writing techniques. The second axis, though, is the subject of a sizeable literature, including but not limited to Boynton (2005), Connery (1992), Hartsock (2000 and 2016), Keeble and Tulloch (2012 and 2014), and Sims (2007).

Creativity in generating story ideas for journalism

Much of what appears in the news media is driven by the many events that occur each day in society (court cases, parliament, sporting results and the like). Much of this is presented in the form of what is known in the industry as hard news, but equally a lot is presented in feature articles, of which there are numerous sub-genres (columns, backgrounders, and profiles among others) in newspapers, weekend supplements and magazines. The need continually to produce new material leads, not surprisingly, to stale or recycled stories: which is why feature writing textbooks say a person who can generate fresh story ideas is as important in a newsroom as one who can break news, and why they provide a range of methods for doing so (Ricketson 2004: 55–70; Tanner, Richardson and Kasinger 2012: 5–10). These combine Edward De Bono's lateral thinking techniques with the curiosity about what is happening in the world that is required in journalism. For example, one method drawn from lateral thinking for generating a fresh story idea is to change your vantage point on an issue. Instead of looking at an issue from the commonly understood perspective, shift it to see what that reveals. Every year when the Year 12 school results are released, there are stories written about high-achieving students, while education authorities rarely fail to point out that a school exit score is not the be-all and end-all. Kate Nancarrow decided to bring that cliché to life by telling the stories of four young people who had recovered from lacklustre grades in Year 12 to find interesting jobs or another path to successful study (Nancarrow 2015). That is, she exercised creativity in generating an idea for a feature article to provide readers with new and relevant information.

Another way that feature writers show creativity in idea generation is to take a familiar topic such as gender-based wage inequality, and explore an unfamiliar aspect of it. Articles charting barriers to equality are common, as are those debating the advantages and disadvantages of affirmative action. Reaching beyond the familiar, feature articles might delve into women working in male-dominated industries, or examine how certain companies offer innovative ways to combat the problem. However, *Elle*, the French-originated, global fashion magazine, took an especially creative approach to the issue, focussing on a father of twins who had started a fund to help offset the wage gap his daughter would, in all likelihood, experience. Paul Ford, a freelance writer, realised that the economic prospects of his twins (one male and one female, both aged three) differed markedly and that, over her lifetime, taking into account inflation, his daughter might earn A$1 to 3 million less in wages than would her brother. So he and his wife, Maureen, started saving in an account specifically for their daughter, trying to pay down 'all the obvious taxes that women pay on womanhood' (Ford 2015). In setting up such a fund, Ford faces difficult ethical decisions such as: how will his son feel about the fund when he grows up? How should the fund be set up so that it offers his daughter freedom, not control? Should he be using the money to help women more broadly? It is an original and insightful feature that speaks to a broad social problem from a narrow but nonetheless illuminating vantage point.

How journalists can display creativity during their research

These two examples show the value of a strong idea for feature articles, but journalists can also respond creatively to the news of the day, as well as displaying the kind of persistence for which their industry is well known. Robert Fisk, a veteran foreign correspondent, reported on the killing in 1996 of six people, including a mother and her three children, who had taken refuge in an ambulance in Manouri, their village in Lebanon. The Israeli government ordered all villagers to leave as it had become a stronghold for Hizbollah ('Hizballah' in Fisk's newspaper), and the people were killed by a missile shot from an Israeli helicopter. At the time,

reporting focussed on why civilians had been targeted by the Israeli helicopter. The Israeli government acknowledged that its pilot had targeted the ambulance but said that it was owned by a member of Hizbollah and was being used to shield Hizbollah guerrillas. Fisk wrote a feature that vividly recreated the events and set them in the broader context of the seemingly never-ending rounds of strikes and counter-strikes by Israel and its immediate neighbours in the Middle East (Fisk 1997). He also wrote that the Israelis' justification for the attack was untrue. Powerful though the article was, what made it distinctive was Fisk's idea, which he pursued determinedly, to trace to its origin the missile that had killed the six people. This turned out to be an American arms manufacturer that had supplied the Hellfire anti-armour missile to Israel. Fisk learnt of the exact missile and its manufacturer because a Reuters camerawoman had filmed the attack as it happened, and afterward a United Nations soldier had recovered from the site a fragment of the 160cm missile that happened to bear identifying marks: 'AGM 114C'. The first three letters were short for Air-to-Ground Missile, while the numerals indicated it had been jointly manufactured by Rockwell International and Martin Marietta.

Rockwell, which had been recently taken over by Boeing, was headquartered in Georgia, about 20 minutes from Atlanta. To get the piece of shrapnel to Georgia, Fisk needed to enlist the help of an Aid Agency as they could more easily bypass airport security. Fisk told Boeing's public relations manager, Bob Algarotti, only that he was doing a general article about the missile for fear that if he told him his real purpose Algorotti would not agree to see him, and confronting Boeing with the final result of their manufacture was the point of Fisk's journalistic exercise (Eisenhuth and McDonald 2007: 20). When he put the missile fragment on the table in the meeting room, Algorotti says he felt 'a little uncomfortable' while two executives who worked on the weapon and are former soliders became angry, saying 'This is so far off base, it's ridiculous'. Fisk disagreed:

> They manufactured this missile. Did they not bear some responsibility for its use—at least to ensure that it was used responsibly by their clients? There then followed some very uncomfortable minutes. Algarotti complained that you couldn't blame a knife-maker if someone used the knife to murder someone else. Yes, I said, but this was not a knife. The Hellfire was an antipersonnel weapon. 'It's not!' the Colonel replied. 'It's an anti-armour weapon.' And then there was silence—because, of course, if the missile was an anti-armour weapon, it most surely was not an anti-ambulance weapon. 'Are you on some kind of crusade?' one of the executives asked. I said I thought this an unfortunate remark—and Algarotti interrupted quietly to agree with me. We were dealing with the death of innocent people, I repeated, including four children. What was I looking for, one of the men asked? 'For some sign of compassion from them', I replied. One of the men in the room said: 'I, as a person—sure I have feelings, but as a Boeing company employee, all we do is make missiles'. (Fisk 1997)

There are many things that could be said about this electrifying scene: was Fisk naïve in thinking his actions might prompt the weapon manufacturer to change its ways and did he use the missile fragment as a prop to set up a journalistic stunt? Susie Eisenhuth sees in it echoes of the character of Undershaft the armaments manufacturer in George Bernard Shaw's play *Major Barbara*, and his 'silken defence of might is right' (Eisenhuth and McDonald 2007: 2). These are valid questions or observations. What is most striking to me is that central to the article is Fisk's idea, which he says had first occurred to him many years before, of finding an actual missile or bullet that had killed someone and tracking it to its source (Eisenhuth and McDonald 2007: 20). Before the persistence needed for the detective work and the gumption to confront company executives, though, came the imagination to create the original idea. The point is not that imagination is the only element or the most important element in the feature

article but that it is central to its success and that its success is usually attributed to commonly celebrated journalistic traits like determination, resourcefulness and aggressive questioning.

It is uncommon for journalists themselves to point to the importance of imagination and creativity in their work, which makes Nick Davies' (2014) book-length account of the *News of the World* phone hacking scandal particularly useful in this context. Davies has been a journalist for close to four decades, writing primarily for *The Guardian*, and has won British Press awards three times as well as three British awards for his investigative work (see http://www.nickdavies.net/about/). He has written six journalistic books, the most recent being his account of the phone hacking scandal, *Hack attack: How the truth caught up with Rupert Murdoch* (2014). He is not only a high-achieving journalist but a hard-headed one with the kind of irascible tenacity that characterises investigative reporters. So it is something of a surprise when, early in his book about phone hacking, he spotlights the importance of imagination for journalists who he believes run on a 'flammable psychological mixture, like petrol and air, a volatile combination of imagination and anxiety' (Davies 2014: 8). The anxiety stems from the need to find a story ahead of competitors coupled with the need to ensure its accuracy. Imagination is needed to develop story leads, as he writes: 'you train your imagination, pushing it like you'd push a muscle until it's stronger than other people's, until it becomes almost freakishly powerful' (Davies 2014: 8). This process is set out over the next 400 pages as Davies tells the story of phone hacking and how he pursued it.

Phone hacking has been called the biggest scandal of media ethics in the history of English-speaking democracies (Tiffen 2014: 325). It forced media mogul Rupert Murdoch, perhaps for the first time in his long career, to close a profitable newspaper, and for him to declare to a parliamentary inquiry, 'This is the most humble day of my life'. His company, News Corporation, has spent hundreds of millions of dollars settling lawsuits by phone hacking victims and defending its senior executives in court. That *News of the World* journalists hacked phones had been known since 2007 when the newspaper's Royal editor, Clive Goodman, and a private investigator it hired, Glenn Mulcaire, had been convicted for intercepting the private mobile phone voice messages of royal family members and five other people. Nobody had followed up the implications of this conviction, though. Who were the other five people, for starters? Murdoch's papers were, of course, keen to move on but other media outlets were incurious, partly because to a greater or lesser extent they were engaged in similar practices and partly because they did not want a fight with News Corporation, a globally powerful and frequently vindictive media company (Tiffen 2014; Dodd and Ricketson 2015).

Davies himself is not that interested until after he meets an anonymous source who has heard Davies and a News Corporation executive, Stuart Kuttner, in a 2008 radio interview debating media ethics and Davies' then new book, *Flat Earth News*: a book concerned with the rise of what Davies termed 'churnalism' or public relations disguised as journalism. Referring to the Goodman and Mulcaire convictions, Kuttner had said phone hacking happened only once at *News of the World*. The anonymous source contacted Davies to tell him Kuttner is lying as many reporters at the paper had been hacking phones. Davies thinks it is interesting but not a great story; nobody was going to be very surprised that tabloid journalists behaved badly. Then the source, to whom Davies gives the rather ridiculous moniker Mr Apollo, tells him that Scotland Yard, when it investigated Mulcaire, found masses of phone numbers in his books but they had not followed up on any of them. 'This was getting more interesting. Why would the police behave like that when dealing with a particularly powerful newspaper, which happened to belong to Rupert Murdoch, the biggest media mogul in the country?' (Davies 2014: 7). He then writes it was only after he had gone home that evening that:

> My brain finally clicked into gear and I understood the biggest reason for going after this story ... I finally realised that what really mattered was that the man who was editing the *News of the World* at the time—Andy Coulson—was now working as media adviser for the leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron. And although it was the Labour Party who were in government, it looked very likely that the Conservatives would win the next election and Cameron would become prime minister. Andy Coulson was on his way into Downing Street. (Davies 2014: 7)

Here we see Davies' journalistic imagination at work, with him thinking ahead to what is likely to happen to Coulson and how his appointment as press secretary connects two of the vital threads of the story—unethical media practices and their proximity to political power.

Davies needed to be persistent to build the story, of course, especially in the face of indifference from many media outlets and hostility form Murdoch's papers to the 100-plus news stories he wrote about phone hacking between 2009 and 2011. In June 2011 Davies' revelation in *The Guardian* (co-authored with Amelia Hill) that *News of the World* had hacked the mobile phone of Milly Dowler, a then 13-year-old missing girl later found murdered, provoked public revulsion and outrage and prompted the British government to set up the Leveson inquiry to probe deeper and wider than the existing parliamentary inquiries that had been nibbling round the edges of the phone hacking scandal. Like most journalists, Davies formed relationships with his sources: in this case the small network of lawyers, parliamentarians and journalists committed to combatting phone hacking. During a 2011 parliamentary inquiry into phone hacking, Davies fed questions to the Labour MP who led the charge against *News of the World*, Tom Watson. James Murdoch, head of News International during the scandal, was evading questions about why he had signed off on a huge payment to Gordon Taylor who had sued *News* for hacking his phone:

> Quietly, I slipped my phone out of my pocket, found Tom Watson's number and sent him a message across the room: 'Did James know about email for Neville [Thurbeck, chief reporter for *News of the World*]? If not, why settle the Taylor case? If so, why not tell police?' (Davies 2014: 365)

Watson duly asked the question about the 'For Neville' email that showed the extent to which phone hacking was embedded in the newspaper's reporting practices. It elicited a curt reply from Murdoch: no, he did not. This became a key piece of contested evidence. Apart from the mordant irony that it is a mobile phone Davies uses to prime Watson, and the issue of whether Davies stepped over the line from observer of events to participant in them, what is most evident in this and numerous other instances documented in *Hack attack* is Davies' ceaseless improvisation and working of his imagination in pursuit of the story.

Where Davies needed moral courage as well as imagination to keep at the phone hacking scandal, Wilfred Burchett required physical courage and imagination for what was to become a worldwide scoop—his eyewitness account of the impact of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. The bomb was dropped on 6 August but the first reports were provided by the United States government to the media. What little detail the press releases had emphasised, the bomb's extraordinary technological capabilities and the importance of a military base at Hiroshima; that nearly nine in ten of the city's inhabitants were civilians was not mentioned (Lifton and Mitchell 1995: 3–7). The Japanese government surrendered a few days after a second atomic bomb was dropped, on Nagasaki.

Later that month General Douglas Macarthur arrived in Japan and immediately ordered Hiroshima and Nagasaki off limits to journalists. Instead, he invited them on board the USS Missouri to report on the signing of the surrender papers on 2 September 1945. The official

surrender was undoubtedly newsworthy but no journalist from an Allied country had reported on the impact of the bomb. Where the former exemplifies journalism as the recorder of important events, the latter exemplifies journalism uncovering or discovering news—which is an inherently creative act. Burchett, an Australian working for London's *Daily Express*, showed great independence, resourcefulness and a flair for improvisation in making the trip alone from Yokosuka to Hiroshima. He also had good fortune: a *Daily Express* colleague in Japan, Henry Keys, also wanted to go to Hiroshima. They flipped a coin; Keys lost. Burchett recounted in several publications how he became the first Western journalist to visit Hiroshima after the bomb; this account draws primarily on the last of his several volumes of autobiography, which was published posthumously: *Memoirs of a rebel journalist* (Burchett and Shimmin 2005: 229–244), and his 1983 book *Shadows of Hiroshima* (Burchett 1983: 25–39).

A representative of Domei, the Japanese news agency, warned Burchett: 'Don't go to Hiroshima. Everyone is dying there'. Burchett had little idea of the dangers of radiation fallout unlike those working on the development of the bomb, the Manhattan Project. He nevertheless engaged in an elaborate ruse to slip away from the other journalists before spending 21 hours getting to Hiroshima. He travelled by train, with much of the trip in the dark as the train swept through long tunnels. At each stop Burchett needed to ask the name of the station. He did not speak the local language and he dared not mention the name Hiroshima as he was sure it would inflame the Japanese soldiers who were crammed into a carriage alongside him. The situation was tense; the Japanese had surrendered but the treaty was just being signed on board the Missouri. When Burchett arrived in Hiroshima he was thrown in gaol overnight by two local policemen, despite protesting he was a journalist. In the morning, he showed them his letter of introduction to the local Domei representative, which improved his standing in their eyes. Burchett strapped on a pistol lent to him by a colleague and simply walked out of captivity. Nobody stopped him. He began walking around the city and was appalled at the level of destruction.

Burchett headed for the city's police headquarters where the Domei representative told Burchett the police wanted to kill him. Astonishingly, it was a member of the Kempeitai, the Thought Control Police, who saved Burchett's life by accepting his pleas to be able to show people around the world what the bomb had done to the city and its citizens. Burchett went to one of the local hospitals, 1.3 kilometres from the epicentre of the blast, and was sickened by the sight of men, women and children dying from what the doctors told him was radiation sickness. He went outside, wrote his report on his battered Baby Hermes typewriter sitting among the ruins and, critically, the local Domei representative tapped it out in morse code and transmitted it to Tokyo, as arranged with Henry Keys. Unfortunately, for reasons that are unclear, only the first 200 words of a 3000-word despatch had come through. It was enough for Keys, though, being the essential eyewitness confirmation of the effects of the bomb. The lead paragraph of Burchett's worldwide exclusive report, which was published on the front page of the *Daily Express* on 5 September headlined 'The atomic plague', is as follows:

> In Hiroshima, 30 days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly, people who were uninjured in the cataclysm—from an unknown something which I can only describe as the atomic plague.

'Atomic plague' is an arresting phrase; it is not an accurate description of radiation sickness but that points to how little anyone outside the Manhattan Project had been allowed to know about it.

How journalists can display creativity in their writing

Turning from the work done during the idea generation and research phase to the writing phase of journalism, let's examine two articles from *Esquire*, one long regarded as a classic of magazine journalism, the other a more recent celebrated article. Since 2012 *Nieman Storyboard*, which is part of the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, has run a series called 'Annotation Tuesday!' in which members of faculty or other scholars walk through a journalist's article, probing the creative as well as the journalistic process behind it. The article is reprinted in full; the journalist or author is interviewed, and the questions and answers are interleaved at relevant points in the text of the article. This can be distracting if you have not already read the article but if you have, the interpolations offer a rich insight into how the journalist or author went about their work. An early 'Annotation Tuesday!' revisited Gay Talese's famous 1966 profile of Frank Sinatra. Headlined 'Frank Sinatra has a cold' and published in *Esquire*, the article was one of the first to make a virtue out of not being able to interview the subject. Talese interviewed members of Sinatra's large entourage partly because Sinatra was wary of being profiled and partly because Talese intuited that Sinatra refracted through his entourage might offer a clearer view of Sinatra than a conventional interview.

A half a century after the article's publication, it is fascinating to revisit 'Frank Sinatra has a cold' and see how carefully Talese crafted it. The first thing to notice is how Talese has retained his reporter's obsession with accuracy. He interviewed around 100 people for the article, and when *The New York Times magazine*, in an interview with Sinatra's widow, Barbara, in 2011, quoted her saying her late husband never wore a hairpiece, Talese exclaims to Green, 'Totally made up! Total fiction!' He immediately called the magazine and demanded a correction, which was issued. Talese had kept his original notes from his interview with the woman who earned US$400 a week looking after Sinatra's hairpieces (Green 2013). Talese is equally concerned with writerly matters. Growing up, he loved reading short stories, John O'Hara's in particular, and believes that in longer forms of journalism the writer's voice in a profile is paramount: 'The difference between writing and reporting is voice' (Green 2013). Green asks him about a particularly evocative passage describing the effect of Sinatra's singing and Talese recalls how his reading of F Scott Fitzgerald's *Winter dreams* and Irwin Shaw's *The girls in their summer dresses*, among others, in his youth influenced how he consciously aimed at evoking the kind of mood and tone associated with fictional short stories. Here is the passage from Talese's profile:

> Undoubtedly the words from this song, and others like it, had put millions in the mood, it was music to make love by, and doubtless much love had been made by it all over America at night in cars, while the batteries burned down, in cottages by the lake, on beaches during balmy summer evenings, in secluded parks and exclusive penthouses and furnished rooms, in cabin cruisers and cabs and cabanas—in all places where Sinatra's songs could be heard were these words that warmed women, wooed and won them, snipped the final thread of inhibition and gratified the male egos of ungrateful lovers; two generations of men had been the beneficiaries of such ballads, for which they were eternally in his debt, for which they may eternally hate him. (Green 2013)

Leaving aside the gendered language, what is noteworthy is how, as Green writes, the reader is plucked from the present (1966) and deposited in 'different locales, different seasons, different generations'.

The final case study comes from an article published in the July 2000 issue of *Esquire* magazine about the crash in 1998 of Swissair Flight 111 into the Atlantic Ocean, close to the village of

Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia, killing all 229 passengers on board. The article by Michael Paterniti was chosen in a selection of the magazine's best on its 70th anniversary (Miller 2003: 563–80) and is reprinted and discussed in Norman Sims' history of American literary journalism, *True Stories* (Sims 2007: 25–42). Despite its subject matter and place of publication, 'The long fall of one-eleven heavy' is anything but a regulation reconstruction of an airline disaster. As Thomas Curwen, a journalist with *The Los Angeles Times*, writes in an appreciation of the article, 'Paterniti identifies none of the characters by name, and he provides no explanation. The principals are known only as the medical examiner, the television reporter and the father of the woman with the blue Persian eyes' (Curwen 2012). The story opens with a long descriptive passage that evokes an atmosphere of foreboding, strangeness and loss. It describes places and people but carries few of the particular identifying details common in journalism.

> It was summer; it was winter. The village disappeared behind skeins of fog. Fishermen came and went in boats named Reverence, Granite Prince, Souwester. The ocean, which was green and wild, carried the boats out past Jackrock Bank toward Pearl Island and the open sea. In the village, on the last shelf of rock stood a lighthouse, whitewashed and octagonal with a red turret. (cited in Sims 2007: 25)

Paterniti says he made this writing choice because he wanted readers to identify with the people in the story as 'an archetypal character rather than a particular character' (Sims 2007: 312). This does not mean the people described in the story are fictional. Paterniti was deeply committed to reporting the events as accurately as possible and his article was fact-checked by *Esquire.* He spent time in Peggy's Cove interviewing those involved in the crash investigation. He interviewed the families of those who died and he experienced the aftermath of the event viscerally; one of the lawyers representing a family slid across the table a photograph of an ankle, saying 'That's the family. That's what's left' (Sims 2007: 313). For Paterniti the process of gathering the material and finding how best to represent it is akin to method acting:

> You attempt to live so completely inside of your characters and their stories that it becomes part of you. I've often dreamt a story many times over the course of weeks, in different variations, before committing to a set of sentences, to the first notes. But the dreaming, like the dreaming in a foreign language, is part of the process; it means you are approaching fluency. (Sims 2007: 313–14)

In an interview with *Nieman Storyboard*, Paterniti recalls how after he had finished his reporting and had drafted a lot of material he was unable to begin writing the actual article:

> I finally went up to Peggy's Cove, and on the first day I went into this little fishing village, and no one would talk to me. There was this kind of hostility because they were tired of talking about this horrific thing. And I was driving out and it was spitting rain, and the sky was kind of that grayish purple, and all the clothes on the line—the wind had filled all the clothes. So they were just hovering. And that's what I thought when I drove by; I thought I was seeing bodies in the air. And that was it. It was really that image that started it for me. And I just cranked it out … How do I capture the grief as something tactile? But until there was the absence of bodies I didn't know what to hang it on. (Williams 2010)

The image of the billowing clothes is used in the article's final section which circles back to the beginning, repeating 'It was summer; it was winter' and asking how people come to terms with such grief: 'What had happened here? And why did the clothes on the line look as if they were filled by bodies, though there were no bodies in sight anymore?' (Sims 2007: 42). What impresses here is how much of the process of doing this work of journalism is creative. Alongside the gathering of facts, the persuading of people to be interviewed and the cross-

checking of people's accounts with documentary sources, Paterniti needed to make some kind of intellectual and emotional sense of all he has gathered and then find a means of expressing that in words. Another journalist might never have seen the billowing clothes on the line; Paterniti did, and at that moment the image encapsulated a key truth about the crash's aftermath for him. By no means is this to say that Paterniti's account is the only one that could be written. Others may have gathered relevant details about the event and written it up in a less lyrical style that would have given readers more space to imagine the event for themselves. Such an observation goes to the complexity of events and of how conscientious journalists and writers can dig into the same events and find differing facts, or interpret them differently, or choose to structure their story in different ways.

Conclusion

What this selection of examples and case studies shows us is, first, journalism is a form that is much more supple than is often thought, and, second, that it is far preferable to consider questions about creativity in journalism as a 'both' rather than an 'either/or' proposition. From relatively straightforward feature articles to more ambitious long-form pieces, journalists can and do exhibit creativity, imagination, and inventiveness. These qualities jog alongside more easily recognisable journalistic traits—doggedness, independence and aggression. It seems clear, though, that these qualities are inherent in much good journalism and that they can lift individual pieces from competent to compelling and memorable. Whether the creativity that journalists can show is the same as, or simply similar to, that commonly found in fiction, poetry, and drama is an interesting question, but one that is perhaps less important than the need for the vital role of creativity in journalism to be better understood by scholars, in newsrooms and in journalism education.

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