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Not muddying, clarifying: towards understanding the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction

Abstract

Debates about the relationship between fiction and nonfiction are complex but remain critical to the field of book-length journalism, which is grounded in the practice of representing in words actual people, events and issues. These debates have been flavoured by the conflating of various concepts, which has the effect of muddying rather than clarifying the field. A review of relevant scholarship in narrative and journalism studies shows how some scholars conflate notions of narrative with fiction, of fiction with literariness, and of fiction with nonfiction. An examination of the historical development of journalism provides three points relevant to a better working understanding of the relationship between fact and fiction: first, the hard news report has never been the sole form in which news has been presented; second, a range of modes of writing usually associated with fiction are not the sole province of fiction, and third, the use of the word fiction in the term 'fictional techniques' to describe book-length journalism and literary nonfiction sends a misleading message to practitioners, critics and readers alike.

Keywords: nonfiction; literary journalism; narrative journalism; creative nonfiction; book-length journalism; the New Journalism.

It happened again recently. I was puzzled afresh, but it has happened so often that I have begun to think that, like a recurring dream, this verbal tic merits attention. Discussing Anna Funder's *Stasiland* (2002) in a class called Literary Studies: True Stories, a student referred to the book as a novel. It is not a novel, I said; it is nonfiction. A few minutes later another student said the same thing, before giggling and correcting herself. I wish I could say this was a one-off but it isn't. I have been teaching courses about what is variously called literary journalism or narrative nonfiction since 2000, and have lost count of the number of times, in classes and in submitted work, that students have described a piece of nonfiction as a novel.

I don't pretend this experience amounts to empirical evidence, but it is certainly suggestive. Let me be clear first what it does not suggest to me - that students these days are ignorant of even the most basic terms, etc. Let's not scratch about in that dry gulch. Rather, in my experience most students arrive in classes with commonly held preconceptions and misconceptions, which is why this recurring misnaming suggests to me that many students associate novels with books, especially when these books are written in a narrative mode. Conversely, I have never once heard a student refer to a textbook as a novel.

For many the word nonfiction evokes images of dry, formal prose about a serious subject, possibly someone long dead. Equally, journalism is something students associate with what they see on television, hear on radio and read in newspapers or, more likely, online and on mobile devices.

There is a substantial amount of journalism produced in book form, however. Funder's book about how ordinary East Germans have adapted (or not) to life after the re-unification of the two Germanies, *Stasiland*, is an award-winning example, but there are many others, as scholars in these fields have demonstrated (Williford & Martone 2007; Lounsberry 1996; Hartsock 2000; Sims 2007; Ricketson 2010). By book-length journalism I mean the practice of using journalistic methods to research and write independently about contemporary actual people, events and issues at book-length in a timely manner for a broad audience. By journalistic methods, I mean the finding of documents whether in print or online, interviewing people and first-hand observation (Conley & Lamble 2006; Ricketson 2004). The term book-length journalism will be used in this article, but other terms used for this area of writing practice include literary journalism, narrative journalism, literary nonfiction and creative nonfiction.

All these terms, and others such as reportage and the New Journalism, seek to describe an area of writing where practitioners take a narrative, or storytelling, approach to presenting their accounts of people, events and issues. By comparison, in daily journalism, the approach taken to presenting people, events and issues is more often expository. The common term in the news media industry is 'hard news' writing where what the journalist (or their editor) deems to be the most important piece of information is put in the lead paragraph and each following paragraph contains information in descending level of importance. The tone is formal and tethered to the institutional voice of the newspaper for which the journalist works (Sally White 1996). Journalists working in newspapers can and do write feature articles that step away from the hard news format to take a narrative or storytelling approach, but these articles are published alongside the hard news articles and sit within the newspaper, whose mission is seen by most as reporting on the news of the day (Ricketson 2004: 2-12).

When print journalism is taken out of the place it is commonly understood to occur - the newspaper - and published in a form commonly associated with fiction - the book - and when it is written not in the hard news form long tied to daily journalism but in a narrative style usually experienced as fiction, then perhaps it should not surprise that students are confused. If a work of book-length journalism reads *like* a novel, is it likely to be read *as* a novel? That is, as having no stated purpose of attempting to represent actual people and events. Students are likely to be further confused by the way that, in the research literature about this area of writing, whichever term is preferred, one of its defining elements is said to be the *application of fictional techniques* to writing about actual people and events (for examples, see Wolfe 1975: 46; Murphy 1974: 17; Sims 1984: 5; Lounsberry 1996: 29-31). I have used the term myself (Ricketson 2001: 150; 2004: 228), but now believe it is misleading, for two reasons.

First, the word 'technique' connotes the simple plucking of tools from a writer's kitbag and applying them to a set of facts. Following this line of thought can lead practitioners to view research and writing as separate and distinct processes rather than organically linked to each other. This is at least partly what, by her own admission, happened to Estelle Blackburn when in her book *Broken Lives* (1998) she re-investigated the convictions of John Button and Daryl Beamish for murders that she argued had been committed by a

notorious serial killer, Eric Edgar Cooke, in the early 1960s in Western Australia. In a separate book-length account of how she went about researching and writing *Broken Lives*, Blackburn described how the book's editor, Zoltan Kovacs, said her first draft read like a 'series of police rounds stories' (2007: 185) prompting Blackburn to rewrite, trying to 'colour it up', 'fictionalise' and 'breathe life into the characters' (2007: 163). At Kovacs' urging she attempted to write an interior monologue for Cooke, not to excuse him but in an effort to explain (2007: 193).

Second, and more important, implicit in using the words fictional techniques is a reaction against the way people and events are usually presented in the print media, especially newspapers; that is, in hard news reports. The reaction is not altogether surprising as the news report, with its fixed format and formal tone, has been the predominant print media form since near the end of the 19th century (Mindich 1998; Schudson 1995:59-60). So familiar are its conventions that it has been satirized since at least 1965 when a former journalist, Michael Frayn, wrote his novel *The Tin Men* (1965: 57-61). Such familiarity invites the belief that the news report is a naturally occurring phenomenon, but it is actually the result of a complex history that includes but is not limited to the unreliability of the early telegraph that impelled journalists to send the most critical piece of information first in their dispatches, and the rapid expansion of newspapers that gave rise to a journalistic class. Previously, most publishers had used newspapers to express their partisan political views; they did not want to grant their employed journalists similar freedom, which led in turn to development of a mode of writing that sought to erase the identity and ideology of the journalist and present the world dispassionately (Schudson 1978; Stephens 2007; Mindich 1998).

It may be more productive, though, not only to see the narrative or storytelling approach to journalistic writing as a reaction against the rigid form of news reporting, but also to look back before the rise of the inverted pyramid. What this shows is while all forms of writing are an abstraction from the reality they seek to describe, the hard news report is, more than many, a circumscribed form of writing. News reports do not offer analysis, they do not set events in context and they exclude atmosphere and emotion, or where they do report atmosphere and emotion they snap-freeze them in phrases such as 'visibly upset'. In Norman Mailer's memorable phrase they are forever 'munching nuance like peanuts' (Stephens 2007: 242). The limitations of the hard news report, as James Carey suggests, are a key driver behind the continued existence of other journalistic forms (1986: 151).

Before the rise of the hard news report in the second half of the 19th century, daily newspapers presented their reports in a variety of forms written in a variety of narrative modes. In 1836 James Gordon Bennett, editor of *The New York Herald*, pioneered the eyewitness true crime report when he wrote about his viewing of the 'beautiful female corpse' of a murdered 23-year-old prostitute in the city 'that surpassed the finest statue of antiquity' and, drawing on his sources, recreated the death from the moment the murderer 'drew from beneath his cloak the hatchet' (Stephens 2007: 231). It was common then for newspapers to present their reports in the form of a chronological narrative. On 8 December 1854 *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne, Australia, began its report on war in the Crimea as follows: 'To render the narrative of events clear to our distant readers, we must trace it from its commencement' (Hutton & Tanner 1979: 5-6). Schudson studied the historical development of the coverage of the American president's state of the union address, from 1790 to the 20th century. By the mid-19th century it was common for newspapers to reprint the president's address in full, accompanied by an editorial commentary that was written from 'an engaged and partisan stance', and a news report about the

‘spectacle’ of the opening of Congress (Schudson 1995: 57). *The New York Times* began its report in 1870: ‘A beautiful Indian summer sun, a balmy atmosphere, and crowded galleries, resplendent and brilliant hues of gay toilettes, greeted the return of the Congress to its chambers’ (Schudson 1995: 57-58).

What emerges from this historical context are three points relevant to a better working understanding of the relationship between nonfiction and fiction: first, the use of the hard news report has never been the sole form in which news has been presented even though the vast bulk of scholarship about journalism has been devoted to hard news, according to Barbie Zelizer in her overview of the field, *Taking Journalism Seriously* (2004: 6); second, the use of a range of modes of writing usually associated with fiction are not the sole province of fiction; and third, the use of the word fiction in the term fictional techniques sends a misleading message to practitioners and critics alike because the word fiction is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘that which is feigned or invented; invention as opposed to fact’. Granting that the line between fact and invention is nowhere near as clearly drawn as lexicographers would have us believe, using the word fiction here flies in the face of what many practitioners believe they are doing. Robert Boynton interviewed 19 leading American practitioners for his 2005 book *The New New Journalism* including Ted Conover, Jon Krakauer, William Langewiesche, Michael Lewis, Susan Orlean and Ron Rosenbaum. Similarly, I interviewed six leading Australian practitioners between late 2006 and early 2009 about issues to do with book-length journalism. They were John Bryson, Helen Garner, Chloe Hooper, Malcolm Knox, David Marr and Margaret Simons. As Tracy Kidder, winner of a Pulitzer prize for general nonfiction, puts it, the techniques of fiction writing have never belonged to fiction: ‘They belong to storytelling’ (cited Sims 1995: 19). It is preferable, then, to see that what journalists do, whether working in newspapers, magazines or at book-length, as drawing on a range of narrative approaches to research and write about actual as distinct from invented people, events and issues.

The notion that there is a neatly drawn line between fiction and nonfiction may have been long ago dismissed by scholars but that does not mean these two ways of representing the world are indistinguishable. That the representing of actual people and events in words is subject to complex questions about the difficulty or even the possibility of separating people and events from our perception and construction of them behoves us to make every effort to be clear about these complexities rather than to shrug our shoulders and say, well we all know the line between fiction and nonfiction is blurred beyond recognition.

How do readers actually know whether what they are reading is fiction or nonfiction unless they are told by someone, whether the author, the publisher or a bookseller, and how do they assess this information? The short answer, according to H Porter Abbott in his *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, is that they don’t know (2008: 147-50). That immediately prompts a further question: does it matter whether the reader knows or believes they are reading fiction or nonfiction? This, in turn, opens into a larger debate about whether journalists can, however imperfectly, report on events in the actual world, or whether in the face of crumbling belief in positivist notions of a simple objective reality, journalists are seen as one group among several in society that construct reality through words and images.

These debates are critical to a field like book-length journalism that is grounded in the practice of representing through a narrative or storytelling approach actual people, events and issues in print. These debates, too, have been characterized by the conflating of various concepts, which has the effect

of muddying rather than clarifying complex ideas. A review of relevant scholarship in narrative and journalism studies shows how some scholars conflate notions of narrative with fiction, of fiction with literariness, and of fiction with nonfiction.

Hayden White was discussing history when he pointed to the literary element of that activity (1978: 81-100), but his argument can and has been extended to book-length journalism (Smith 1990). History and journalism, whether daily or book-length, are separate fields but what they share is an attempt on the part of practitioners to represent actual people, events and issues in words. 'Historical situations are not inherently tragic, comic, or romantic' but only made so, writes White, 'by the historian's subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind' (1978: 85). White's argument, developed over several works, has been influential in undermining belief in a naïve historical realism and in drawing attention to the extent to which historians construct plots and meanings for the events and people they write about. His argument can be extended to journalism. The value of the work of White, among others, has been to shake 'narrative theory out of the complacency with which it has long approached non-fiction. If rhetorical devices produce meaning in fiction, so do they in non-fiction,' writes Marie-Laure Ryan in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Herman, Jahn and Ryan 2005: 418).

White's argument about emplotment is displayed routinely on commercial television current affairs programs *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair*. That is, as Jonathan Holmes demonstrated on ABC television's *Media Watch* on 19 July 2010 in an item entitled 'Tweed Tales on TT', plots are imposed on a set of events and people rather than arise out of inquiry into them. Holmes showed how an item about a man portrayed as a victim of 'youth gangs' 'terrorising entire neighbourhoods' in Tweed Heads on the New South Wales-Queensland border had actually been attacked by three men in their twenties, as the man told the producers of *Media Watch* after the item ran on *Today Tonight*. And the man, Ron Roberts, admitted 'the feud started with a neighbourhood dispute'. For this item Roberts had been portrayed as an elderly, garden-loving victim, but several years beforehand, on another *Today Tonight* program, he had been 'exposed' as a 'brutal bully' for hitting a 15-year-old who picked one of his prized roses, and chastised for allegedly inventing his past as a decorated Vietnam veteran. If this example illustrates the potency of White's argument, it also opens the door to its limitations.

Lubomír Doležel draws attention to how White's argument is founded on a non sequitur. White writes that endowing a set of historical events with a specific plot structure is 'essentially a literary, that is to say fiction-making operation' (1978: 85), which means, as Doležel points out, that 'The equating of history and fiction is smuggled into the postmodernist paradigm by a tautology. Emplotment is a literary operation; therefore, history is tantamount to fiction-making' (Doležel 1999: 251).

Doležel argues that White's position founders when he is asked, and agrees, to take what Doležel calls 'the Holocaust test' (1999: 251-53). That is, can the Holocaust, like other historical events, be plotted as a comedy or must it be seen as a tragedy? White shifts the argument from a consideration of how the facts of the genocide of six million people can be represented in a limited number of ways to a broader consideration of whether there are any limits 'on the *kind* of story that can responsibly be told about these phenomena?' (White 1992: 37). There is a logical hole in the assumptions underlying White's position; if historians (and journalists) draw from concepts usually associated with fiction - tragedy, comedy, romance - then presumably these concepts

originated in novelists' experience, and re-imagining, of the world. That is, life preceded fiction. The interplay between life as experienced and as rendered in fiction is more complicated than White's argument allows; equally the dividing line between historical facts and historians' interpretation of them is not definitively drawn but continually feeds back and forth, enriching both the finding of facts and the making of interpretations. In taking the Holocaust test, though, as he discusses in his 1992 essay, White continues to distinguish between facts and 'poetic and rhetorical elements by which what would otherwise be a list of facts is transformed into a story' (White 1992: 38). It is as if for White facts did not need to be unearthed in the first place by historians (and journalists), and as if those facts might never surprise practitioners and run entirely counter to any preconceptions they have about events they are investigating. If the belief that historians' portrayal of events can accurately reflect objective reality is naïve and simplistic, so too is the belief that there is no reality but only our representation and 'emplotment' of it.

The use by Doležel of possible worlds semantics is valuable in teasing out and clarifying the points of difference between fiction and nonfiction. Possible worlds semantics acknowledges the inability of language to express reality directly: 'The only kind of worlds that human language is capable of creating or producing is possible worlds' (1999: 253). To begin with, fiction writers are 'free to roam over the entire universe of possible worlds, to call into fictional existence a world of any type', including fantasy worlds and the supernatural (1999: 256). Verisimilitude is required in some kinds of fiction but is not a universal principle of fiction, whereas historians engage in a continuous refining of historical worlds, supplementing or re-writing history according to the state of available sources.

An apposite example, given Doležel's invoking of the Holocaust test in his discussion of White's work, is a book entitled *The Destruction of Dresden* that was written by David Irving and published in 1963. Even after Irving became a public and virulent Holocaust denier, his book on Dresden continued to be well regarded by historians until 1999 when Irving sued an American author, Deborah Lipstadt, over her portrayal of him in her book *Denying the Holocaust* (see Guttenplan 2001: 1-16). For the libel trial another historian, Richard Evans, conducted a forensic examination of all the primary and secondary sources Irving relied on, and demonstrated that Irving's work on Dresden was fraudulent. Evans found Irving had fabricated evidence, had used a forged document that gave a wildly inflated number of bombing victims even after he had been told it was a fake, and had refused to use a genuine document that provided a more accurate number of victims (Guttenplan 2001: 225-26). What this example illustrates, courtesy of a lucid work of book-length journalism by DD Guttenplan, is not only the potentially ever-changing nature of historical study but also the real dangers of historians allowing some gaps to remain unfilled. By contrast, where gaps in knowledge exist in fictional works they have nothing like the same impact even though they may be impossible to fill. Doležel cites the example of *Macbeth*; no amount of textual analysis will yield whether Lady Macbeth had children because Shakespeare simply did not provide the information in his drama.

Doležel is happy to say the boundary between fiction and history is open but 'possible worlds semantics is curious about what happens when the boundaries are crossed' (1999: 264) and points to three well-known border-crossings: historical fiction, counterfactual history and what Doležel, echoing Genette, terms 'factual narrative'. Writers of historical fiction, for instance, can include representations of both actual and fictional characters but fictional characters cannot exist in the actual world. Factual narrative is 'the most remarkable manifestation of the open boundary between fiction and history' (1999: 267)

because the possible worlds of factual narrative are ‘models of witnessed present’ but its mode is ‘fictional’ (1999: 268). Questions can be asked about the factuality of factual narrative but they can be explained by the practitioner’s ‘skilful and patient reporting’, and where that is shown to have failed, the work has violated the norms of its genre and can be reclassified as fiction (1999: 268-69). The question of exactly how works of book-length journalism are shown to have failed may be more complicated than Doležal allows, but that is beyond the scope of this article.

A clearer sense of the boundaries between fiction and fact enables us to apply White’s argument about emplotment more productively. Where Ryan takes from White the notion that rhetorical techniques are present in nonfiction as well as fiction, I turn to the research phase in works of fiction and nonfiction. However much factual material is included in a work of fiction it remains primarily a work of invention. That is, following Doležal, authors invent plots for their novels. A practitioner of book-length journalism cannot - or should not - invent a plot for the subject of their work. White is right to point out that some historians (and journalists) do impose plots on their raw material; that is at least partly what I would argue happens in both Bernstein and Woodward’s reconstruction of the demise of Richard Nixon’s presidency, *The Final Days*, and in Capote’s ‘true account’ of a multiple murder case, *In Cold Blood*.

Walt Harrington, author of two works of book-length journalism and a journalism academic in the United States, writes:

To keep ourselves open to what is before us, we must not become too obsessed with asking ourselves, ‘What’s the story here?’ - and thus fall victim to the reporter’s paranoia that we’ve got to produce something out of this mess and we better figure it out fast. That undermines our ability to grasp the story, because it means we’ll inevitably fall back on well-worn themes and observations - interpretive clichés - and not give ourselves the time or frame of mind to see anything beyond that. (1997: xxxiv)

Many of the most engaging works of book-length journalism are imbued with a well-deep sense of curiosity about the world and its people; intellectually, and emotionally, a long distance has been travelled by the practitioner from their original idea via their research to the final argument. As Margaret Simons, an Australian practitioner of book-length journalism, says: ‘If you go through the entire process of writing a book without having changed your mind on anything then my instinct would be to question whether you really engaged in the process. You should be surprised by your material’ (Simons 2006-7). The point, then, is not that White’s argument about emplotment is fallacious, but that it needs to be qualified.

Eric Heyne and Daniel Lehman have made significant contributions to developing a theoretical underpinning for literary nonfiction that applies to book-length journalism. Heyne begins by flatly rejecting as grandiose assertions that there is no difference between fact and fiction and argues for core differences between fiction and literary nonfiction that need to be recognized by ‘any theory that hopes to do justice to powerful nonfiction narratives’ (Heyne 1987: 480). Drawing on John Searle’s work that the distinction we commonly make between factual and fictional statements derives not from the statements themselves but our perception of the type of statement being intended, Heyne argues it is the author who decides whether a book is fact or fiction and it is left to the reader to determine whether the book contains good or bad fact. He uses the terms ‘factual status’ and ‘factual

adequacy' respectively to distinguish between these two kinds of truth. Heyne acknowledges there is no 'transcendent connection between space/time events and narrative of those events' but 'recognizing we are students of human constructions shaped by human purposes need not make us afraid to talk about truth. We make decisions every day based on our evaluations of competing versions of reality' (1987: 489). Lehman, in his 1997 book *Matters of Fact*, agrees with much of Heyne's argument: 'The confession that, finally, it is impossible to delineate an exact boundary between fiction and nonfiction does not mean that the boundary does not matter' (1997: 5).

Lehman builds on Heyne's binary model of factual status and factual adequacy; he uses the term 'implicated' to describe the complex strands of relationships inherent in nonfiction between, on the one hand, journalists, the events they write about and the texts they produce, and on the other, readers, their knowledge of the events written about, and their engagement with the text (Lehman 1997: 36). The relationship between journalist and reader operates differently in nonfiction than in fiction because of the overt and claimed relationship between the book and actual people and events. Lehman openly acknowledges there is no simple equation between actuality and nonfiction or even actuality and fictional texts; even if such an equation was possible, the 'genre police' (Lehman 1997: 5) as he calls them would need to account for the existence of narratives in an 'intertextual milieu' that makes the relationship between actuality and its reproduction almost indistinguishable (1997: 7). Even so, the decision by an author or the publisher to label a book nonfiction remains an important key to how it is written and read. Heyne, in a second article, concedes his binary model is oversimplified, then develops Lehman's work by offering a mental map for discerning the relationship between fiction and nonfiction:

One way to recognize the kind of narrative truth that we associate with nonfiction is by the presence of a certain kind of caring. If the reader is prepared to assert an alternative version of events, to engage actively in a certain kind of dialogue, then we are dealing with something we might all be willing to call nonfiction ... When we can talk about different stories competing, and when we genuinely wish to choose among them rather than allowing them to peacefully coexist, then we have left the realm of fiction. (Heyne 2001: 330)

This is a particularly helpful switching point for discerning readers' differing responses to fiction and book-length journalism. It illuminates an aspect of the public response to Garner's *The First Stone*, for instance. A minority read the book as fiction, and Garner used pseudonyms, but overwhelmingly readers and critics read the book as nonfiction and passionately argued about the events at Ormond College and Garner's interpretation of them (Ricketson 1997: 80-81).

If some scholars such as White confuse fiction with literariness, others conflate fiction with narrative. No less a theoretical figure than Genette notes in 1991 that narrative studies has focused 'almost exclusively on fictional narrative alone' acting as if there is 'an implicit privilege that hypostatizes fictional narrative into narrative par excellence, or into a model for all narratives' (Genette 1993: 54-55). Such has been the emphasis in narrative studies on fiction that he believes his work *Narrative Discourse Revisited* ought to have been retitled 'a restricted narratology' (1993: 56). Genette uses the framework he developed in his earlier work *Narrative Discourse* to compare fiction with what he terms 'factual narrative', which provides valuable insights into, for instance, the danger of using an omniscient narrative voice in factual narrative, but he acknowledges he has not done the 'empirical investigation that remains

eminently necessary in this arena' (1993: ix). Genette's unfamiliarity with the range and history of journalism prompts him to discuss the 'indexes of fictionality' in the opening of an article published in *The New Yorker* in 1988 as if such an anecdotal lead, as it is known in the media industry, is noteworthy rather than a commonplace, not just at the magazine since at least the 1930s (Yagoda 2000: 137), but also a common practice in newspapers as well as magazines for decades both in the United States and Australia (Blundell 1988: 131-36; Ricketson 2004: 175-77). Not that Genette is alone; as Stephens comments, too often journalism historians 'seem like theater historians who have never studied Shakespeare or Sophocles' (2007:1).

An important corollary of this re-orientation is that it allows us to ask fresh questions about issues that arise when book-length journalism is written in a particular narrative mode. There is an inherent tension for practitioners between their commitment to veracity and their desire to engage readers emotionally as well as intellectually, which is a defining characteristic of journalism or nonfiction written in a narrative style. The point is not that there is an ineluctable connection between nonfiction and truth and between fiction and invention, but that the average reader associates a narrative style with fiction and this imposes a greater burden on the writer of book-length journalism and nonfiction to make clear to readers what they are being offered and the terms on which it is offered. Deceiving the reader is, in an important sense, inherent in fiction; in nonfiction its effect is poisonous.

When book-length journalism and nonfiction are presented in a narrative style, then, the question of how well the book is written is secondary. That is, if a work of book-length journalism is superbly written, would that mitigate or eliminate questions of deception? It could be argued that a superbly written work would intensify the problem as such a work would lodge deeper in the reader's consciousness. I do not want to argue there are fixed links between ethics in the narrative mode and levels of literary skill as that connotes a mechanistic relationship between them, whereas the act of researching and writing is an organic as well as a mechanical process. It is possible for a practitioner to be a gifted wordsmith and an unethical journalist and, too, for the reverse to hold. It is possible that more complex interrelationships exist between any given practitioner's literary ability and their practice of ethical decision-making; that question is beyond the scope of this article. The key point here is that the ethical issue is triggered by the taking of a particular narrative approach, and that this ethical issue in the practice of book-length journalism needs our attention before, or at the very least alongside, attending to literary issues.

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TEXT

Vol 14 No 2 October 2010

<http://www.textjournal.com.au>

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