Chapter 9

The Evolution of Literary Journalism in the Digital Age

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Firstly, this chapter covers the intersection between traditional print literary journalism and the advent of online literary journalism. Secondly, it traces scholarly attention to the 'evolution' of literary journalism, primarily in the US since the New Journalism of the 1960s, showing how literary journalism in the twenty-first century has been supercharged by technological and creative innovations which have transformed the kinds of texts produced and how those texts are accessed and experienced. Thirdly, throughout, it illustrates that radical technological and visionary changes have been accompanied, nevertheless, by a sense of historical continuity evident in an abiding regard for the New Journalism and/or its foremost proponent, Tom Wolfe – not least in scholarly accounts of a 'new wave' and 'golden age' for literary journalism inaugurated by the Pulitzer Prize-winning 'Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek' (2012). Lastly, in the context of examples, it presents the reader with a conundrum: the latest immersive multimedia narratives driven by film production approaches run counter, in fact, to Wolfe's print bias and dismissal in *The New Journalism* (1973) of the cognitive impact of film. It invites debate on whether Wolfe's cognitive theory is ripe for revaluation even as prestige in literary journalism, as in literature broadly, continues to attach chiefly to print.

In this chapter we will explore what has become, in the digital age, of the centuries-old practice of literary journalism. We will trace its relatively rapid development from an enduring, print-based tradition into a revamped yet recognisably continuing phenomenon across print and online media in the twenty-first century. In doing so, we will concern ourselves mainly with what contemporary literary journalism looks like and how it represents, fundamentally, the perpetuation of innovative practice. For readers who might wish to explore further, literary journalism resources and examples referred to can be accessed via the information and/or URLs included in the References list at the end. The aim of this chapter is twofold: to help academics, students and practitioners (1) gain an understanding of the extraordinary transformation over the past 25 years in how literary

journalism is produced and consumed; and (2) gain knowledge to start to navigate and evaluate literary journalism scholarship and practice in the digital age.

To this end, it is instructive to initially foreground some of Tom Wolfe's key claims and points in *The New Journalism* (1973) before juxtaposing two notable publications – one scholarly and the other an example of pioneering professional practice – on which Wolfe's conception of effective literary techniques can be seen to have a significant bearing: Kerrane and Yagoda's *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism* (copyrighted in 1997, published in 1998) and Mark Bowden's 'Black Hawk Down' (1997). These two publications emerged at the intersection of literary journalism's long and illustrious print history and what was then the beginnings of revolutionary innovation online. They serve as a gateway not just to pinpointing the expansion from print to digital outputs at that time but to a wider appreciation of how Wolfe and the New Journalism continue to shape both literary journalism scholarship and practice. Wolfe's importance is flagged upfront because it will become increasingly clear that he exerts an enormous influence, both productively and problematically, on how literary journalism is perceived, analysed and produced.

Famously, in his provocative and often amusing proclamation of the New Journalism, Wolfe described how a new style of journalism, supposedly out of the blue, had 'caused a status panic in the literary community' (1996 [1973]: 39). In the mid-1960s, journalists exhibiting this new style were creating impactful narratives through their innovative use of literary techniques. The upshot, according to Wolfe, was that they were displacing the longstanding, supreme status of the novelists. At the end of the decade, he crowed, 'no one in the literary world could simply dismiss this new journalism as an inferior genre' (42) for these journalists, not least Wolfe himself, had managed to 'wipe out the novel as literature's main event' (22). Although its premier status was not yet secured, he declared that 'the most important literature in America today is in nonfiction, in the form that has been tagged, however ungracefully, the New Journalism' (11). His championing of the New Journalism drew much of its humour and force from challenging what he called the journalistic and literary 'old guards' (35) or, as he also put it, 'the kentucky colonels of both Journalism and Literature' who denounced those working in this 'damnable' new hybrid form (38).

At the heart of Wolfe's account of the New Journalism was his recurring discussion of the use of four literary devices to achieve the power of realism: 'scene-by-scene construction,

dialogue, point of view and the detailing of status life' (64). A basic understanding of Wolfe's identification and description of these four devices is helpful, as we shall see, in starting to navigate and evaluate literary journalism scholarship and practice in the digital age. Wolfe explained that:

(1). scene-by-scene construction entailed 'telling the story by moving from scene to scene and resorting as little as possible to sheer historical narrative', which could involve drawing upon actual witnessing of scenes and events unfolding;

(2). closely related to this was the effort to 'record the dialogue in full' which could assist in rapidly and convincingly establishing and defining character;

(3). third-person point of view, informed by interviewing, could serve to present 'every scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character, giving the reader the feeling of being inside the character's mind and experiencing the emotional reality of the scene';

(4). recording everyday details symbolic of people's status life could facilitate access to the interiority of character, with status life viewed broadly as 'the entire pattern of behaviour and possessions through which people express their position in the world or what they think it is or what they hope it to be'. (46-7)

Wolfe's elucidation of these techniques of realism, which he claimed the New Journalists discovered intuitively rather than through theory, was peppered with comparative references to renowned literary-historical figures. Moreover, he proceeded to retrieve from literary history, in a somewhat patchy manner in the Appendix, various examples of nonfiction written by reporters which were 'showing many of the characteristics of the New Journalism' (60). In this context, Kerrane and Yagoda's selection of examples for their anthology constitutes a helpful '101' crash course for the uninitiated – significantly, in traditional print literary journalism even as this recognised form, at the time of the anthology's release, had in fact begun to move online. Compiled to address the problem that, despite a multitude of material, there was no suitable one-stop textbook to prescribe to their students, their anthology expressly reverses Wolfe's treatment of predecessors like Charles Dickens, George Orwell and John Hersey as an 'afterthought' by instead 'giving prominence to such pioneers,

and by connecting their work to the [new] journalism of the 1960s and '70s – and beyond' (1998: 17).

Kerrane and Yagoda's editorial approach, which resulted in a categorised historical sweep from Daniel Defoe and James Boswell to Svetlana Alexievich and Michael Winerip, is also notable for acknowledging that literary journalism is 'a profoundly fuzzy term' (1998: 13) and applying some defining criteria for the selection of examples. Prioritising the second component of the hybrid term, the writing had to be factual or 'animated by the central journalistic commitment to the truth'; entail 'a process of active fact-gathering' and 'doing what reporters call reporting' (13); and have currency, with the writer getting 'on the story soon after it happened' (14). To live up to the first component, the writing had to satisfy their premium on innovation (15). Journalism that is literary was, in their estimation, 'thoughtfully, artfully, and valuably innovative'. This kind of journalism liberatingly cast aside one or more conventions of mass-produced journalism, such as the basic inverted pyramid structure of mainstream news stories. Evidence of innovation was important for selection in light of high-level literary journalism constituting 'a tradition, with each practitioner standing on the shoulders of his or her predecessors' (14).

Given their consciousness of ingenuity and historical influence, Kerrane and Yagoda were bound to admit an array of works exhibiting a variety of writing approaches and skills which make such journalism stand out – including use of the four literary devices expounded by Wolfe. Unsurprisingly, Wolfe is included in the anthology. He appears in the 'Telling Tales' and 'Style As Substance' sections, by way of an excerpt from *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (1968) and 'The Girl of the Year' (1964) respectively. Evidently influencing their selection here, both works are touched upon by Wolfe in *The New Journalism*: the former in relation to the device of point of view such as shifting 'from the narrator's omniscient voice to someone else's stream of consciousness' (Wolfe 1996 [1973]: 48); and the latter to illustrate his skilled use of three points of view within a short passage (33). Wolfe's presence is also supportive of Kerrane and Yagoda's overall endeavour to present the case that literary journalism does exist and 'is not an oxymoron' (1998: 16) – an allusion to historical perceptions of incompatibility subverted by the hybrid term.

The second key publication and a game-changer in the history of the professional practice of literary journalism is Bowden's 'Black Hawk Down' which appeared around the same time

as Kerrane and Yagoda's print anthology and has been hailed as 'the advent of literary journalism in the digital age' (Dowling 2020: 529). First published in 29 daily instalments in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s print edition, Bowden would later credit the 'pioneering way it was presented on the Internet' as a major reason for the story's international reach and impact (Bowden 2000). Originally 'Blackhawk Down', the dual publication was followed by the best-selling book and the feature film directed by Ridley Scott. Readers who access the archived site material online (see Bowden 1997 for the URL) can directly appreciate the trailblazing effort of combining text, photos, infographics (including maps), video and audio in Bowden's dramatic and distressing account of the US military raid in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1993. Clearly, the online version went beyond simply 'mounting the text of the series' on the *Inquirer*'s website, which was Bowden's initial assumption. It capitalised instead on the opportunity to provide more novelty and material to delve into than was possible in print. As Bowden reflected, the audio-visuals helped to give 'the account weight it might not have had, had it run only in the newspaper'. The *Inquirer* website's readers could also 'inspect the building blocks' which not only added to the interactive experience of reading the story but 'grounded it more firmly in reality' (Bowden 2000).

However, it should also readily strike contemporary readers how cumbersome and lacking in visual impact the presentation is compared to, say, the bold and continuous scroll-down design most of us are familiar with via mainstream news coverage online. The considerable effort to enhance the main text with audio-visuals as well as supplementary text resulted in a high volume of clicks required to access material and progress through the multiple pages. The consequence is a painstaking, stop-start reading experience. The slabs of text are hyperlink-heavy and frequently dotted with audio-visuals, with items mirrored in the sidebar which includes sections for the video, audio, photos, maps, graphics, who's who and glossary. Generally, images within the chapters are too small and poorly positioned (although the arrangement of the photo galleries is better). While supportive of readers' contextual understanding and active engagement, which the Q&As with Bowden are a testament to, the 'busy' site content tends to get in the way of sustained focus on the central narrative progression of the lengthy story. Plenty of time is required to consult the extensive material – or rather, what is left of it. Ageing has taken its toll on the site: many hyperlinks within this 'relic of the earliest days of Web 2.0' have fallen prey 'to internet ephemerality known as link rot' (Dowling 2020: 529).

Encapsulating the quite spectacular extent of technological advancements since then, Dowling comments that although 'an unprecedented achievement in 1997, decades later the visually disjointed transition-less design now feels more like a Wikipedia page or a database of raw information in sharp contrast to the latest immersive multimedia narratives designed for mobile audiences' (2020: 529). Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of how the online version of 'Black Hawk Down' significantly altered yet perpetuated the innovative tradition of literary journalism described by Kerrane and Yagoda. The curation and presentation of the material by Online Editor Jennifer Musser and her team was, at that time, cutting-edge work and the site attracted tens of thousands of readers daily. Bowden admitted that, as an old-fashioned newspaper reporter, he could not have envisioned such an outcome even as he augmented his write-up by providing copious source material. He had in mind only 'a newspaper series for the benefit of readers in the Philadelphia area and then a book that might reach a broader audience' (Bowden 2000). The online version, then, emerged as a new form of literary journalism built upon what, up till then, had been a time-honoured preoccupation with print outputs. Components of Bowden's groundwork as an experienced print journalist – interviews, documents, transmission clips, etc. – were made accessible online to both 'deconstruct' and elaborate upon his original storytelling.

Underpinning the success of the innovative online version was the usage of literary journalism techniques hitherto deployed in print tradition – including the four devices extolled by Wolfe. The connection was illustrated by Royal and Tankard Jr who investigated the ways in which 'Black Hawk Down' adhered to the techniques and facilitated the goals of literary journalism. They utilised the work of Wolfe and other well-known experts like Sims and Kramer to establish the defining characteristics of literary journalism and applied these to the site, discovering that techniques of traditional literary journalism in evidence included 'Dramatic Story Form' (2004: 85) as well as, frequently, Wolfe's 'Dialogue in Full' and, for many of the chapters, 'Cliffhanger Endings' (86).

Furthermore, they found that evidence of the use of web techniques to enhance attributes of literary journalism covered Wolfe's 'Scene-by-Scene Construction', 'Dialogue in Full' and 'Third-Person Point of View' (86); Sims's 'Accuracy', 'Voice' and 'Structure' (87); and Kramer's 'Digressions' (87) to amplify and reframe events, in this case encompassing 'the glossary, a Who's Who section, the multimedia components and an "Ask the Author" bulletin board' (87). They argued that, ultimately, the unique power of the online version derived

from the ‘combination of all of these elements into one package’ (87); and based on their findings, they predicted that a ‘future version of the World Wide Web will probably do a better job of integrating text, images, audio, video and bulletin boards – leading to still more effective online storytelling’ (88). Their prediction of improvement online is not only comparable to Kerrane and Yagoda’s notion of an innovative print tradition but also, in fact, dovetails with a dominant theme within wider literary journalism scholarship since the turn of the century: that of ‘evolution’, the word used explicitly by some of the leading experts in the field. We will register several examples of this word cropping up, in examining the continuation of literary journalism’s innovative tradition into the twenty-first century and its remarkable transformation by becoming, indeed, a more integrated and effective form of online storytelling.

In 2005, for instance, Boynton referred explicitly to an ‘evolution’ in hailing a substantial group of practitioners of what he called ‘the New New Journalism’ (2005: xxx) which appeared to be at the forefront of a print renaissance of literary journalism. As the tag ‘New New Journalism’ indicates, Boynton was effectively announcing another turning point in the history of literary journalism: ‘But as Wolfe celebrated the triumph of New Journalism, evidence of an even more formidable next stage in American literary evolution was already taking shape. In the thirty years since Wolfe’s manifesto, a group of writers has been quietly securing a place at the very centre of contemporary American literature for reportorially based, narrative-driven long-form nonfiction’ (xi). Boynton portrayed this next phase of evolution as deeply indebted to but distinguished from Wolfe’s New Journalism. Explaining that the New New Journalists synthesised the best of two traditions – the New Journalism of the ’60s and an earlier generation of ‘New Journalists’ of the nineteenth century – Boynton judged the New New Journalism to be possibly ‘the most popular and influential development in the history of American literary nonfiction’ (xi).

The New New Journalists embraced their freedom to experiment with form as well as focus on particular cultural and social concerns (2005: xi). They were less burdened by ‘debates over “journalism” and “literature” – between “subjective” and “objective” reporting’ (xxx) – and wrote about topical issues such as immigration, poverty, race, the clash of faiths, and big business (xxix). Pointing out that it was widely accepted the New Journalism was over by the ’80s, Boynton argued that the New New Journalists (among them, notably, Gay Talese who was repeatedly referred to by Wolfe) were representative of the continued development and

maturation of American literary journalism (xi). They could be credited with elevating it 'to a more popular and commercial level than either its nineteenth- or late-twentieth-century predecessors ever imagined' (xxx). His central message was, then, that Wolfe's New Journalism had been surpassed. Affirming that 'nonfiction today is as prestigious – if not more so – than the novel', he declared the New New Journalism had, without fanfare, secured 'a premier place in American literature' (xxx).

Writing soon after the turn of the century, Boynton's chosen examples from the '90s and early 2000s served to support his portrayal of a cultural and commercial 'age of nonfiction': 'There is nothing quaint or marginal about works of literary journalism like Jon Krakauer's *Into Thin Air*, Michael Lewis's *Moneyball*, Richard Preston's *The Hot Zone*, Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief*, Jonathan Harr's *A Civil Action*, and Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation* – all of which have been enormous bestsellers' (2005: xxx). However, a print resurgence of literary journalism which the New New Journalists had appeared to be spearheading was abruptly curtailed in the 2000s owing to media organisations rapidly shifting to converged newsrooms with reduced staff. As Jacobson, Marino and Gutsche Jr point out in 'The Digital Animation of Literary Journalism' (2015), the '2000s' brief literary journalism movement was perhaps marked by the discontinuation in 2010 of Harvard's Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism, which had once hosted winners of Pulitzers and others considered the prized literary journalists of the times' (2015: 3–4). Amid such challenges, it was recognised that literary journalism needed to adapt. In 'The Evolutionary Future of American and International Literary Journalism' (2011), Sims affirmed the continuing importance of literary journalism but wondered 'how – and where – it's going to survive' (2011: 85).

A striking aspect of Sims's essay, if we recall Kerrane and Yagoda's description of an innovative print tradition, is his faith in the prospect of the evolution of literary journalism in the digital age based on its successful track record of innovation in print. 'History is on our side', he declared (2011: 85). Among the turning points in the American context, where the craft was advanced by a few vanguard writers, he highlighted 'the rise of mass circulation urban newspapers in the 1890s'; 'reporting on World War I'; 'the traveling of expatriates in Europe after the war'; 'writing about the Great Depression of the 1930s … and the documentary photography of that era'; and 'the New Journalism of the 1960s'. Those innovators, he pointed out, were never a majority in journalism. In comparison to 'the meat-and-potatoes dinner of standard objective journalism' which held sway as the dominant form

by the 1920s, literary journalism had ‘always been nothing more than a salad or dessert’ (85). Yet, as he proceeded to highlight, reviewing American journalism ‘of the past century or more – journalism that remains informative and viable and influential on the world stage – we discover that the leading texts were literary journalism’ (89). A New York University study which compiled a list of the top 100 texts of twentieth-century American journalism across all main forms (including standard journalism and investigative reporting) found ‘at least forty-one were works of literary journalism’ (89), among them a range of the New Journalism celebrated by Wolfe. Sims understandably trumpeted: ‘On this list of the twentieth century’s best, literary journalism was the main course rather than a side dish’ (90).

In this light, Sims was optimistic. He sensed that ‘we are at another turning point, at least in American literary journalism, which … will likely affect the practice of literary journalism throughout the world’ (2011: 85–86). In his view, the time was favourable for innovation. He argued that the form flourished on new beginnings and at the margins of the marketplace, and therefore the time could be right for it to successfully transition to new media and markets outside North America (87–88). While writing books was still the aspiration for literary journalists (87), the journalism industry viewed the Internet as a transformative medium (88) and there were endless opportunities for creative growth through experimentation (89). The bigger challenge, Sims believed, would be formulating an economic model for literary journalism on the Internet (88) following the promising release of large-screen portable reading devices like Amazon’s Kindle in 2007 and Apple’s iPad in 2010.

Although, as we have seen, the lengthy online version of ‘Black Hawk Down’ had been tremendously popular with readers in 1997, scholars have also pointed to notoriously short attention spans (Dowling 2020: 529) among audiences on the early web. In this vein, Sims identified online reader engagement as a problem that would need to be overcome if literary journalism’s evolution was to continue:

> It may come to pass that we will figure out how to read long pieces of literary journalism on the computer screen. Right now, we don’t. People typically won’t read anything longer than three computer screens on the Web, and it really should be only one screen in length … In the future – who can predict? – we might find a way to read literary journalism on the Web… (2011: 88).

Soon enough, however, proof of online storytelling innovation – indeed, evolution – was to materialise; and mounting research evidence would also soon allay the concern that readers' attention spans were not up to the task of reading lengthy literary journalism online. In December 2012, 'Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek' by John Branch was published by *The New York Times* and quickly became widely regarded as having set a new benchmark for digital longform design. The harrowing six-part story, about a group of skiers who got caught in an avalanche on a mountain pass through the Cascade Mountains of Washington in February 2012, attracted around 3.5 million views and won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing. Similarly, bearing the online version of 'Black Hawk Down' in mind, readers can access 'Snow Fall' on the *NYT* site (see Branch 2012 for the URL) to directly appreciate, in comparison, just how much more visually impactful it is and, fulfilling Royal and Tankard Jr's prediction, how seamlessly the multimedia components have been integrated into an easy-to-navigate, flowing and highly effective narrative.

However, the online version of 'Black Hawk Down' has not been completely overshadowed. It should also strike the reader how 'Snow Fall' is reminiscent, for instance, of the original effort to provide forensic detail and embed audio-visuals in sync with the narrative progression. Unquestionably, though, 'Snow Fall' has the 'wow' factor in its stunning combination of text and audio-visual elements on a grand scale. This includes the soaring aerial shots and mapping of mountainscapes as well as the contrast between the peaceful banner scene of snow falling and the computer-generated simulation of the avalanche, along with parallax scrolling and smooth transitions within single pages to keep readers immersed in a moving – in more ways than one – reading experience. Little wonder, then, that the question 'Can we "Snow Fall" this?' rapidly entered journalistic parlance and that many stories similarly enhanced through multimedia integration have since appeared. Jacobson, Marino and Gutsche Jr, in their content analysis of 50 longform packages (including 'Snow Fall') across four countries (the US, the UK, Australia and Canada) between August 2012 and December 2013, found that a 'new wave' of literary journalism had clearly emerged which was characterised by implementing literary techniques through multiple media and represented a portal to linear storytelling in the hypertextual environment of the web (2015: 1).

Drawing a parallel with the New Journalism, the researchers argued that 'just as the literary journalists of the 1960s attempted to write the nonfiction equivalent of the great American novel, journalists of the 2010s are using digital tools to animate literary journalism techniques' (2015: 1). Underlining Wolfe's continuing relevance to the theory and practice of literary journalism in the digital age, their explanation of the coding for their content analysis explicitly referred to the New Journalism in relation to core elements of literary journalism such as 'Scene' and 'Dialogue', with 'point of view' (6) also among the elements coded. Tellingly, it was found that literary techniques appeared throughout the packages' multiple means of delivering narrative structures to immerse the reader in the story and that packages' literary elements could 'be identified as operating within Wolfe's four devices of literary journalism' (10). The success of 'Snow Fall', and the resultant proliferation of 'Snow Falled' stories, confirmed there was, indeed, a large online readership or market for digital longform nonfiction produced in this innovative manner.

Further reassuring data on reader engagement was presented by Boynton in his keynote address in 2013 for the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies (IALJS) where his continued projection of an evolutionary trajectory was apparent in the title, 'Notes Toward a Supreme Nonfiction: Teaching Literary Reportage in the Twenty-first Century'. Although he did not explicitly apply the term 'New New Journalism', the successful transition of New New Journalists to the online environment was evident in his provision of data in relation to Jon Krakauer and Martin Lewis. The former's *Three Cups of Deceit* was the first release, famously selling more than '200,000 copies, with the first 90,000 given away for free' (2013: 130), by digital publisher *Byliner* which had collaborated with the *NYT* on 'Snow Fall'. The latter was among the writers on aggregator *Longform*, which launched in the same month Apple released the iPad (April 2010), whose reputations were a key predictor of attracting higher numbers of readers (131).

However, it was in Boynton's quite detailed examination of *Longform*'s data, encompassing the website and mobile app, that the matter of reader engagement online came most sharply into focus. Boynton discovered the website averaged 400 000 unique visitors per month and the mobile app had sold 35 000 copies, with the website posting four 2000-plus-word stories each day, drawing from thousands of magazines and websites. Boynton also found that a strong majority of readers were engaging with longform stories online to completion. With nearly every story receiving at least 1000 reads and averaging 4000, Boynton reflected on

how these long pieces required commitment and were not 'the kinds of things you read while talking on the phone and pecking at your computer' (2013: 130). He also learnt that certain times were being utilised for extended reading: usage was heaviest between 7pm and 2am, peaking at 9pm, and the number of visitors doubled during weekends. Strikingly, a full 65% of visitors finished every story they read (130).

A few years later, in 2016, a Pew Research Center study of online reader behaviour confirmed that mobile users were consuming lengthy news content, and thus longform journalism 'does have a place in today's mobile-centric society'. In fact, despite the small screen space and multitasking often associated with cell phones, users' total engaged time with articles 1000 words or longer averaged 'about twice that of the engaged time with short-form stories' (Mitchell et al. 2016). Such was the boom that, the same year, Allison Eck wrote a piece headlined 'The Washington Post crosses a storytelling frontier with "A New Age of Walls"' in which she explained that digital longform was 'a relatively new species undergoing a gradual but fierce evolution – and everyone's trying to figure out how it works'. Duly referring to 'Snow Fall', she highlighted several recent examples that had followed suit: *Atavist*'s 'Love For My Enemies' (see Augustin and Schenck 2014), *The New York Times*'s 'Greenland is Melting Away' (see Davenport et al. 2015), *The Washington Post*'s 'The Waypoint' (see *Washington Post* 2016) and, as her article title indicated, *The Washington Post*'s 'A New Age of Walls' (see Granados et al. 2016). The latter, she argued, had pushed 'this species a step further, taking cues from audience behavior and using those lessons to the story's advantage' so that 'even though the entire story is scrollable, its tempo varies depending on where you are in the story and how much time you take' (Eck 2016).

We are living, then, in what Dowling has called the 'current golden age of digital literary journalism' following its 'brief but fierce evolution' (2020: 529–30) inaugurated by 'Snow Fall' and which he has also likened to Boynton's evolutionary projection of 'supreme nonfiction'. Target audiences are more engaged than ever in the online environment through mobile devices, availing of the interactive elements, immersive qualities and shareability of digital longform. Clearly, as the parallax scrolling and smooth transitions within single pages in 'Snow Fall' illustrate, a hallmark of this golden age is the expert calibration of the reading experience to minimise distraction and drive focus on the central narrative. The emergence of a second wave of improved digital longform design is exemplified by the stories highlighted by Eck. The design approaches are leaner, uncluttered and careful to avoid jettisoning the

reader elsewhere online via hyperlinks and supplemental elements in favour of interactive containment and navigability within these stories. They have proved effective at holding the attention, bolstering the autonomy and inducing the empathy of mobile audiences. The multimedia elements, such as photos, infographics, video and audio, are not merely extratextual ornamentation, displaying technological wizardry, but key parts of a concentrated narrative structure and therefore of a streamlined, meticulously co-ordinated online reading experience.

Another hallmark, as these expertly calibrated stories also show, is their cinematic appeal. Superb audio-visuals abound – for example, the drone footage of the melting ice sheet in Greenland (Davenport et al. 2015) or the panning shots of laundry on a barbed-wire fence in the Idomeni refugee camp in Greece (Granados et al. 2016) – which reflects the fast-growing importance of film production techniques to literary journalism. In shifting towards the collaborative model of film production, the traditional professional identity of literary journalism as the work of a single bylined writer has been destabilised in recognition of key co-creators like screenwriters and directors (Dowling 2020: 539). According to Dowling, the contemporary approach to digital longform production is necessarily from the vantage point of both a literary artist and filmmaker. Storyboards, which were 'formerly the building blocks of screenwriters and directors in cinema production', have become 'the bastion of mobile news producers' (537–8).

In the context of the convergence of print media and digital storytelling, film or video elements have been harnessed in service of what Hartsock has defined as literary journalism's 'distinctive narra-descriptive aesthetic, particularly its chronotopic capacity to transport the reader to a specific time and place' (Dowling 2020: 530). Film or video elements have also been utilised to help the reader see the world from others' perspectives, whether via journalistic interviews or by creatively seeking to immerse the reader through point of view. The 'Snow Fall' skier video is a prime example of the latter approach. As Dowling has described it, the skier's 'camera lens functions as his eyes' so that the reader enters 'both the scene and – in the most direct manner possible given this film technology – the skier's subjectivity'. He adds: 'Never before in literary journalism have we been able to enter into a figure's subjectivity through this medium that enables such depth and intimacy. The emotion is overwhelming…' (537).

There is, however, a conundrum at the heart of literary journalism practice and scholarship in the digital age which relates to film and is yet to be expressly reckoned with. It was Wolfe who raised the thorny issue of cognition which he defined in terms of the unique and powerful relationship 'between written language and the memory' (1996 [1973]: 65). Speculating on creativity and offering a prediction of what would be discovered 'about the powers of the written word', he argued that print as opposed to film or theatre was 'an indirect medium that does not so much "create" images or emotions as jog the reader's memories' and thus it had 'some unique and rather marvellous advantages' in absorbing the reader (63). Wolfe believed in the 'Identikit principle' whereby merely suggesting the outline of a face invited the reader to 'fill in the rest', stirring emotions and therefore powerful reader engagement (64).

Returning to the four literary devices which, he posited, could 'jog or trigger the memory in such a rich fashion' (1996 [1973]: 64) – i.e. scene-by-scene construction, dialogue, point of view and the detailing of status life – he claimed the first two could be better handled on film than in print whereas the latter two worked much better in print than on film. 'No film maker', he argued, 'has ever successfully brought the audience inside the mind or central nervous system of a character – something that even bad novelists are able to accomplish as a matter of routine' (64). According to Wolfe, nothing that filmmakers had tried, including 'making the camera the "eyes" of the protagonist', had successfully put viewers 'inside the skull of a character on film'. He was pessimistic that this could ever be achieved: 'The first movie maker to deal successfully with point of view and status life will be the first giant in that field. Sad to say, the students of cognition may discover that technically and physiologically it is an impossible problem for film' (65).

Although Kerrane and Yagoda challenged Wolfe's treatment of literary antecedents of the New Journalism as an 'afterthought', they evidently concurred with his stance on print versus film. Pointing out that third-person film documentaries emulated the stylistic exuberance and wide range of subject matter of literary journalism, and highlighting how both nonfiction film and print literary journalism offered the 'double pleasure of true stories artfully told', Kerrane concluded that the print journalist still enjoyed 'one great advantage over the film-maker':

> Despite continuous improvements in equipment – ever more lightweight and portable, with less need for special lighting – the

> camera's presence subtly alters the very reality it would show. By contrast, the eye of the writer is an omnipresent lens, no more and no less intrusive than the mind behind it. The literary journalist enjoys greater freedom in researching a story and greater flexibility in telling it, often refocusing in an instant to take us beneath the surface and into the psyche, either a character's or the writer's own. (1998: 20)

This perceived difference gives rise, in the digital age, to an as-yet unresolved tension concerning print versus online literary journalism, specifically about which (multi)media elements are best suited to achieving 'cognitively' the literary effect of realism. The issue of what might work best, for particular storytelling situations, therefore has potential ramifications for the wider field of literary media. Key questions to be debated are whether Wolfe has been proved wrong, in the digital age, about what he saw as the limitations of film; or whether print remains 'cognitively' more impactful than cinematic online storytelling; and whether there is cognitive dissonance or congruity in encountering both text and film within online storytelling. Multimedia journalism did not exist then so anachronism should be avoided; but insofar as multimedia elements can be combined, and although he did not explicitly challenge Wolfe's print bias, Dowling appears to think such a bias is mistaken and outdated. 'Far from profaning the textual sacrosanct bond between journalist and reader', he wrote, 'digital longform is now recognized among the world's most acclaimed literary journalism' (2020: 539).

Even so, Dowling's portrayal of a digital golden age gained impetus from the recent rejuvenation of the New Journalism online. For instance, under the subheading 'Renewing the New Journalism Revolution Online', Dowling argued that digital longform was 'now hardly so arduous to consume in terms of the cognitive processing of multimedia and written text'. To support his stance, he added: 'Certainly Michael Shapiro, founder of the digital magazine the *Big Roundtable* [an outgrowth of which has since appeared in the form of the *Delacorte Review*], saw the internet as no detriment to his audience's attention span when he disclosed the platform's "mission to renew the promise of the New Journalism that started and then sputtered a few decades ago, connecting techniques of great fiction with the discipline and thrill of serious reporting"' (2020: 533).

Dowling's account, then, could not have been more relevant to Wolfe's cognitive theory yet never tackled Wolfe head-on, as it were. Nor was Wolfe's theory expressly addressed by Dowling and Vogan in an article which described digital longform as a 'cognitive container' (2015: 211) and also drew a parallel between the innovativeness of the New Journalism and digital longform as exemplified by 'Snow Fall'. Given that Dowling's account closed the 'New Directions for Scholarly Inquiry' section which concluded *The Routledge Companion to American Literary Journalism* (2020), contemporary literary journalism and literary media scholars could proceed directly and overtly towards a revaluation of Wolfe's theory in the digital age. Two more factors could also serve as motivation for doing so.

Firstly, print is far from dead and remains, in fact, a pinnacle to which literary prestige is firmly attached. Registering the prominence of print in the digital industry 'as a method of brand franchising with literary audiences in mind', Dowling explained that *Grantland Quarterly* was 'an early entrant into the print literary journal market by way of its website run under the auspices of ESPN by Bill Simmons, who had a vested interest in revitalising literary journalism for sports through contemporary and classical pieces, including works by Hunter S. Thompson' (2020: 538) – the Gonzo journalist who appeared in *The New Journalism* and has many poor imitators online (Marino 2018). New digital-to-print production models reflect how the aspirations of digital longform writers and editors have 'gravitated towards book publishing'. Digital-to-print book examples include Shane Bauer's 'My Four Months as a Private Prison Guard' (2016) and James Verini's *Love and Ruin: Tales of Obsession, Danger, and Heartbreak* (2016) which resulted from a national award for feature writing and a contract with Norton – 'a telling sign', Dowling observed, 'of the new recognition of the literary stature of digital longform' (2020: 538). Notably, beyond the US context, the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature was awarded to Ukraine-born Belarusian literary journalist Svetlana Alexievich, a long-time print practitioner who appeared in Kerrane and Yagoda's anthology.

Secondly, Dowling also pointed to a 2016 report by Marino et al. on eye-tracking of millennials' mobile longform interaction which found: (1) total fixation was relatively even between text and video; (2) there were greater levels of enjoyment of text and photos than videos which were considered too long and boring; (3) well-edited photos, followed closely by text, induced the most pleasure of all the multimedia elements; and (4) readers preferred autonomous navigation rather than locked-in progression (Dowling 2020: 537). Interestingly,

one can draw from Dowling's account a sense of 'old-school' page design elements of print journalism, like the combination of text and photos, working effectively online. Wolfe's prioritisation of print (or text) therefore haunts such findings which, according to Dowling, affirmed Hiippala's view that 'longform prefers shallow formatted videos that function to establish the "cognitive container"' and suggested that 'autonomous navigability, a vestige of print reading, and crisp editing of video and photographs hold sway with readers' (537). The overall picture that emerges of literary journalism in the digital age is of radical transformation online while remaining steeped, nevertheless, in long-established print tradition. What contemporary readers are encountering, fundamentally, is the perpetuation of innovative practice. This augurs well for the continued evolution of literary journalism – and indeed its contribution to the development, more broadly, of literary media – into the twenty-first century.

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