

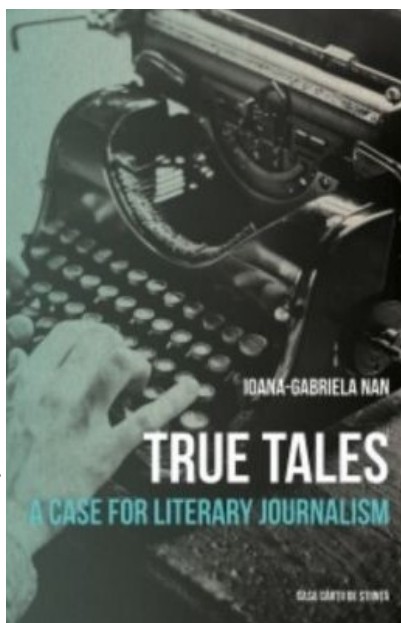
## BOOKS

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**Ioana-Gabriela Nan, *True Tales. A Case for Literary Journalism*,  
Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2018, 279 p.**

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The question prompting the author's research has been around for at least several decades now, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world of letters. Interestingly enough, the book's publication coincides with renewed interest in the debate surrounding it. From Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* to the latest controversy sparked by Karl Ove Knausgaard's extremely popular and richly awarded *My Struggle*, the question of fact versus fiction has preoccupied linguists, semanticists and narratologists alike. The author acknowledges such previous contributions by summing up the existing research on the issue in all these fields. However, her approach is unexpected in the sense that she does not proceed by analysing the novelistic output of authors such as the above. Instead, she follows the consequences of the manifesto of New Journalism, published by Tom Wolfe in 1973, whose text was announcing nothing short of a revolution in the way novels were to be written, using all the journalists' tools to produce non-fiction that was to be read "as fiction".



The main reason for this peculiar approach seems to be what the author feels to be the insufficient amount of research done to cover all the many-faceted aspects of journalistic writing, especially its softer, human interest version. In this respect, she seems to be in agreement with other authors who call for a reconsideration of some of the writing practices of journalism as forms of literary art. However, while prominent structuralists such as Barthes or Genette already approached the journalistic output from a literary-narratological perspective, literary studies in general seem to have been more reluctant to accept this stance. A short review of British and American history of journalistic writing is provided to illustrate the evolution of this particular, narrative genre of journalism, as well as its advantages and disadvantages in the face of the more traditional and "professional" fact-based journalistic accounts whose aim is communication, rather than story-telling.

Apparently, this kind of narrative ability applied to journalistic writing also

seems to have contributed to the confusion surrounding it. Usually, we tend to associate telling stories with literary fiction, so a very important difference is being thoroughly investigated by the author: that between literariness, narrativity, and fictionality. Moreover, the difference between the fictional and the fictitious is also underlined as relevant, especially in the case of journalism. To analyse all these aspects, the methods of semantic studies have been chosen as the most appropriate to provide convincing proof not only of the fact that not all literature is fictional (which, at first sight, appears commonsensical), but also of the fact that not all fiction is literary and of the fact that the texts of the narrative journalists, however literary in their aesthetic, cannot be said to be fictional.

In fact, a whole chapter is dedicated to proving this point from a speech act theoretical perspective starting from Searle's illocutionary approach to fiction and the central role played by the notion of "pretence" in differentiating between fact and fiction, while also taking into account the critiques to Searle's theory provided by more recent researchers such as Gregory Currie, Marie-Laure Ryan and Christopher New.

However, the concept of story and the question of whether literary journalists were actually truthful in their accounts was felt to require further investigation, and the author turned, for answers, to the perspective of possible world semantics, whose framework and conceptual tools have been considered crucially complex and detailed to allow a correct assessment of the kind of literary novels that narrative journalists claimed to be able to produce. Thus, two concepts central to possible world semantics – the

ontological status of possible worlds and transworld identity – are explored in detail by summing up the way they have been put forward by their foremost proponents from Lewis to Kripke, Plantinga and Rescher and by explaining their relevance to the later theories concerning the possible worlds of fiction.

The latter, in turn, occupy the space of a whole chapter, which explores essential issues such as the way in which the notion of truth relates to that of a fictional world (David Lewis), what possible worlds look like (Thomas Pavel, Lubomir Doležel), how one can walk through them without getting lost (Umberto Eco) or the gestures one has to perform in order to "make believe" (Marie-Laure Ryan). This is because, as the author explains, borderline types of discourse such as those represented by literary journalistic accounts cannot be discussed without such thorough investigation and without understanding what makes a discourse fictional.

Of all these accounts of fictional worlds, one seems to the author to come closest to explaining the nature and position of literary journalistic stories. Thus, Marie-Laure Ryan's proposal of considering such discourse as "true fiction" constitutes the focus of an analysis meant to compare this model to historiographical models of narrative non-fiction as described by Hayden White. In both cases, the challenges of narration seem to bring literary journalism and historiographical discourse closer to fiction than they themselves would sometimes wish to be. That is why Ryan's conceptual tools establishing rules of world separation and world connection are invaluable in determining the distance that separates the worlds of journalism and historiography from those of literary fiction.

In particular, the notion of recentering as the defining feature of fictionalisation is a point where the author's arguments seem to differ from Ryan's, to the effect that literary journalism does not, in her opinion, belong to Ryan's class of true fictional accounts in which she includes novels such as Mailer's or Capote's. To support her position, the author presents the writers' own testimony that they never intended their novels to be more than lively but true accounts of the events described. Moreover, in the case of Capote or Wolfe, the texts are based entirely on accurate and acknowledged recordings, excluding any gesture of fictional recentering and, consequently, any difference between the actual world and the textual actual world. Thus, such novels seem to come closer to the genre of memoir, in which the details, rather than being imagined or invented, are instead recorded thoroughly. At most, the journalist's eye for the dramatic has made him/her use novelistic techniques (point-of-view, detail, dialogue) to bring the story to life, thus foregrounding the aesthetic qualities of the discourse.

The degree of literariness, however, is not enough to justify a text as being fictional. So the author does not seem to endorse Genette's view that the discourse of literary journalism is "almost fictional" and instead opts for an either-or position: either they are "true-fictional", as Ryan ar-

gues, or they are factual, but highly subjective and aestheticised accordingly. Unlike some journalists themselves, who insist that the division between fiction and non-fiction is as fluid as to allow writers to pass indifferently and comfortably between them, the author, in agreement with Eco, insists that there are both textual and paratextual features put in place by the writers that, when ignored by the reader, will lead to misunderstanding and false belief. In view of her investigations, the author believes that a thorough investigation of the work of literary journalists leads her to believe that, far from being artificial or new, the separation between fiction and non-fiction is an important aspect of written discourse and it becomes a crucial one in the case of journalistic output, professionally committed to non-deception either in the fictional or in the fictitious sense.

However – and this is perhaps one of the merits of the book – the author does leave the question open for further arguments to be brought in support of one of the two possible semantic modes, making room for other perspectives and renewed research effort. A rich, multidisciplinary bibliography and a certain stubbornness of discovery by multiple perspectives makes this book a worthy project, one that should be continued and refined as journalistic non-fiction, as well as confessional novels, are becoming an increasing part of the contemporary literary mainstream.

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