



# A History of American Literary Journalism: The Emergence of a Modern Narrative Form

*John Hartsock*

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During the 1960s, such works as Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* were cited as examples of the "new journalism". True stories that read like novels, they combined the journalist's task of factual reporting with the art of fictional narration. Yet as John C. Hartsock shows in this revealing study, the roots of this distinctive form of writing -- whether called new journalism, literary journalism, or creative nonfiction -- can be traced at least as far back as the late nineteenth century. In the decades following the American Civil War, Stephen Crane, Lafcadio Hearn, and other journalists challenged the notion, then just emerging, that the reporter's job was to offer a concise statement of the "objective truth". Drawing on the techniques of the realistic novel, these writers developed a new narrative style of reporting aimed at lessening the distance between observer and observed, subject and object. By the 1890s, Hartsock argues, literary journalism had achieved critical recognition as a new form of writing, different not only from "objective" reporting but also from the sensationalistic "yellow press" and at times the socially engaged "muckrakers". In the twentieth century, the form has continued to evolve and maintain its vitality, despite being marginalized by the academic establishment. A former journalist who covered Capitol Hill for UPI and reported on the collapse of the Soviet Union for the *San Francisco Examiner*, Hartsock brings a fresh and informed perspective to the issues he examines. The result is a concise introduction to the genesis and development of a significant literary genre.

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