

Literary Criticism & Journalistic Writings: A Case Study of a News Story of Daily the New York Times (AUG. 19, 2014)

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Abstract

Literature and journalism are considered distinct disciplines and therefore literary and journalistic writings are different from each other. Due to many corresponding aspects of them, literary journalism, a combined field of study was flourished that adopted the techniques of objectivity as well as subjectivity. It was assumed as a journey from facts to fictions. Despite having commonality, there are many thematic differences between literature and journalism. In present paper, the researcher analysed a news story published in daily the New York Times and searched for four literary themes within its text. Those literary themes are imagination, emotionality, rhetoric and poetics. Journalistic writings are different than literary writings because the former have no those literary features. After the analysing the news story, it was concluded that the news story was free of those literary themes

and was considered a good example of journalistic writings.

Keywords: Literature, Journalism, Imagination, Emotionality, Rhetoric, Poetics

Introduction

Literary and journalistic writings are different from each other but many scholars have attempted to unify both styles of expressions and according to Hartsock, (2000) it is not only a rift occurred between literature and journalism but also occurred within journalism as a result of objectivification of news due to which narrative literary journalism emerged (p. 17). Literary Journalism found many supporters from media and communication, and literature. It was called a journey from facts to fictions. If the worlds of knowledge and the layperson are to understand one another, then literary journalism offers to an exceptional degree promising means for doing so (Passos, Nering & Carvalho pp. 28-29). Literary journalism is

newspaper, magazine or book-length nonfiction that combines solid reporting with the narrative and rhetorical techniques used by writers of fiction. (Serafin & Bendixen, 2003, p. 687). Many famous writers from the history practicing literary journalism are Daniel Defoe, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, James Agee, Ernest Hemingway, A.J. Leibling, Joseph Mitchell, Lillian Ross, John Steinbeck, Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Tom Wolfe, Joan Didion, John McPhee, Edward Hoagland, Richard Rhodes, Tracy Kidder, Mark Singer, Richard Preston, Adrian Nicole LeBlanc, Don DeLillo. V.S Naipaul and Shiva Naipaul (Kaur, 2012, p. 55).

In spite of it, many authors established a strong divide among literary and journalistic writings. According to Connolly, "literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice; journalism what will be read once" (Keeble, 2005, p. 160). Literary journalism does not adopt its popularity from being the only lyrical or creative prose in journalism. It does, however, differ importantly from everyday journalistic stories published in newspapers and magazines. It needs immersion in an event; presumes a point of view; and utilizes literary technique unapologetically, making high use of stream of consciousness, metaphors, symbolism, description, point of view, narration, dialogue and other conventions thought by many to lie within the state of literature (Whitt, 2008, p. 64). It is controversial to say whether there is a real difference between literature and

journalistic discourse. Perhaps it would be better to explain that difference is at the core of the connection between literature and journalism (González, 1993, p. 9).

In present research, the author has tried to clarify the thematic difference between literary and journalistic writings. For this reason, he analyzed a news story selected from daily the New York Times (Aug. 19, 2014). The analysis of that news story was conducted with literary perspective.

Rationale for the Selection of a News Story of daily the New York Times

A news story titled as "Shooting Accounts Differ as Holder Schedules Visit to Ferguson" was selected for literary analysis as daily the New York Times is considered a newspaper which mostly adopts the journalistic principles of objectivity and transparency. On the other hand, the literary genres are usually consist of subjective creativity. The selected news story tells about a serious incident occurred in United States recently. It was expected that the prescribed news story would fulfill the criteria of journalistic rules that are different from literary guidelines.

Research Questions

How are literary writings different than journalistic writings?

Research Method

The dividing line between what is considered fact and fiction prevails to be, even for writing based upon a basis of journalistic reporting, that it does not add imaginative stuffs to realistic details, and the author does not want to know what the audiences are thinking or feeling, and that characters are identified by their actual names (Underwood, 2013, p. 34). For this purpose, the entire paragraph of the concerned news story will be taken as a unit of analysis and the following literary themes will be searched for in it. If all or some themes were found in the text of it, it means the news story did not fulfill the criteria of journalistic writings.

1. **Imagination:** Journalistic writings are usually clear of imagination because journalistic news are based on objective facts. Imagination and artistic creativity work for fiction that is a part of literature. Frus said that on the opposite to "fiction's imaginative freedom and creativity, journalism is discursive and mundane" (Underwood, 2008, pp. 10-11).
2. **Emotionality:** A journalist reports about what he/she finds in a rational way. Emotionality or sentimentism leads to subjective reality and emotions are considered a beautiful dress for literature. A journalist does not work with emotions and personal opinion. He/she collects facts and composes a report about an incident. On the contrary, emotions are sometimes attached to

prejudices. It is a simplistic assumption that emotion invariably compromises impartiality that is not a good practice in journalism (Richards & Rees, 2014, p. 860).

3. **Rhetoric:** The aim of the rhetoric can be persuasion, propaganda and brainwashing. Many literary pieces of work deal with rhetoric. Journalism serves as an information and education. It has no rhetorical language. The shared areas between journalists and rhetoricians generally lie frequently in topoi of sense-making processes (Daniel, 2002, p. 509).
4. **Poetics:** Poetics is a crucial part of many literary genres. It includes meters, rhyming words, and musical forms. Journalistic writings must be free of poetics. According to Hegel, prose has appropriated to itself everything that is of the mind and on the contrary, poetry melt and pour into basically other mould` the material supplied by reality (Heller, 1984, p. 4).

Discussion

The selected news story is about Ferguson, a city of United States where a black teenager was shouted by a white police officer that erupted chaos in the area against police. The news storywriter has used a very transparent language that has no imagination, emotionality, rhetoric

or poetics. For explanation, the first paragraph can be textualized. “As a county grand jury prepared to hear evidence on Wednesday in the shooting death of a black teenager by a white police officer that touched off 10 days of unrest here, witnesses have given investigators sharply conflicting accounts of the killing” (para. 1). The paragraph is free of literary themes. The paragraph just provides information about the incident and there is no persuasion, propaganda, or brainwashing hidden in it that is a part of rhetoric. The paragraph has no emotional appeal and there is no imaginative poetics in it. “Some of the accounts seem to agree on how the fatal altercation initially unfolded: with a struggle between the officer, Darren Wilson, and the teenager, Michael Brown. Officer Wilson was inside his patrol car at the time, while Mr. Brown, who was unarmed, was leaning in through an open window” (para. 2). This paragraph is also an example of journalistic writings. It has no imagination, emotionality, rhetoric or poetics. “Many witnesses also agreed on what happened next: Officer Wilson’s firearm went off inside the car, Mr. Brown ran away, the officer got out of his car and began firing toward Mr. Brown, and then Mr. Brown stopped, turned around and faced the officer” (para. 3). This paragraph just explains the scenario of the incident that arouses some fear that is a negative emotion. But this type of fear is not attached to the words. It is created the incident itself. “But on the crucial moments that followed, the accounts differ sharply, officials say.

Some witnesses say that Mr. Brown, 18, moved toward Officer Wilson, possibly in a threatening manner, when the officer shot him dead. But others say that Mr. Brown was not moving and may even have had his hands up when he was killed” (para. 4). It is appeared from the statement that there is no lyrical style exists in it.

“The accounts of what witnesses have told local and federal law enforcement authorities come from some of those witnesses themselves, law enforcement authorities and others in Ferguson. Many spoke on the condition of anonymity because they did not want to be identified discussing a continuing investigation” (para. 5). Here, the writer has tried to a news story as journalistic report. The news story is not dressed up in literary garments. “The new details on the witness accounts emerged as Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. was scheduled to visit Ferguson on Wednesday to meet with F. B.I. agents who have been conducting a civil rights investigation into the shooting” (para. 6). It is a simple news statement that has no imaginative, emotional, rhetorical or poetic characters. “Mr. Holder and top Justice Department officials were weighing whether to open a broader civil rights investigation to look at Ferguson’s police practices at large, according to law enforcement officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal talks. The issue came up after news reports revealed a 2009 case in which a man said that four police officers beat him, then charged him with damaging government property — by

getting blood on their uniforms`` (para. 7). It is a news-bearing language, which is different than fictional language. ``Under Mr. Holder, the Justice Department has opened nearly two dozen such investigations into police departments, more than twice as many as were opened in the previous five years, according to department data`` (para. 8). No literary fictional statement is mingled within it. ``Also on Tuesday, federal authorities learned the results of an autopsy performed on Mr. Brown by military coroners that showed that he had been shot six times, though they declined to release further details until their investigation was finished. An autopsy conducted on behalf of Mr. Brown's family also found that he had been shot at least six times — including once in the face and once in the top of his head — with all bullets striking him in the front. The county has also done its own autopsy, which found evidence of marijuana in Mr. Brown's system`` (para. 9). The statement creates some fear because the incident is fearful. Along with it, the language adopted for it is free of emotions.

``The Brown family has scheduled a funeral for Monday. Clashes between the police and protesters have become a nightly ritual, although the scene on Tuesday was initially calm. The authorities took their positions before sunset, and Missouri National Guard soldiers staffed checkpoints at the shopping center that is now a police command post. Demonstrators marched without incident while officers watched.

The quiet nature of the protests raised hopes that they had entered a calmer phase, but more confrontations were reported overnight, with 47 people arrested`` (para. 10). The reporter has written a running scenario of the incident. He/she did not put his/her own thoughts or reflections. ``In a statement on Tuesday night, Gov. Jay Nixon expressed sympathy for the Brown family and praised residents for "standing against armed and violent instigators." But he also said that "a vigorous prosecution must now be pursued"`` (para. 11). The reporter separated his/her own dictions from the dictions of other person using double commas. No literary feature is included into it. ``"The democratically elected St. Louis County prosecutor and the attorney general of the United States each have a job to do," Mr. Nixon said. "Their obligation to achieve justice in the shooting death of Michael Brown must be carried out thoroughly, promptly and correctly, and I call upon them to meet those expectations"`` (para. 12). The quoted statement may have some literary language but the reporter has separated it with double commas. It is a good practice of journalistic principles.

``The fatal confrontation began on Aug. 9 shortly after the police received reports that two men had robbed a convenience store in Ferguson. Officer Wilson, who was not responding to the robbery, had stopped to speak with Mr. Brown and a friend, Dorian Johnson. The Ferguson police chief, Thomas Jackson, said that it was around the time that Officer Wilson started talking to the two

that he realized they fit the description of the suspects in the convenience store robbery` (para. 13). No imaginative, emotional, rhetorical or poetic language is utilized in this paragraph. `A lawyer for Mr. Johnson said that his client was interviewed by the F.B.I. and the St. Louis County police last week for nearly four hours. In that interview, Mr. Johnson admitted that he and Mr. Brown had stolen cigarillos from the store, said the lawyer, Freeman R. Bosley Jr.` (para. 14). The incident presented in this statement is reported as news. `Mr. Bosley said that the officer told the two to get off the street, adding that Mr. Johnson told the officer that he lived nearby. They got into a bit of a verbal dispute with the officer about whether walking in the street constituted a crime, Mr. Bosley said` (para. 15). Again, no imaginative, emotional, rhetorical or poetic language is utilized in the last paragraph.

Conclusion

The news story selected from daily the New York Times has many journalistic qualities. It is not like a fictional script, which comes from imagination and has no ground reality. The news story does not carry the messages of emotions. It is not like a rhetorical speech and has no meters or musical forms. Ultimately, It has no literary features that distract a reader from objectivity. Finally, it can be concluded that it is a good example of journalistic writings.

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