

Foreword

"Profession: Reporter" has evolved out of both old and renewed enthusiasms for the work of certain writers; it began long ago when a South African historian by the name of Jeff Gay introduced me to the American Agnes Smedley; not, initially, to her journalism, but to the autobiographical novel "Daughter of the Earth." I had read Norwegian Use Lindbaek's book "Battalion Thalmann - an eye-witness account of the Spanish civil war" - and was familiar with the American colony in Paris during the 20s, which included Djuna Barnes, Kay Boyle and Janet Flanner, among others. They formed part of the circle around the bookshop "Shakespeare and Company", as did Ernest Hemingway and James Joyce.

Wera Saether's books have interested me for years, and I was familiar with Milena Jesenska, not as a reporter but as Franz Kafka's correspondent. Americans Martha Gellhorn and John Reed, the Czech Egon Erwin Kisch, the Pole Ryszard Kapuscinski, the Swedes Sara Lidman, Stig Dagerman, Sven Lindquist, and Jan Myrdal, the Yugoslavian Slavenka Drakulic, all these and others were familiar names, and some I had read, but until work on the present anthology was underway, I had not given much thought to the genre of these books; it was what they were about that mattered.

As such I had been preoccupied with the reportage genre for many years without truly realizing the extent of it. In the spring of 1998 I began work on this anthology because of a so-called coincidence; I came across a volume of Djuna Barnes' reportages anthologized in Swedish, and was immediately smitten! It later became clear to me what an important role reportage really has in the history of literature, and how neglected reportage as a genre is in that greater context. Incidentally, Djuna Barnes, like most of the other reporters included in this anthology, is known primarily for her literary production. The publisher "Ordfront" series "Masters of Reportage," along with other individual volumes about reportage from the same publisher, has been a fantastic source of inspiration during this project: since 1982 editors Stig Hansen and Clas Thor have written and edited a long line of books that in informational value and sheer enthusiasm have constituted a unique and unsurpassed wellspring for the writing of literary history. Their work, which is in large measure devoted to women reporters, introduced me to Djuna Barnes, Hanne Krall and others. Before reporting on fashion in Paris in the 30s, Djuna Barnes had written scathingly about the arms buildup in the U.S., and had interviewed American labor leaders. Hanne Krall is a leading Polish reporter who has devoted particular attention to Jewish survivors of the European catastrophe. Milena Jesenska, who died in a concentration camp in 1944, was a passionate journalist who was planning new stories right up until the time of her death. With the German Magarete Buber -who, like Jesenska, was a political prisoner, she had planned to write a volume of reportage called "In the age of the concentration camp." She translated Kafka into Czech, wrote luminous and humorous reports from the daily life in Prague, as well as stern warnings against the growing racism in Europe. Her sorrowful report from Prague on the day of the German invasion in 1939 is also included in this collection.

Why the special emphasis on women in this genre? The answer should be self-evident: they are many, and many of them are very good. They are underrepresented, which is an unfortunate and unnecessary circumstance that this anthology perhaps can help to redress. The work of women reporters will hopefully find its place next to that of men in the general education of well-rounded journalists and readers.

II.

In parts of the Nordic school of reportage heavy emphasis is placed on reportage as literature, as a genre distinct from non-fiction. I'm not sure how fortunate or *real* this distinction is;

such divisions often seem contrived, as though one imagines a defense of reportage requires statements about its loftiness and its place among *belles lettres*. But it goes without saying that reportage has undeniable literary qualities, in the sense that it provides a literary and so-called human experience that pure news does not. It's not so easy for the reader to keep his distance from good reportage, not so easy to keep the information at a safe distance by saying: "this doesn't concern me, it's so far away, I can't do anything about it." Good reportage often provides the kind of experience Dag Solstad describes in connection with Proust: "I don't understand why this should interest me, but it has come to interest me, greatly."

A somewhat peculiar instance for the undersigned is [the author and short story writer] Joyce Carol Oates's reportage on American boxing. I've never been particularly interested in boxing, but the fascination borne of her analytic enthusiasm, extensive knowledge and ability to recreate the milieu is the same that a great work of literature generates in the reader. Boxing: the versatile Barbro Alving's reportage from the legendary match between Floyd and Ingo is also included here, a text that contributed to the banning of professional boxing in Sweden.

Karen Blixen is an author whose work is primarily belletristic, but in 1940 she traveled to Germany on assignment from the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*. What she wrote was for obvious reasons not published until after the war, specifically in the journal *Heretica* in 1949. Her privileged access to people in high places in the Third Reich resulted in some of the most incisive texts regarding the culture of acquiescence in Germany, while her reflections upon the nature of propaganda are the work of an author of acute social awareness and stylistic genius.

The other Dane included in the anthology, Ulla Terkelsen, nears us in time with a text about the 1972 "Bloody Sunday." The tone is sober, but the shock over the massacre of innocent civilians lies as a threatening undercurrent. Terkelsen reports on an incident that unsettled people all over the world.

Reportage enjoys the advantage - as for example in the case of Karen Blixen - that it continually communicates *both* news and analysis, and often also conveys a sense of setting. This is the *forte* of reportage, as compared with the chronicle or commentary. In this respect reportage is important, not only because it is literature but because it performs a unique synthesizing service within the flickering news picture. It is important to underline the *report* quality of reportage, as the record of a particular place at a particular point in time, something which is not seldom manipulated, especially in today's media situation where competition is tough and circulation rapid. If a reporter in a certain daily medium gets too hung up on the keywords "scandal" and "catastrophe," little room is left for concentration on events and situations that are less conspicuous.

The title of Wera Saether's magazine article "Romania, a Report of More Than Sorrow" is exemplary in its attentiveness to aspects that do not initially stand out as the easiest subject matter for reportage, while at the same time the content delivers what the title promises. Pure news stories can perfectly well demonstrate thoroughness and analytic preparedness, and as such it is always a pleasure to read Martha Gellhorn and Barbro Alving. Both were foreign correspondents, the latter also a general reporter on the most diverse topics. Both are remarkable for their broad knowledge, commitment and humor, Gellhorn sarcastic and Alving wry and occasionally impulsive, as in the reportage included here about the hunt for a "fashion desk" in the newspaper "Pravda."

III.

In a Norwegian TV-interview Ryszard Kapuscinski said that he wanted to "go to places where people are making history." An American photographer known for taking harrowing pictures from war-ravaged regions participated in the same TV program. The interviewer asked why the photographer couldn't spare him such scenes: "Because I don't think you have the right to be spared."

I've included this little TV-anecdote because both statements are typical of most of the texts selected for this anthology. The most important selection criterion is that the texts should "write history," while also - hopefully - inspiring in the reader an irresistible desire to go on, to learn more.

And sometimes curiosity goads people to action. Although the selection concentrates primarily on Western writers, and primarily on European history in our century, I am cautiously hopeful that a global perspective may seep through. For the women who have been singled out in this collection of reportage have traveled and described events in many parts of the world beyond the West; Isabelle Eberhardt in North Africa at the beginning of the century, Agnes Smedley in China in the 30s, Barbro Alving in Hiroshima, Martha Gellhorn in Vietnam, and Wera Saether in Jerusalem.

The selection is an attempt to provide an outline of our century through a palimpsest of individual pieces of reportage; but the selection has many lacunae, and much that could have been interesting to include has not been included. Moreover, it is the so-called *classical reportage* that has been given pride of place; phenomena such as *New Journalism* do not have a natural niche in this particular collection.

I have three primary wishes for the anthology; first of all I want to honor selected outstanding writers, and secondly to share the pleasure of their work with the readers. An equally compelling motivation has been to provide an opportunity for contemplation that the information deluge seldom provides.

IV

Reportage is diametrically opposed to propaganda; reportage stands in a love-hate relationship to the news telegram; reportage feeds on literary genres such as the travel letter and the travel diary, as well as the short story and the novel from Cervantes onward; reportage is akin to the writing of history in that it strives for an understanding that moves beyond the news story; reportage takes after the essay in the reporters interrogative stance towards events, etc.

Reportage can take the shape of many things, but never propaganda or other forms of manipulative news media. Two things vouch for the quality of the genre: the unabashed subjectivity of the writer, and a wealth of knowledge about a given subject. Much of what is called reportage is either repackaged information from open sources, or superficial entertainment. Another serious problem is travel journalism that is generously funded and results in *lousy* tourist brochures. Impassioned reportage is occasionally compared unfavorably with objective journalism. The advantage of this subjective kind of reportage - one could just as well call it an attitude - is that there is no mistaking where the voice is speaking from. In today's stream of information it has the advantage that it can be localised, both by the distinct voice of the reporter and the interaction between her and people, places and events that she describes and ultimately analyses. Something Kapuscinski said in the above-mentioned interview also speaks to this issue; quoting from memory, "In the past journalists were hand-picked by Le Monde, the New York Times and Frankfurter Allgemeine to go to selected places. But now they are sent in thousands, unprepared, from place to place, and during the war in Bosnia you could find amateur journalists who did not know that the Balkan wars were 500 years old. This pertains to the problem of democracy: what good does greater flow of information do for democratic societies, when the information itself lacks perspective and is often false because so many factors have been left out?"

The "information imperative" is one of the hocus-pocus terms of our age. What do today's media players mean by this? Spokesmen for today's media scene, where the news now circulates faster than it did only a few decades ago, will often respond with something like the following: "information imperative" refers to informing the public about what it demands to be informed, plus whatever the editorial desks find interesting.

Many press- and media apologists remind me of the most myopic defenders of the market economy; everything is just a question of supply and demand, and as long as there is a balance there everything is OK. As long as we give people what they want, we've fulfilled our responsibility. Even if it were so that demand always follows supply - as though the people unceasingly yearn for feature material about supermodels, and the media conscientiously attend to that need without ulterior motives - even if that was the case, is this really the self-image that newspapers want, to be fulfilling people's needs and that's it?

Reportage can do what the news article or commentary cannot; namely, to allow the non-

rational side of human activity to come to light. For example, however much an editorial emphasizes the absurd and tragic aspects of a civil war this is all too often expressed in a predictable and rational language.

There are many possible explanations for what attracts reporters to places and events, and they range from careerism to acts of solidarity. The Argentine Eduardo Galeanon poses a question about this, and provides his own answer: "Does memory serve a purpose? We have desired to break down the machine of lies...Memory. My poison, my sustenance."

The Norwegian reporters Lise Lindbaek and Wera Saether represent this kind of attitude in their respective generations; the former has sometimes let the polemic get the upper hand, but at her best she is a brilliant stylist and a shrewd analyst; Wera Saether tries to the greatest possible extend to regard an issue from several angles; what they have in common is the committed reporters' doughtiness, the will to empathize, and an emphasis of the necessity of historical memory. In the works of Wera Saether one also finds an implicit discussion about the potential of recollection in the societies she finds herself in - whether it be Rwanda, Romania, Israel or India. She is seismographically aware of the limitations of recollection, as a limitation on historical facts, but also as an acute necessity for people in crisis. At the same time she lets different voices be heard; she weaves in her own reflections, but it is always evident who is saying what, and from what angle. Good reportage stands out by bringing forth the suffering of the individual, but also the survival ability that parallels the suffering. This can be done explicitly and with empathy, which is one of the things Wera Saether does masterfully; it can be done with rage and empathy, a characteristic that applies to Martha Gellhorn when she describes meetings with people in occupied Czechoslovakia . in 1939.

An example of a text in the present anthology that combines the sweeping background article with travel reportage and the interview is the chapter about Kosovo from Rebecca West's book *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. In this monumental book she displays great depth of knowledge and linguistic and historical sensibility. She possesses a highly sophisticated level of discernment when confronting the institutions of power, as well as the myths that power avails itself of; all of this combines to make important historiography.

Rebecca West started out on the more day-to-day oriented journalistic beat, while also writing her first belletristic works. She was an admired and feared literary critic in her younger years, known for her razorsharp reviews. A male equivalent of Appelbaum and West is Kapuscinski, who with his books about Persia/Iran and the Soviet Union, *The Shah and the Empire*, shares their level of ambition in combining every imaginable accessible literary genre to achieve the kind of victory that only novels in the tradition of Cervantes are otherwise awarded; the artistic victory of the hybrid. Kapuscinski has written about Appelbaum's book that "one sense the spirit of Franz Kafka and Bruno Schulz, the dramatic world of the Eastern borderlands comes to life."

V

The present anthology was initiated out of enthusiasm, and work on it concludes with an escalating sense of frustration and rage. Enthusiasm and respect for the women who have contributed some of the most insightful and linguistically significant reportage texts in our century is undiminished. Rage about the stupidity and narrowness of power has not become weaker, while sight of the possibilities of thought and ethical sensitivity has, paradoxically, become clearer through this work. What the Western reportage literature emphasizes is the significance of personal courage and political consciousness, but also the willingness to absorb the increasing social and political complexities that the new forms of internationalization entail. Also the regional fragmentation - especially in Europe - is the stuff of sagacious explanations and analyses. If one finally acknowledges the fact that humor and a skewed elegance are important components of many of the texts that are presented here, one may after all nourish a cautious hope that the world doesn't only move backwards.