

The Literary Journalist as Fellow Human Being

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Three contemporary Norwegian literary journalists discuss the responsibilities of the literary journalist, and the problematic ideals of their genre.

“One day, abruptly, the life of a family member will appear as a book. Their sorrows will resurge again. There will be nights when they cannot sleep. They will see sides of a son or brother that they are not familiar with. That will happen, because I, an inquisitive journalist, lift stones, interfere in Hugo’s and their lives.”

The excerpt above is from *Hugo*, a book by the literary journalist Simen Sætre.¹ The book is based on his experience following the homeless drug abuser Hugo over a period of one year. In this book the author has entered a room that conventionally has been reserved for fictional literature. Whereas the news journalist normally relates to press conferences, meeting rooms, and offices—in other words, the public rooms—Sætre has entered a private room or sphere.

Sætre’s methods and motivation are similar to those found among American practitioners of what has been labeled the “New New Journalism.” In his book *The New New Journalism* Robert S. Boynton² attempts to define these writers and their common platform:

What they do share is a dedication to the craft of reporting, a conviction that by immersing themselves deeply into their subjects’ lives, often for prolonged periods of time, they can bridge the gap between their subjective perspective and the reality they are observing, that they can render reality in a way that is both accurate and aesthetically pleasing.³

These journalists spend weeks, months, and years in the private sphere of their sources and have consequently opened a crack in the door between the private room and the parlor of the public, or, as Boynton explains: “Wolfe went inside his character’s head; the New New Journalists become a part of their lives.”⁴

AN UNANSWERED QUESTION OF ETHICS

Saetre is not the only Norwegian writer who has taken literary ambitions and journalistic methods and entered the lives of ordinary people. The huge success of books such as Åsne Seierstad’s *The Bookseller of Kabul*⁵ suggests that the trends from American New New Journalism are having an impact in Norway. Moreover, narrative journalism is a hot topic in newsrooms; journalists who are able to write a good story in a compelling way are highly regarded.⁶

Such trends have not always gone smoothly, as demonstrated in the wake of Seierstad’s Kabul narrative. After its publication she was criticized for her methods, the truth content of the book, her use of a hidden narrator and interior monologue, the laying bare of intimate details, and the family’s privacy protection. (On this dispute, see Steensen’s article in this issue.) In the wake of the dispute journal editor Karianne Bjellås Gilje called for ethical guidelines for the literary journalist in an article in the Norwegian newspaper *Klassekampen*: “If we get more books where journalists cover milieus either out in the world or at home, we need more discussion about the use of sources in literary journalism. . . .”⁷

The code of ethics of the Norwegian press, *Vaer Varsom-plakaten*, which is a set of normative guidelines adopted by the Norwegian Press Association, provides a strict privacy protection. In September 1999, the leader of the Norwegian Union of Journalists called for a study of the methods that the press used in its coverage of a child murder case. The authors of the report, the so-called Hedrum-rapporten, noted that the press’s professional ethics seemed to cultivate a distanced and detached observation of an event, a professional attitude that left little room for empathy, caring, and compassion. The committee also noted that there is a tendency in the press to limit ethical questions to publishing, keeping the collecting of material and conducting of interviews outside the ethical domain.

In the wake of the report, journalistic conduct and relationships with the sources became its own chapter in the code of ethics of the Norwegian press. It was added that the ethical practice comprises the complete journalistic process. The revision signifies the importance of ethical awareness in the journalist-source relationship, but the wording is still vague.

The uncertainty surrounding ethical and moral issues tied to methods applied in literary journalism persists today. How should the journalist proceed when following individuals for weeks, months, and years in their private sphere? What is morally demanded from a journalist who becomes a part of the source’s life? It is precisely such potential conflict zones in the literary journalist’s entrance into the private sphere that we address in this article.

We will present three trendsetting Norwegian literary journalists’ thoughts on these questions. They are Saetre, who writes for the Norwegian weekly newspaper *Morgenbladet* and has published three nonfiction books since 2004, including *Hugo*, which was nominated for the National Literature Award (Brageprisen); Steen Steensen, an associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences in Norway who spent eight months interacting with the elderly residents of a nursing home for his 2006 book *Beboerne* (*The Residents*); and Seierstad, whose *The Bookseller of Kabul* became the bestselling nonfiction book in Norwegian history and was translated into forty-one languages.

These three literary journalists’ reflections were acquired through a semi-structured interview method. Their reflections are presented by introducing them as they arise in three phases of the journalistic process: 1) preparation, 2) information gathering, and 3) publication and aftermath.

THE PREPARATION PHASE

AN EXTENDED INFORMED CONSENT

How should a literary journalist best prepare sources, and possibly their relatives, on what it means to partake in stories that are so different from traditional news?

Saetre and Steensen emphasize the importance of giving the source a clear idea of what the end result is likely to be. Saetre gave Hugo the book *Stuart: A Life Backwards* by Alexander Masters⁸ in order to create an understanding of his project. Steensen wrote a “test sample text” for the nursing home staff so that they could get an impression of how closely he wanted to portray the life there and how scenic the text would become. According to Steensen the staff was surprised by how he had chosen to write the text and how closely it depicted the sources, even though he had informed them about this in advance.

All the informants believe that the sources must know that they at any time have the possibility to abandon the project or have a kind of “brake pedal.” The possibility to stop the project depends on what kind of stories are told and how deeply the stories delve. According to Steensen: “It is essential

that such sources have much greater rights than official sources.”⁹ Saetre fears that a brake pedal will lead to sources withdrawing right before publication, but points out that when sources have invested so much time in the project, they too will wish to see results from the efforts.

Seierstad, on the other hand, did not make any agreements with sources in *The Bookseller of Kabul* so that they could read the manuscript before publication. He explains:

That was never a question. I didn't even consider doing that. When we discussed it [the main source] said: “This is your book, and you write it the way you want to.” It would also have been practically difficult. The family did not have a phone or mail at this time, and to mail them quotations by post would have been laborious.¹⁰

During her work with *De Krenkede (The Offended)*,¹¹ Seierstad let her main sources have their own quotations read out and be informed about the contexts in which they were used. This was not because she feared that the sources were misquoted, but because they lived in Chechnya, a society with grave repression. She did not want the sources quoted on something that could cause problems for them. Seierstad dropped a whole chapter because of the sources' intervention, even though she thought the chapter could have been exciting.

Seierstad makes an important point when stating that if the source achieves too much control over the text, there is also a risk that essential elements of reportage disappear. The journalists do allow their sources to exert considerable control over the project, even though this may negatively affect their “purpose-rational considerations.” The fact that these journalists give their sources such influence over the process is interesting for several reasons. The code of ethics for journalists in Norway establishes that changes in quoted statements should be limited to correcting factual mistakes. In the book *The New New Journalism* a general principle is that sources shall not have an opportunity to read the whole manuscript, nor their own quotations, before publishing.¹² Steensen goes as far as stating that vulnerable sources also should have a certain influence over how the text is framed, how images are used and the layout is designed, but he does add that this influence is determined by context: It all depends how deeply the journalist delves into the source's private zone.

Working with *Beboerne*, Steensen prepared a written contract with the staff at the nursing home and the city area Sagene. The contract gives a detailed account of his journalistic motives and what the project demands of both parties. This kind of contract could increase the confidentiality in the source relationship, and secure the rights of both the journalist and the source.

But Saetre, Steensen, and Seierstad reject the idea of routinely formalizing a source contract for vulnerable sources.

INCOMPLETE CONSENT

For *Beboerne* Steensen used sources with dementia, sources who evidently could not know the consequences of being interviewed. He had to trust that their relatives and the staff were capable of judging such consequences on their behalf. He believes that such a procedure is justified when the journalist can account for his choices on the grounds of a social and journalistic responsibilities.

In a similar manner Saetre defends “under cover” as a method used when he worked with *Hugo*. Saetre believes that he would not have gained admittance to key places if he appeared as a journalist, whether in drug circles outdoors in Oslo or in the hostels. Because of this, Hugo used to say that Saetre was his brother.

One of Saetre's greatest ethical challenges was that some members of Hugo's family did not want a book to be written about his life. Both Saetre and his book editor talked to family members who did not support the project. The solution became to anonymize Hugo, despite the fact that he himself wanted to appear with his family name. The family was also given the opportunity to read the manuscript before publication. For Saetre it was important to let Hugo decide if he wanted to contribute or not. He further believes that having incomplete consent from relatives is a problem because the process that the journalist exposes the family to is a process that may “bring up things that are difficult, [since] one digs into the childhood and enters into open wounds. . . .”¹³ Now he thinks that the decision to write about Hugo was right: “If the book has positive consequences for many other people and may have negative consequences for the family—how should one compensate for that? There really are no clear answers. But I think it was right. I was not so sure before the book was published. Now I am sure.”¹⁴

When Saetre asks whether the positive consequences for many people legitimizes the harm he possibly inflicts on close relatives, he essentially asks a question concerning the way of thinking in consequentialist ethics: Is it defensible to act on the ground that the decision is likely to have positive consequences for as many people as possible?

CHOOSING SOURCES

In literary journalism it is important that the sources have *good* stories, with conflict, a turning point, and an acknowledgment of one's own situation. Steensen is familiar with several cases where journalists have arranged something resembling an audition in order to choose the best story. But he

finds this practice ethically problematic: "To have people's private life on audition—that does not sound right."¹⁵ He experienced choosing sources for *Beboerne* as somewhat unpleasant, because he had to pick among a rather large amount of people. According to Steenson, the ideal entrance would be to discover the story first, a story that also could tell us something about the society we live in, although this approach cannot be made into a matter of principle.

A JOINT PROJECT?

All of the informants consider it important that journalists seek information about the sources' motivation for participating: "Some may have a political agenda; some want to be portrayed for vanity reasons."¹⁶ Saetre points out that a motivation may have many elements, and he is not sure if the journalist should refuse participation because a source has an "invalid motivation." He believes the source ideally should participate for somewhat similar reasons as the journalist. He himself sought a person who was motivated to display what it was like to live on the streets.

If a journalist and a source share the motivation behind the project, is it then natural to conceive of this type of journalism as a kind of "joint project" between source and journalist? Steensen believes this concept *sounds* erroneous, but still agrees: "One should have a common interest and motivation in telling something important."¹⁷

THE INFORMATION-GATHERING PHASE

PRIVATE SPACES AND THE PUBLIC STAGE

The three journalists consider it important to clarify in advance what the sources wish to be quoted as saying, how much the sources wish to recount, and how much of it the journalist can expose. Nevertheless, the informants admit they also have had problems striking a balance between what one may convey and that which should remain private.

Steensen thinks that on a couple of occasions he went too far in documenting the intimacies in the daily life at the nursing home. He took pictures of the residents in intimate, private situations—for instance, during morning care and change of catheter. The pictures were not intended to be published, but rather to be used as documentation during the writing process. He now regrets having taken some of these pictures.

Saetre also ponders the question of where the boundaries for Hugo's private life were to be drawn: "Which sphere shall he have for himself and where shall I not enter?"¹⁸ He thinks he may have gone too far when he brought Hugo home to his mother, whom he had not seen for four years, and put a

recorder on the table. They had difficulties talking to each other, and Saetre encouraged them to speak, within the confines of an interview: "I entered into a relationship between him and his mother and interfered rather strongly in their lives on the grounds of my motivation, which was journalistic."¹⁹ But he did respect an "untouchability zone" for Hugo. There were things he didn't ask about because he thought it would be too difficult for Hugo to enter into.

Seierstad does not think *The Bookseller of Kabul* is as intimate as many claim it is. But if she were to work with the book anew, she would be more careful with some of the details, among them a scene where she describes a woman washing herself. She now sees that portraying a naked woman in a society where all women wear a burka was a misjudgment: "For me it was a very beautiful scene. It was foolish. I would not do that again."²⁰ She further believes that the intimacy in the book lies more in her presence in their daily life than in that the sources confided their inner thoughts to her. She was careful not to get too intimate in interview situations:

They are very modest, those women. I found it very difficult to ask about things related to sexuality, and I hardly did that unless they invited me to ask about it. We had a conversation about it and I did not include it. It wasn't suitable. It became too intimate, you can say.²¹

Steensen has, on his side, experienced that even if one agrees in advance on a kind of untouchability zone, the source may often exceed it in the interview situation. The solution for him is to remind the source about the interview situation by asking: "Are you sure that this is something I can write about?"

PROTECTING THE SOURCE

According to the code of ethics for Norwegian journalists, one is to: "show consideration for people who cannot be expected to be aware of the effect that their statements may have. Never abuse the emotions and feelings of other people, their ignorance or their lack of judgment. Remember that people in shock or grief are more vulnerable than others."²²

Even though the sources have given informed consent to tell their stories, it is, in the end, the *ethical responsibility* of the journalist to judge whether the sources are ready to tell them. One of Saetre's greatest ethical challenges was to decide if it was right to subject a person to the intense experience of having a book written about oneself. Saetre reflected on how his project would influence a person who already had problems. In this case, he thinks that the solution was to find a person who had the motivation to tell his story, and had been given the possibility to retreat at any time. Saetre chose Hugo as a

source because he perceived him as resourceful. He believes it is right to give the source time to decide if he is ready to contribute.

Steensen, too, mentions time as an important key, because the journalist can never be fully confident that the source is really ready for the attention that may follow:

One cannot as a journalist believe that one possesses such unique abilities to judge characters. One cannot be bombastically certain. One can assess situations to a certain extent. Having time is a key—to not have any time constraints—so that one doesn't intrude into in a grieving process with a plan to publish something the next week. One must be able to come back half a year later and ask: "How does it feel now?"²³

Seierstad perceives two challenges when one attempts to judge if a source is ready to participate: If the source is ready to talk, and if the source is ready to get the story published. Like Saetre she sees a solution in making sources anonymous. In *De Krenkede*, she chose to anonymize children suffering from war traumas. But she also believes that it does not necessarily have to be a great strain on the source to talk about her traumas. It may be a good thing.

None of the informants had any general advice about how one as a journalist should judge if sources are ready to present their stories. However, all of them could account for how they themselves had assessed this problem in specific situations. We therefore interpret them as building their knowledge about traumatized sources on experience rather than on theory about how such sources—and sources under great psychological pressure—act.

The journalists, then, believe that the work process may contribute to something that is beneficial for the source in the sense that difficult matters are talked about rather than suppressed. But when the source uses the journalistic work process as a form of therapy, or when the journalist indirectly creates a kind of understanding of the source's "emotional chaos," does not the journalist then take on the role of a therapist?

JOURNALIST, THERAPIST, OR FRIEND?

According to the code of ethics in the Norwegian press, journalistic integrity to a certain extent presupposes distance. But all three informants experience a detached position as a virtually impossible ideal. Saetre found that it was necessary to play with open cards and let Hugo become acquainted with him to achieve the kind of confidentiality that the book project demanded. Steensen thinks that the journalist necessarily has to enter a different role than the traditional role when one delves so deeply into another person's life:

The question is: Is that a problem? Is it problematic to tell about your own life? I don't worry so much about holding on to the traditional journalist

role. I didn't have any problems with sharing, telling about my own life and talking about other things than what I was there to write about. . . . One is, above all, a fellow human being; one isn't first and foremost a journalist. Particularly this kind of journalism has a clear humanistic side, which makes it ridiculous to pretend that doesn't become a part of it.²⁴

Seierstad, on the other hand, says that she hasn't shared many of her own life experiences in interview situations. She has experienced that most people are not particularly interested in her background, especially not in situations where the sources are in a conflict and both their life situation and their society is so different from her own. When working with *The Bookseller* she did not fear that she would pass on information that the sources gave her confidentially because she didn't speak their language.

Saetre believes that the danger related to getting access to feelings that a source shows in intimate situations is that the journalist may exploit it for commercial purposes. If the journalist uses these feelings in order to sell newspapers, he thinks the journalist acts immorally. Saetre further thinks that the meeting between his publisher and Hugo reminded him that there was a professional context around the project that had to be maintained: "It is OK that I became a friend of Hugo, but there was also a publishing house there which I had to relate professionally to."²⁵

THE JOURNALIST'S APPEARANCE

An ethical dilemma that Seierstad explicitly mentions from working with *The Bookseller of Kabul* was the extent to which she was to enter into discussions with the family:

Should I have explained that "you know, for a Norwegian reader what you are doing now will appear as very unfair"? It was not my role to say that. So I did not enter into many discussions, simply because I did not want to influence the family. . . . I thought that I am not here to reform a family or say "that and that is unjust." Otherwise I could have risked that they had changed their behavior because they knew that I did not like it. . . . I tried to act in such a way that I got the right picture. And then I could not all the time say what I thought.²⁶

Seierstad's issue, the extent to which a journalist should interfere with and influence situations, she observes, was also Saetre's when he was working with *Hugo*: "I may have 200 kroner in my pocket and he stands and freezes, begs, and is about to become ill. How do I relate to that? If I lend him money, then the story will be a different one."²⁷ Saetre found a solution through drawing strict boundaries. He made it clear that he had to follow some rules and that Hugo had to accept them. Saetre could, for example, treat him to food and coffee, but he would not put money in his cup. When Saetre broke

the rules and lent Hugo money, it was used as a kind of experiment that he used in his writing, but then he was also open about his choices and dilemmas in the book. In situations where the journalist does not participate as a character, Saetre believes that the journalist should not interfere unless the circumstances are extreme or dire.

Steensen thinks it is naïve of the journalist to believe one can observe a situation without influencing it through one's presence. That is the problem of the hidden narrator. But as long as one is open about what one does and writes about it in the text, Steensen feels one may be as much of a presence as one likes, and that need not be interpreted as wanting to steer sources in a particular direction to improve the story.

Seierstad has also experienced situations where she wanted to intervene. When working with *The Bookseller of Kabul* she became less concerned about intervening when she felt that she "had the story." Seierstad experienced the dilemma in a situation where the bookseller wanted to report a poor carpenter for a minor theft. She says she then intervened and tried to prevent the bookseller from reporting it. She further says that she intervened because she "had the story" and the carpenter had already been interrogated by the police. She then gave the carpenter money because she felt sorry for him. She considers it absurd to define which situations are appropriate for intervention and which are not, but points out, like Steensen and Saetre, that it is less problematic to intervene in cases where the journalist herself appears as a character in the text.

Saetre witnessed criminal activity. In such situations, he believes it is important to make one's role as observer clear; one should never store substances or interfere in any way, but rather draw back from the situation: "One's presence should be flexible. Generally one should have a role that is laidback and observing."²⁸

PUBLICATION AND AFTERMATH

AN UNEVEN TRADE-OFF

The relationship between reporter and source has traditionally been viewed as a trade-off. In literary journalism it is unusual for the source to ask for media attention or seek publicity. The source spends considerable time in interviews, and in such a context the relationship between source and journalist may appear as an uneven trade-off. Is it then really illogical to compensate for the time and efforts of the source?

Steensen sees it as unethical to pay the source if the source needs money and the payment becomes a condition for the project. Furthermore, he believes it is not necessarily less ethical for a newspaper than for a publishing

house to pay for the source's contribution, but that the uneven trade-off becomes less visible if a book, which has been created on the basis of a meeting between journalist and source, sells well. He has experienced how sources immediately ask: "How much do I get for this?" and he always answers: "Nothing." To him it is important to know that the sources participate with the right motives, and not because they think they can make money.

Hugo received a form of compensation for his contribution from the publisher. According to Saetre, a teacher at the Journalism Program in Oslo suggested the compensation:

I made it clear that [Hugo] would not receive any money for the project. I think the compensation was a decent arrangement; it was an issue between him and the publisher. It was not my money. . . . I would have found it difficult to pay him. That would have been at the expense of what I think about the journalist role.²⁹

Saetre adds that it is not always the case that the source thinks he has not "got[ten] something back" from participating in a large journalistic project. He believes that Hugo appreciated the acquaintance in part because he made contact with someone outside the drug circles. He thinks, then, that Hugo had a positive experience through them getting to know each other.

In several cases, Seierstad has helped those she has written about economically, from her own pocket. She has supported the building of a school in Afghanistan and contributed to opening a bakery in Chechnya. As long as everything happens after the project has ended, Seierstad does not see it as a pressing ethical issue, but rather as a gesture from her as a private person.

The informants, then, have different opinions of which contexts and to what extent it is permissible to compensate for the source's time and participation. But if it is, as Seierstad suggests, acceptable to pay after projects have ended, is it then the case that the journalist stops being a journalist the moment the last period is put in the reportage?

TO WITHDRAW FROM THE PRIVATE SPHERE

When Saetre ended the project with Hugo, he asked himself what further responsibility he had for Hugo: "When one has followed somebody . . . for such a long period, what kind of responsibilities do you then have? I think it has to do with being present—if [sources] need to talk, then one talks with them . . . without trying to save them or solve their problems. It is a kind of passive presence."³⁰

Steensen experienced it as strange to end the relationship with one of the close relatives from the book, after following her for so long. He thinks that one may feel cynical when all contact suddenly ends after publication.

However, he points out: “I do not think that there is any expectation there on the other side either. It is not only that I know the premises and what this is about—neither does the source have an expectation about sustaining that contact. That would not be natural for the source either.”³¹

He does not think the journalist has an extended responsibility for the source’s life situation after publication, except for making sure that the source is comfortable with the attention. He has experienced how sources have contacted him after publication with a kind of expectation that he will write something else or something new, and finds it difficult to reject the requests: “Then one has not succeeded in reaching the common understanding of the boundaries of the project.”³²

Seierstad is of the opinion that when the project has ended, one is free to do what one wishes, such as supporting different initiatives economically. She views her support after she completed her work for *The Bookseller* in this way: “Not really as a penitential exercise, but a little because ethically this is not my story. It is Afghanistan’s story. If I could contribute to more people getting education,[so] that more people can tell their stories, then I have done it.”³³ Still she believes that boundaries for the relationship with individual persons must be clear from the outset: When the project is completed, then the relationship between the professional journalist and the source is over: “You may carry on having contact, but you are not there as a spiritual adviser.”³⁴

THE AIM OF LITERARY JOURNALISM

We have seen that in many cases the informants justify their choices on the grounds of their perception of the *importance* and *relevance* of their projects. It may be difficult to accommodate a traditional understanding of the journalist role in definitions of the purpose behind literary journalism. One definition, for example, sees the literary journalist not as a watchdog, but as a communicator of “the complexity of humankind.”³⁵ We further emphasize how the journalist’s right to interfere with others’ private issues is anchored in journalism’s societal mission, and if this task is not carried out, the right to interfere with others’ private issues disappears. The question then is: How do our informants position their projects within an understanding of a larger societal mission of journalism?

Saetre has difficulties with seeing how all of Nordic literary journalism fulfills a societal task. He sometimes wonders if it is the reading experience itself that is interesting, somewhat like when magazine fiction draws one in by a gripping story, without it having any value beyond itself. Saetre wishes himself to be positioned within an American “New New Journalism” tradition:

In a way there has to be a cost connected to people who tell about their own lives, but that cost must . . . be motivated by a greater framework, I feel. The reason I think it is justified in the case of Hugo is that there is a lack of knowledge about that life situation, or there has been a [perception] that has been wrong. So I think that one can illuminate important matters by [writing about them], and in such a context one may view it in a kind of exposé tradition, in which one illuminates parts of reality to get a proper political understanding.³⁶

Saetre thinks it would have been difficult to legitimize the book if Hugo did not have this motivation. Certainly, a human life may be exciting enough in itself, but Saetre believes there must be a greater motivation than just to tell a good story.

Steensen, too, is of the opinion that one has to elevate the story to exhibit general human values or place the story in a context where the source’s story may say something about a phenomenon in our time or in our society:

To move the readers only at an emotional level is not enough. One must try to include a dimension that appeals to the intellect. But then the question is: Will not all stories about human experience have something universal about them? Yes, but there is also a difference between *Dynasty* and *The Wire*.³⁷

He further points out that a societal task or mission is a difficult concept and that large parts of all journalism cannot be defined as important or relevant. The journalist role must also include telling stories about ordinary people’s everyday lives, but based on a premise that one still “manages to lift it up to a level where the story has a value beyond itself.”³⁸

Seierstad emphasizes that all reportage activity has to do with seeking out someone, traveling to a place, finding out things, and judging if what is discovered is generally beneficial or important to understanding the world:

How can we understand the Afghans without seeking them out, asking them about things, or the Chechens, Serbs or Iraqis, or the drug-addicted or different groups, parents of young children or whatever. This is of course the premise for the whole of reportage, the journalist role; to define for oneself what one thinks is important to write about.³⁹

Even though there are topics that do not interest her, Seierstad also sees a value in reportages or books that are about “ordinary people’s” challenges, narratives that may be of assistance to people facing similar problems.

We interpret the informants’ answers in this manner: If the motivation to write reportage solely is to appeal to a “sense of community,” the journalist fails in writing a good literary reportage. If the topic concerns many people, manages to appeal to the intellect, and at the same time illuminates impor-

tant or unknown parts of our society, the journalist succeeds in writing a solid literary reportage within the frames of the societal mission of the press. The orientation towards individual persons in literary journalism should be considered as a device in order to illuminate important social issues.

CONCLUSION

Summarizing the contributions of the three informants makes it possible to point out a direction for how the Norwegian literary journalist should proceed when entering the private sphere of vulnerable sources. It is clear that vulnerable sources should have more rights than official sources, but the circumstances of literary journalism are such that hard-and-fast professional norms may not be appropriate. In some cases a judgment call, a sense of what feels right, will determine the appropriate way to proceed in an encounter with another person.

These literary journalists are prepared to allow their sources to intervene directly in the narrative of the literary journalist, even though their intervention may reduce the quality of the reportage. But these writers also recognize their responsibility to educate their sources about how literary journalism works, communicating details with revelatory power, so that the source can be fully informed before making a decision to cooperate.

The process of immersion journalism means that other relationships beyond the immediate source connection need to be considered, including relationships with family members and those that may continue after the story is complete. Boundaries must be carefully negotiated, as when the journalist takes on a therapeutic role of helping a source deal with trauma and then perhaps learns information that would not be in the source's best interest to reveal.

In cases where the literary journalist writes a narrative from private spaces without informed consent, the journalist should base the reasons for doing so on a solid, social responsibility. If one interprets the requirement of informed consent too strictly, some areas of society, such as its drug scene and geriatric care, may not be covered properly. Overall the published story ought to have significance beyond itself. The informants use the importance of their project to legitimize their intrusion into the private sphere of vulnerable sources. The personal stories should not only appeal to the readers' feelings, but illuminate social issues.

The debate about the methods used by literary journalists is often reduced to a question of "for" or "against." But one should not underestimate the power of literary journalism as a genre whose function is using personal stories to direct the reader's attention towards critical social issues. The value

of a place for a private life in the public should not be underestimated. The important thing is that literary journalists continuously reflect on the way they approach and use vulnerable sources, and on the power they possess in their communication with them.

NOTES

1. Simen Saetre, *Hugo: En biografi* (Oslo: Stenersens forlag, 2006). Our translation.
2. Robert S. Boynton, *The New New Journalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).
3. *Ibid.*, 27.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Åsne Seierstad, *Bokhandleren i Kabul: Et familiedrama* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2002). Here referred to as *The Bookseller of Kabul*. The English translation was first published in 2003: Å. Seierstad, *The Bookseller of Kabul*, trans. Ingrid Christophersen (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003).
6. Jo Bech-Karlsen, *Åpen eller skjult: Råd og uråd i fortellende journalistikk* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2007).
7. Katrine Ree Holmøy, «Trenger Vær Varsom-plakat», *Klassekampen*, 3 March 2007.
8. Alexander Masters, *Stuart: A Life Backwards* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005). Alexander Masters's book inspired Saetre's project. Masters's book is about the drug abuser Stuart and includes a biographical element where the main person's past is exposed in some chapters.
9. Steen Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.
10. Åsne Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.
11. Åsne Seierstad, *De krenkede: historier fra Tsjetsjenia* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2008).
12. Jon Krakauer is among those who never lets sources read through their own quotations. There is, in other words, a major difference between our informants' practice and American journalists' established practice. Krakauer says: "I tell the person I'm interviewing that he'll have no control over the process, that I won't show the article to him before publication, that he will give me things he'll regret. . . ." See Robert S. Boynton, 167.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.
16. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.
17. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.

18. Simon Saetre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.
19. Ibid.
20. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.
21. Ibid.
22. Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press, Norsk Journalistlag. http://www.nj.no/no/Journalistikk/Etikk/Var_Varsomplakaten/Code+of+Ethics+of+the+Norwegian+Press.b7C_wZHU0V.ips (accessed 5 April 2013).
23. Steensen, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.
24. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.
25. Saetre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.
26. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.
27. Saetre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.
32. Ibid.
33. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.
34. Ibid.
35. Linda Dalviken, *Fortellende journalistikk i Norden* (Kristiansand: IJ-forlaget, 2005), 38.
36. Saetre, interview with authors, 23 March 2009.
37. Steensen, interview with authors, 24 March 2009.
38. Ibid.
39. Seierstad, interview with authors, 27 March 2009.