Patching up paradise:

What started as a lofty dream in the West Virginia hills is now a crumbling memory. But to the Hare Krishna followers who remain, it's almost heaven.

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by

Eric Marshall Hornbeck

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Introduction

This thesis consists of both a background research paper, “Review of literature” and a professional project in the form of a long-form, narrative piece of literary journalism, “Patching up paradise.”

The professional project was reported from October 2007 through March 2008 and written from February 2008 through May 2008. The author spent a total of eight days with a Hare Krishna religious community near Moundsville, West Virginia. The community was founded in 1968 and has shrunk dramatically from a peak population of around 700 people in the 1980s; today, about two-dozen people remain.

Accompanying photographic content was realized by Robert Hardin over the same time period and is included in the enclosed DVD. The DVD also includes an incorporation of the author’s written content with Rob Hardin’s photographic content into a multimedia Web site.

For more on Rob’s experiences and work, please see Rob Hardin’s thesis, “Patching up paradise: What started as a lofty dream in the West Virginia hills is now a crumbling memory. But to the Hare Krishna followers who remain, it's almost heaven.”

Patching up paradise

When the sprinkler system kicked on, the deities on the altar sat unmoving. Nrishimhadev, Gura Nitai and the smiling faces of the siblings Jagannatha, Subhadra, and Baldev stared out into the sanctuary as hundreds of gallons of water sprayed throughout the temple, an Escher optical illusion of stairwells and corridors that bend and warp back into themselves. A Hare Krishna follower had left burning incense unattended on a padded chair upstairs. The aging sprinklers saved the wooden building that February day. But the pools of water warped the sanctuary's floor and had to be cleaned up by a handful of monks.

Two towering wooden doors lead out from the sanctuary to the entranceway, the water of a few weeks' ago mopped up and shoes stacked neatly along the walls. Plastic sheeting hangs over the wide glass doors to the outside to form a makeshift defense against an indecisive winter of rain, sleet, snow and ice. Without shoes the floors are uncomfortably cold. Thick wool socks emerge from monks' plain robes. Chipped tiles and insulation peek through knots in the walls' wood paneling. Among expressionless portraits of an androgynous, blue-skinned Krishna are the doors to modest guestrooms of ill-fitting sheets, sloping roofs and portable radiators. In one, duct tape secures a sprinkler to the wall. This temple, built in the 1980s, was just temporary, but a more permanent one has yet to become more than a thought.

The muted sounds of monks chanting wafts from the sanctuary. A monk leans forward, preparing to place his head to the wooden floor. He stops and gently places a piece of dark parquet flooring back in place — silently doing his small part to keep the

temple together for one more day. He presses his forehead to the floor in the direction of Nrishimhadev, Gura Nitai, and the other ornate deities, who are worshiped and cared for as embodiments of the supreme incarnation of God, Krishna. The monk returns to chanting: *Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare*.

All day, every day, the 16 Sanskrit words of the *maha mantra*, or "great mantra," rise over New Vrindaban, a would-be farm and religious haven perched atop the hills in West Virginia's northern panhandle, just south of Wheeling. About two-dozen people live in the temple, and a handful of others live in cabins, apartments and a few small homes on the fringes of the 1,500-acre property, vassals to the temple's lord.

The Hare Krishna movement, now officially the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, is built around the 16-word *maha mantra*. Popularized about 500 years ago in India, the movement reveres it as the mantra best suited to bring Hindus closer to God through chanting and contemplation. Indian guru Prabhupada brought the mantra to the Western world in the 1960s when, on the advice of his own guru in Calcutta, he rode a freighter to the United States and landed, penniless, on New York's Lower East Side. His solitary chanting of the *maha mantra* in Tompkins Square Park ignited a massive following. George Harrison sung about the movement, temples sprung up nationwide and Hare Krishna followers, clad in their iconic orange and white robes, became ubiquitous sights in airports passing out copies of Prabhupada's translation of the Hindu holy book, the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

In 1968, a group of Hare Krishna followers led by Prabhupada's disciple Kirtananda founded the New Vrindaban community. They dreamed of a life emulating the sustainable and cow-friendly lifestyle of ancient India and a beacon for Westerners seeking Hare Krishna. It swelled, reaching its zenith in the early 1980s when about 700 people lived on the grounds. But the mood grew sour as many doubted Kirtananda's heavy-handed leadership, controversial plans for the community, and a string of scandals divided that divided residents (See Appendix A: Background on illegal activity at New Vrindaban in the 1980s and 1990s). The International Society for Krishna Consciousness expelled New Vrindaban from the worldwide movement in 1987. Eventually, Kirtananda and his supporters left, and in 1998 the worldwide Hare Krishna movement readmitted New Vrindaban. A small group of ardent followers remains, and they hope to turn the community from a shrunken hulk of its former self and into the model of Hindu living that Prabhupada had originally envisioned.

Winding from the temple up the hill, Palace Road bisects New Vrindaban and is named for the Palace of Gold. The palace and its surrounding gardens are an anomaly on a road otherwise lined with trailers, simple ranch houses, and the main temple down the hill. Three years after it was completed in 1979 *The New York Times* called it "the Taj Mahal of the West." Millions have visited it in the past three decades, but it's as far as most visitors — both Hindus and others — venture into New

Vrindaban's grounds. The palace emulates classical Indian architecture but was not designed to withstand the Ohio River valley's cold winters.

Despite harsh winters' toll, the temple is still striking. No photography is officially permitted in the palace — a rule intended for "unruly Indian crowds," says Chris Fici, 27, who has lived in the temple down the hill since the fall of 2006. His soft voice lacks the blustery confidence of some other long-time residents who met Prabhupada before his death and can recite verses from his diaries and the *Bhagavad-Gita*. He often wears a plain black hooded sweatshirt over his white robes, and his hair is cut short except for a small tuft on the crown of his head. That bit of hair and the mixture of clay and water on the bridge of his nose and between his dark eyes signify his devotion to Krishna. His boxy glasses are more Brooklyn hipster than celibate Hindu monk.

Construction of the palace began while Prabhupada was still alive in 1973, Chris says. By the time it opened in 1979 Prabhupada had died, but an eerily lifelike replica of him still sits cross-legged in his intended study, a beanie on its bald head. Although he favored simpler surroundings, his followers still insisted on building the palace and gardens to honor their founder.

Their zeal to build, however, surpassed their skills and preparation. Newly converted Hare Krishna followers flooded into New Vrindaban after it was founded in 1968, and those who built the palace often lacked construction knowledge and experience. The palace's plumbing had to be torn out when it was installed incorrectly.

Followers learned how to lay marble flooring and hang Italian-imported chandeliers as they went.

As he walks through the palaces corridors, Chris says it took him some time to move beyond mere curiosity to making the temple his home. Raised Catholic, believing in God was never an issue for him. As a film major at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, he found himself drawn to meditation and world religion classes, especially Buddhism and Hinduism. His path toward New Vrindaban began when a Hare Krishna follower handed him a flyer for an on-campus event. “So I went,” he says. “The first devotee I met was just like a skinny white kid from Detroit. And I was talking to him and he was like, ‘Yeah, I’m a monk, I live in Detroit.’ And I’d been reading about all these Buddhist monks who had sat in caves for thousands of years and it was like, ‘You’re a monk?’ And it was just very interesting.”

Chris stayed in Ann Arbor after he graduated and fell into a daily routine of smoking pot and delivering pizzas. In 2006, he came to New Vrindaban with some friends for the Festival of Inspiration, the largest Hare Krishna gathering in North America. He was moved by the devotion off all the followers who came to visit — and he became increasingly disenchanted with his directionless life. “I had to leave (Ann Arbor),” he says. “I didn’t have any place to stay. I just made the decision at that time. I just had this day where I was completely fried with Ann Arbor. I was like, ‘This life sucks here. What am I doing here?’ It really came to the front of my desire. ‘What can I do now? Well, I’ve been thinking a lot about moving into the temple. What better time to try it than now?’ ”

So he decided to adopt the lifestyle of a Hare Krishna monk: He became celibate, stopped eating meat, renounced intoxicating substances such as caffeine and tobacco, committed to chanting the *maha mantra* throughout the day, and shaved his head, leaving only the short tuft in the back. He moved into New Vrindaban's *ashram* — the wing of the temple where monks live — in the fall of 2006. "For me, moving in here, because I was just floating around after I left college, it was like: I have to become responsible for myself. I have to do something with my life that I feel is positive," Chris says. "I really felt that coming here and pursuing this path as a monk, as a devotee, going out and doing programs, becoming a spiritual person, trying to become an example for people to follow if they too want to follow a spiritual path — it's not what I want to do, it's what I need to do."

Chris's decision is rare for an American. Fewer young people today turn to Hare Krishna than during the movement's heyday in the 1960s and 1970s. Most believers live off-site; of the 100,000 Hare Krishnas in the United States, Chris estimates that fewer than 100 are monks. Better organization and cultural roots make monks more numerous in India. Chris estimates that New Vrindaban's total congregation numbers up to 1,000 people; most live nearby, in cities like Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and Wheeling. That leaves the onus on the two-dozen full-time residents to maintain the temple, palace, guesthouses, grounds, cows, and gardens — a job done by hundreds at the community's peak.

For that core group, autonomy is the rule while community is the goal. Although there is a temple president appointed by the worldwide Hare Krishna

movement, most jobs are left up to ad hoc volunteers and, more often than not, jobs are done purely by inertia. Those who cook the communal *prasadam* meals for the deities continue to cook, those who recruit on college campuses continue to travel, and those who have organized weekend festivals for decades, such as May's Festival of Inspiration, continue to do so.

Making decisions is "fairly chaotic," Chris says. After the troubles the community had under Kirtananda's leadership, the hierarchy is looser and "management can be a little bit invisible." Yet somehow, Chris says, "things get done. Food is cooked, deities are taken care of." And despite the incense fire near miss a few weeks earlier, he adds with a halfhearted chuckle, "the temple usually doesn't burn down."

Down the hill from the palace, Jay Prabhupada Das — his spiritual name — spends his mornings clucking over his brood of car-sized cows. After 5 a.m. worship in the temple, the native Brazilian crosses Palace Road and fusses over the temple's half dozen dairy cows and one young calf. As he drops scoops of corn, oats, and molasses in front of each one of his charges, he chats with them like an animated mother pouring cereal for fidgety children at the breakfast table.

Jay flits about the barn to warm up the tubes of the mechanical milking machine, the cows mooing anxiously. "When the air start to come inside this, seal it, thhh. The air inside seal it by suction," Jaya, 54, says as hooks each cow's udders to the milking machine while the cows, oblivious, lick up grain with banana-length

tongues. “When you milk, it’s like this: chya, chya chya,” he softly mimics the airy pumping sound. “In my country, it’s by hand.”

The leaders of New Vrindaban brought Jay from Brazil three years ago to inject life into its agricultural projects. Indian culture reveres cows because of a romanticized portrait of ancient India’s rural agricultural society. Each family depended on a cow to till the fields, give milk, and provide fertilizer. The cow in turn was cared for as if it were a family member. But it didn’t exactly work out that way, Jay says, waving his arms. “Here, because you have more than one cow, you know, because I don’t own the cows, then the relationship is different. And sometimes it become, just, work. You know, just work. How do you say in America? Dirty work. You take out the pleasure of the activity just because you change the relationship between animals and people taking care.”

New Vrindaban is still heavily reliant on modern society, Jay says. Monks drive gasoline-powered cars to do outreach programs at regional universities, such as the University of Pittsburgh, West Virginia University in Morgantown, and Ohio University in Athens. The temple provides Styrofoam plates and cups for visitors at mealtimes. A wood-splitter at the back of the temple provides the fuel to heat the temple and keep the deities warm — as long as someone takes the time to use it. Jay and others try to get more people to commit to the day-to-day maintenance of the very agricultural and sustainability projects that are the ostensible goals of Hare Krishna belief. “We have problems to get people to be involved in this job. Nobody wants. I came from South America because no one in America wants to do it,” Jay says.

The worldwide Hare Krishna movement appoints new Vrindaban's leadership, but the sour taste left behind after the community's implosion under Kirtananda has left many averse to strong leadership. Ad hoc decision-making is a major struggle, but the temple's most fundamental difficulty is money. Having shrunk in population by about 95 percent since its peak, New Vrindaban wages financial battles constantly. Maintaining aging buildings, caring for visitors, supporting monks who spend large parts of the day chanting, and traveling to nearby cities such as Pittsburgh and Cleveland to reach out to non-Hare Krishnas isn't cheap. The dairy operation alone costs about $95,000 each year — not including badly needed upgrades and repairs.

When New Vrindaban's troubles in the 1980s and 1990s caused it to hemorrhage residents and supporters, a seemingly obvious group filled the void of support and funding: Indian-American Hindu immigrants. Even non-Hare Krishna Indians found comfort in New Vrindaban's services, where well-cared for deities and vegetarian food were reminiscent of Hindu worship in India.

As more and more Indians moved to the United States, especially to urban areas, Hindu temples began to sprout up closer to home for many Indian-Americans. But New Vrindaban had the potential to offer something urban temples couldn't: cows. Hindu families visiting New Vrindaban perform Hindu ceremonies with some of the cows and spend time with them.

Although some Western residents, like Chris, are slow to follow through on the daily care of New Vrindaban's cows, Hindus across North America donate to its cow protection and rescue programs. A plaque in the barn honors families who have

financially “adopted” cows: Dr. Inderjit Saini and family of Sterling Heights, Michigan, adopted Laxmi; Sonia Lohiya of Newport Beach, California, adopted Sunita; M.R. Kothary and family of Ontario, Canada, adopted Gauri. Others cows are supported from families in New York, South Carolina, Wisconsin, and Arizona. Polaroids of deceased cows are taped on the barn’s wall with their names carefully penned below, as if grandparents, aunts, uncles.

Most weekends, especially in the warmer months, busloads of Indian-American pilgrims arrive from New York, Detroit, Washington, Toronto, and all over North America to experience rural Hare Krishna living. Such pilgrimages are common in India but are more rare in the United States because there are only a handful of such rural temples and, because of its illustrious past, New Vrindaban is one of the oldest and most well known. And, like in Indian culture, “all the rich people maintain the religious people,” Jay says. Donations keep the community alive, and Jay supplements charity by selling excess milk to local Hindu families. In one of the barn’s rooms, stacks of boxes filled with dried cow dung, an excellent fuel for fires, are shipped to distant Hindus and even to Westerners for use in exorcisms.

But getting residents themselves to pay more than lip service to the dairy operation has been difficult. “It’s sad, because we know that real wealth is coming from this. You have milk, and you have ox. You are independent and you have time for yourself,” Jay says. “It’s so difficult. I don’t have the answer.”

The pitch in the whirring sound of the milking machine changes, signaling that it’s time to unhook the milking machine from the quieting cows. He records how

much milk each cow gave that morning and pours it into large containers. “Do you know the secret to caring for cows?” Jay asks with a half grin and a raised eyebrow. “Patience.”

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna. At 5 a.m., the beginning of the day’s first worship service is announced with the ominous bellow of a conk shell. When followers enter the sanctuary, they kneel down and press their foreheads to the ground in the direction of the bejeweled, static deities.

Krishna Krishna Hare Hare. Followers and chant sing the *maha mantra* and other Hindu mantras. Drums beat, the pace quickening from a drowsy yawn to a driving tempo. Arms stretch toward the ceiling, bodies swaying to the hypnotic beat of the drums, chanting and chanting and chanting. Some dance and twirl or jump and spin, all to please the deities.

Hare Rama Hare Rama. As the *maha mantra* grows louder, the priests wave plump fans in front of the deities. Elaborate likenesses of a multitude of gods and demigods, the most important being incarnations of Krishna, believed to be the supreme incarnation of God, are treated as if they were the gods themselves — which means that each one is carefully bathed, its clothes are changed daily, and it is offered three specially prepared meals every day. Special food is cooked for the deities, who are served during worship. (After the service, the offering is added to the communal meal.)

Rama Rama Hare Hare. During large festivals hundreds of people, nearly all of them pilgrims and day-trippers, join in. The crowd surges back and forth from the altar, shoeless feet scurrying across the smooth floor. Followers dance together in spinning circles. The chanters face the front altar, then a side altar, then a likeness of Prabhupada, back to the front altar, and so on, for up to several hours. But on a cold February day there are few visitors. High-energy chanting soon calms down into meditation. Followers use a string of plain white beads to count the mantras they've murmured to themselves. They pace around the sanctuary or sit in the lotus position and sway as they mumble the *maha mantra* and finger through beads. Later, one of the followers sits on a fat, low chair and preaches on the *Bhagavad-Gita*. "There used to be 700 people here. Now there are only a few. How can we go on?" he asks. "We have to be fit and ready. The snowball will keep growing and Krishna Consciousness will spread."

Four hours after the morning's first blow of the conch shell, worshipers move from the heavily adorned sanctuary to the slopping roof and chipped tiled floor of the neighboring *prasadam* room, where communal meals are shared.

Over an egg- and meat-free breakfast, Jayasri, 59, tells of her conversion when she met Prabhupada in Hawaii four decades ago. He sat behind a desk of voluntary poverty made of a piece of plywood that sat on two bricks. Since then, she raised her children as Hare Krishnas and has visited temples around the world. She lives outside the temple now with her husband. "It's fun," she says. "Spiritual life relieves the soul of anxiety."

Fifty-four-year-old Mathura became a Hare Krishna follower in 1978 and has lived at New Vrindaban since 1996. Prabhupada's mission was to bring Hare Krishna beliefs to the West. But the shift from Westerners to Indian-Americans wasn't what his followers envisioned. "The fact that we're not reaching out as much to Westerners in the last 15 years is a big black spot for many of us," Mathura says.

Sitting cross-legged on the *prasadam* room floor and eating out of a simple metal dish, Mathura says he first came to New Vrindaban in order to run a natural, herbal pharmacy using plants native to Appalachian West Virginia. Ten years later, Mathura's pharmacy is still just a dream.

Between the temple and the dairy barn, a small, green house sits along Palace Road. It would be at home in a suburban subdivision. Walking up with his guitar for an afternoon of planned group fellowship and music, Chris says it's unlikely that all the people who said they would attend will materialize. And, if they do, he doubts they'll arrive on time. He shrugs his shoulders and walks through the snow, the cold wind whipping over the stubble on his head.

Inside, Chris is the only follower to join Devananda, a tall, lanky Canadian man who lives in the house. Shoes stand at attention around the wood-burning stove, chairs and couches arranged around it. Before coming to New Vrindaban, Devananda worked as a butcher and on a cargo ship that plied the waters between Montreal and Newfoundland. It was a rough life, he says, tuning his guitar and sipping ginger tea, and not one he wants to return to.

“Want to play something?” Devananda asks Chris. They sing the *maha mantra* and pop music that sprung from the Hare Krishna movement. “Really want to show you, Lord,” the pair sings, drowsily strumming their guitars to George Harrison’s reverent tribute to the *maha mantra*. “That it won’t take long, my lord. My sweet Lord.”

Forty years after it was founded, New Vrindaban is still a long way from the utopia Prabhupada envisioned. Yet followers stick around and find strength in the community of believers they’ve created. New Vrindaban may not yet be a failed experiment — just a community in a mid-life crisis.

“There’s nowhere in this world where you can escape difficulties,” Chris says. “You can’s just come here and live in the temple and think it’s like blissful heaven — because it’s not.”

Devananda agrees. The few followers left at New Vrindaban are like fish, deep in the open water, he says. While storms on the surface roll the waves and toss boats, the fish below keep swimming on and on and on, oblivious to the tempest above. Like those fish whose mouths open and close, rhythmically, hypnotically, Hare Krishna followers chant. *Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna*. Devananda says that he’d like to get a maple-syrup operation started at New Vrindaban. It hasn’t happened yet.

“We’re just trying to keep our one temple from burning down,” Chris says.

Appendix A
Background on illegal activity at New Vrindaban in the 1980s and 1990s

New Vrindaban's population continued to swell after Prabhupada's death in 1977. Kirtananda hoped to attract new converts by building seven sprawling, flashy temples on its seven hills, just like New Vrindaban's namesake town in India, where Krishna is said to have spent his childhood. By the early 1980s, about 700 Hare Krishna followers lived on the grounds. By 1985, New Vrindaban was the second-largest employer in Marshall County, West Virginia.

However, a string of scandals divided the community. In 1986, Thomas Drescher was convicted of the murder of a fellow follower. FBI agents, investigating accusations of racketeering and child molestation, raided the community in 1987 and arrested Kirtananda. The International Society for Krishna Consciousness expelled New Vrindaban and all its members from the worldwide movement the same year. In 1996, Kirtananda pleaded guilty to federal racketeering charges, and his supporters left the community. Finally, a fraction of its former size, New Vrindaban was readmitted to the worldwide Hare Krishna movement in 1998.

—compiled from Associated Press reports

Appendix B
Review of literature

The genre of literary journalism is finding increased use in newspapers and other media as writers, editors, readers, and advertisers see its benefits, but the form remains little studied (Kramer 2002). This paper will define the term "literary journalism," list its characteristics, explore its history, review the legal and ethical considerations, examine the limited scholarly studies of the form, and discuss its applications to this thesis.

Terms

"Literary journalism" is a term used to describe a writing style that has also been called creative nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, narrative journalism, intimate journalism, and the new journalism (Reagan 2000; Forché and Gerard 2001). Creative nonfiction is "the most inclusive term," encompassing all forms of "compelling fact-based writing" while the slightly narrower term narrative nonfiction tends to exclude lyric essays. Closer to the nonfiction end of the creative nonfiction spectrum is literary journalism, which excludes most memoirs (Forché and Gerard 2001).

Characteristics

While so-called "straight" journalism or formulaic newswriting is driven by reportage and the who, what, where, when, and why of current events (Talese 1996), literary journalism combines traditional reportage with the creative and stylistic approaches of fiction to "make a stab at explanation, figuring out how such or another wonderful or terrible thing could have happened" (Forché and Gerard 2001, 97).

Typically, only one fiction technique, the invention of characters and details, is strictly off limits (Sims and Kramer 1995). Literary journalism can also add a sense of coherence to news stories that incorporate intertwining narratives, complicated subjects, and large amounts of data and that require context in a technical field (Franklin 1987).

Literary journalism might “read like a novel,” but unlike novels, the writing of literary journalists is true (Reagan 2000). More specifically, literary journalism is characterized by the rigorous drive for accuracy preached by “straight” journalism, immersion reporting, the narrative storytelling techniques of voice, narrative structure and organization, and the use of symbols to represent literary themes and abstractions (Sims and Kramer 1995) or, more succinctly, exhaustive research, a literary writing style, and a search for deeper meanings (Talese 1996).

Professional journalism organizations have increasingly embraced literary journalism as a way to attract readers (Spadora 2008). Even in the limited space of a newspaper, the defining characteristics of literary journalism can be utilized (Stepp 2005). Working journalists, trained to adhere to “facts-consciousness and objectivity,” often fear a form that lacks strict ethical guidelines; a general rule of thumb for these ethical conundrums is a mantra to not add “things that did not happen” and to not “mislead the public in reproducing events” (Clark 2004).

In his introduction to the anthology *The New Journalism* (1973), Wolfe highlights four criteria that differentiate a piece of literary, or, as he called it, new journalism from a piece of traditional journalism: “scene-by-scene construction,

dialogue, point of view and the detailing of status life," (1973, 48) the last of which Wolfe alternatively defines as simple symbolism. "When one moves from newspaper reporting to this new form of journalism, as I and many others did," Wolfe writes (1973, 50), "one discovers that the basic reporting unit is no longer the datum, the piece of information, but the scene, since most of the sophisticated strategies of prose depend upon scenes."

Since the 1960s, the genre of literary journalism has expanded and continues to lack narrow categorization (Sims and Kramer 1995). Still, there are a wide array of characteristics that distinguish it from its two chief influences, journalism and fiction. Literary journalism simultaneously emphasizes immersion reporting and extensive background research, "implicit covenants" with readers about accuracy of reporting, covers "routine" events rarely deemed newsworthy by traditional journalism, uses a simple creative style and "intimate voice," and advocates fiction-influenced form and structure to create "meaning" for readers (Sims and Kramer 1995)

Information gathering

Deep research and reporting give literary journalists the same raw materials of character, fact, and detail that a traditional journalist would utilize, in addition to being able to come to conclusions on the topic (Forché and Gerard 2001). But while a newspaper journalist, for instance, often writes many stories each day and, therefore, can't spend lots of time on any one topic, literary journalism is grounded in "old-fashioned legwork, hanging out with the story's subject day after day" (Talese 1996, 19).

The investigative reporting that literary journalism requires differs from traditional “dry” investigative journalism in its emphasis on “human drama” over factual information (Reagan 2000). Conducting multiple in-depth interviews requires commitment not just from the reporter, but from subjects as well. Building trust takes time, and being honest with subjects up front about the time and openness commitment required is an important first step in building that trust. More reporting, even when it doesn’t end up on the page, still imbibes the writer’s voice with a sense of authority that would be lacking without such background (Reagan 2000).

Spending extended periods of time with subjects comes with both risk and reward. The risk is being voyeuristic by spending so much time with a subject. This, oddly, can go both ways, as a reporter in a group of subjects can become the odd man out, the observed rather than the observing. The reward in observing subjects in “everyday life” comes in the “revealing moment” when a subject is able to be frank and revealing about some aspect of his or her life or the story, a moment that can come only with the trust built by immersion reporting (Talese 1996; Sims and Kramer 1995). This often anthropological approach of participant observation, in which the “shared experience” is emphasized over the interview, helps supply many of the supporting sensory and observational details, such as conversations, that add to the narrative structure. Participating in subjects’ life is a method of finding the story’s narrative thread (Sims and Kramer 1995).

In addition to investigative reporting’s collection of interviews, government documents, and observations, writers of literary journalism also gather sensory details

and scenes — sometimes reconstructed (Reagan 2000). While some reporters refuse to reconstruct scenes that they did not personally see because it makes the narrative more prone to mistakes based on interviewees' point of view and errors in memory, others rely on detailed, thorough interviews and fact-checking in scene reconstruction (Reagan 2000). Using interviews with sources to reconstruct scenes and events the writer was not present to witness, compressing the timeline of events and interviews, and changing direct quotes for clarity or literary embellishment are heavily debated within the journalism profession, blurring the distinction of what constitutes "truth" when the competing needs of fact and storytelling clash (Fakazis 2006).

History

The marriage of "artful" writing styles to nonfiction writing and reporting is hardly new. Literary journalism can be traced back as far as the "artful histories" of the ancient Greek historians Herodotus and Thucydides, the "artful biographies" of the ancient Roman writer Plutarch, and the "artful journalism" of Addison and Steele (Talese 1996). Writers such as Montaigne, Rousseau, and Thoreau and their literary essays set the stage for later movements. Daniel Defoe, Charles Dickens, Jack London, and George Orwell pioneered "documentary 'immersion' journalism" (Forché and Gerard 2001; Sims and Kramer 1995).

Rose Wilder Lane, the daughter of children's books author Laura Ingalls Wilder, was noted for her move from fiction writing to the blurring of journalistic parameters with her own literary journalism. Her work looked at factual events through a prism of American values. Her work also demonstrates the prevalence of

literary journalism not just among “East Coast establishment” writers and publications, but among women and women’s publications as well (Lauters 2007).

Janet Flanner, working as a correspondent in France for *The New Yorker*, imbued fictional techniques into her accounts of early 20th-century Parisian life. Her techniques, like those of other 19th- and early 20th-century artists, utilize literary journalism techniques but predate its codification in the 1960s (Thorne 2006).

Ernest Hemingway, too, favored storytelling over newswriting in his own accounts of the Spanish Civil War while working as a newspaper correspondent. His entire career freely blended journalism and fiction. In fact, he himself saw the distinction between the two to be very narrow (Shaber 1980).

Ryszard Kapuscinski, a prolific Polish journalist and travel writer, fell closer to fiction than literary journalism, fabricating scenes, creating composite characters based on a number of real sources, and scoffing at accurate rendering of quotations. Kapuscinski, however, viewed his fictionalized journalism as “truer” than the straightforward news accounts he wrote for the Polish Press Agency (Aucoin 2001).

Critics have often dismissed literary journalism since American newspapers began to move towards hard, “straight” news reporting after the Civil War. This rejection stemmed from both the decline of realism in literary circles and literary journalism’s perceived threat of destroying literary standards by its association with the perceived non-literariness of journalism. Some writers tried to subtlety sidestep this ambivalence. Ernest Hemingway, for example, decided to publish a piece of literary journalism intended for *The New Republic* in a collection of short stories

instead; he simply giving it a new title, thus making it palatable to literary critics (Harstock 1998).

The rise of Lippmann's post-World War I call for "objectivity" helped propel the perception of literary journalism out of traditional journalism and into the gray area between fact and fiction. Journalism was seen as "utilitarian" and incompatible with literary pursuits (Harstock 1998).

It wasn't until the 1960s, however, that this blend became more explicit and entered the domain of publications more closely aligned with "straight" reportage. Truman Capote's 1964 nonfiction novel *In Cold Blood* would later be judged as the first work of this new, more codified style. It moved from the pages of books to magazines such as *Esquire* and *New York*, explicitly employing traditional journalistic reporting techniques as the foundation for the short story's and the novel's stylistic techniques in writing that either was marketed as journalism or tackled people and subjects traditionally left to the "straight" reporting of newspapers and other media (Wolfe 1973). By the end of the decade this new style, later coined "The New Journalism" by Tom Wolfe, was a full-blown, if still undefined, phenomenon. Initially this style was overtly attacked by mainstream literary circles and seemingly ignored by mainstream news publications (Wolfe 1973), but today its influence can be seen even on the pages of newspapers, business writing, and technical writing (Sims and Kramer 1995).

Using a literary approach to story organization helps bring focus to otherwise daunting levels of data. When literary journalism first emerged as a distinct form in

the 1960s, audiences had considerably fewer media messages bombarding them than modern media consumers. But literary journalism can still fill a niche, lending a narrative structure to mounds of overwhelming information — by definition the form's forte (Franklin 1987).

In fact, since the early 1990s, more and more news media have abandoned traditional inverted pyramids and newswriting in favor of literary journalism or elements of it (Abrahamson 2006). Literary journalism has broken out of the magazines that first popularized it for the mainstream in the 1960s and expanded into newspapers and bastions of print journalism, displacing traditional journalism with "traditional storytelling" (Harstock 2007).

Objectivity

The contemporary increase in the use of literary journalism has been attributed to a reaction to the "objective" style of reporting — "short, concise, relatively neutral in tone and intent and structured in descending order of importance," often described as the inverted pyramid (Harstock 2007, 262) — that has dominated news media, especially newspapers, since the early 20th century; competition from new media's embrace of literary forms; and reporters' and editors' preferences for the style, all leading to a rejection of early critics' disdain for literary journalism and to even the most "conventional" news media institutions embracing it (Abrahamson 2006).

Objectivity, as a professional journalistic virtue, is often abandoned in literary journalism. Objectivity is difficult for even "hard" news to maintain, as has been shown in times of violent conflict when patriotic assumptions overpower professional

news standards, such as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Zandberg and Neiger 2005; Viser 2003). Objectivity represents a professional goal that is impossible to maintain 100 percent of the time in practice (Zandberg and Neiger 2005).

News media's views on what constitutes objective reporting are fluid, shifting over time with the changing of society's power structure. Shifts in institutionalism, culture, and the political environment shift views on objectivity among news media, both institutionally and organizationally, precluding an unchanging standard of objective reporting (Kaplan 2006). The interaction of journalists with their sources, too, obstructs true objectivity. The nature of a community, such as the dominant social groups and sources who shape events' interpretations, shapes the news media's coverage of it. This straight news approach prevents a picture of events' "true" form, obstructed by an impossible objectivity framework that can't break through the "nuance" inherent in the news (Berkowitz and TerKeurst 1999). News media's coverage, by emphasizing objectivity, reflects the desires of the status quo (Bowman 2006).

Although straight newswriting itself is not objective, readers can be skeptical of literary journalism, especially when it appears in newspapers, because of its liberal use of fiction techniques. "About this story" boxes are a problematic solution to this problem, however, because they have to go very far to be effective. By using the same attribution techniques as newswriting, however, writers can clearly show readers "where each piece of information came from" in order to add accountability and clarity to such writing (Frank 2002).

Legal considerations

Literary journalism techniques can raise legal concerns. The techniques of narrative journalism create a "borderland" between libel law and professional journalism ethics (Forde 2005). The form's rejection of traditional journalistic standards of objectivity and neutrality — in addition to the lack of any "official, codified authority" (Fakazis 2006) — make it more susceptible to First Amendment defamation claims (Forde 2005).

One case in particular, *Masson v. New Yorker Magazine, Inc.*, however, has been used extensively to defend literary journalists from libel (Forde 2005). In *Masson v. New Yorker*, the Supreme Court applied a "gist rule" to literary journalism, in which "minor inaccuracies do not reach falsity as long as the substance of the defamatory matter is substantially true," which brought the Supreme Court's actual malice standard long applied to traditional newspaper writing in line with literary techniques (Forde 2005, 107), rejecting the "old boundary line separating subjective storytelling from objective reporting" (Fakazis 2006, 20). In an analysis of twenty-one federal and state high court defamation cases involving quotations that were altered "either through their use of words or literary embellishments," Forde (2005) that found nineteen of those cases used *Masson v. New Yorker* to successfully defend against libel suits. However, *Masson v. New Yorker* has not made literary journalism completely immune to defamation suits, especially the use of anecdotes and time compression (Forde 2005).

The future of literary journalism

News media have begun to take literary journalism's approach online. For example, researchers found that the *Philadelphia Inquirer* used Web elements such as Web video, audio, photographs, graphics, and maps to "enhance the power" of a long-form narrative piece of literary journalism in a special section of its Web site, "Blackhawk Down" (Royal and Tankard 2004).

The "Blackhawk Down" site adapts literary journalism techniques to Web technology, including scene reconstruction through video clips, extended audio clips of dialogue, first-person accounts that "corroborate" the written narrative and its "conversational" voice, combining linear and nonlinear storytelling, and background digressions — "the Web, with its capability for hyperlinks, is particularly well suited to handle the digressions characteristic of some literary journalism" (Royal and Tankard 2004, 86-87).

Only some of the hopes of hyperlinking and other possibilities to journalism the Web has made possible have come to fruition. The Internet was seen in the 1990s as a place where readers could experience the endless information and interactivity that were prohibited by limited space in the newspaper. But the Web remains a "downstream product," and the extra context cut out of news stories to fit in the newspaper often doesn't find its way online. Hyperlinking, too, is underutilized, media companies being reluctant to send readers to others' sites and, for many news sites, internal hyperlinking isn't routine. While most newspaper writing continues to be traditional newswriting, the Web has legitimized blogs and forums, adding to the

expansive and inclusive philosophy of media and writing style on the Web. The main roadblock, however, is time. "The time it takes to break out of column inch display of news text into new story forms is time that is hard to find (Paul 2005)."

Some reporters have seen a need for a change in how news stories are written; newspapers are no longer readers' go-to source for "up-to-the-minute" news, having been largely replaced by television and the Internet, but instead where readers seek "detail and interpretation." Such views have prompted literary journalism, long a stalwart of feature writers, to find its way into the news section of traditional newspapers, combining with traditional techniques such as the inverted pyramid, to bring variety to newspaper writing and to compete against electronic media. Such methods can make "news stories easier to read and more interesting" (Beasley 1998, 81). Newspapers reporters, too, have embraced the form, indicating that it has a place in news stories, newswriting-oriented reporters are able to write in the style, and that a change is needed in newspaper style, the increase of the use of narrative writing being a commonly cited option (Beasley 1998).

Literary journalism has been touted as a possible antidote to chronically falling circulation at newspapers by attracting new and different readers. The form has been compared to blogs, sharing much of the same personal and narrative style (Spadora 2008). Convincing budget-minded editors, though, is a different matter. Literary journalism lacks a sort of "public verifiability," that is, an editor can make a few phone calls to verify quotes or statistics in a news story, but such measures aren't possible to verify scenes, emotions, or sensory details in a literary journalism story,

even for the easily observable sensory details at a murder trial, for example (Many 1996). Advocates of literary journalism can still encourage the use of the form among the traditional newswriting culture of contemporary newspapers include sprinkling literary journalism techniques like scenes and sensory details into daily stories, sharing examples of well-written literary journalism from other newspapers, enlisting the aid of scene-conscious photographers (Kirtz 2004), giving writers time to craft literary journalism, acknowledging that number-driven stories are abstract for readers without real-life details that literary journalism can provide, and refraining from "belittling" sensory details by referring to them as "color" (Many 1996).

Conclusion

Literary journalism still resists easy definitions because it strays liberally into the borders of other genres (Harstock 1999), and it continues to blend together elements of traditional "straight" news reporting and both memoir and fiction (Harstock 1998), blurring the lines between "hard" news and "soft" news in today's media environment (Abrahamson 2006). "Its increasing publication reflect(s) a shift in critical perception in the newspaper establishment as to what constitutes journalism" (Harstock 2007, 258).

The increasing use of the Web, too, has broadened the reach of literary journalism techniques, including as they were applied in this thesis. In-depth immersion reporting and the collection of sensory details on location were key for the success of both the written aspect of the thesis as well as the photographic and audio content. In addition, the traditional newswriting approach of inverted pyramid was

completely rejected in favor of literary goals, such as scene setting, character development, and theme. Alteration of quotations and scene reconstruction were unutilized not only because they weren't necessary to advance the narrative, but also because of the ethical concerns that their use would have raised. Time compression, however, was used, because it both advanced the story and was easier to utilize while still retaining an ethical approach.

By creating a rich Web experience of written literary journalism, Web design, photography, and audio interviews, readers' Web experience will mimic much of the theory driving literary journalism, namely a call for context, background information, and the use of sensory details. A straight news story would give readers the facts. But a rich, complex package also allows readers to understand subjects' motivations and feelings, see the setting, hear the characters, and experience the story as much as possible without visiting the location for him or herself.

Appendix C
Reflections

Robert Hardin and I approached a joint thesis with the intention of integrating visual content with written content on a multimedia Web site. To gather this content, we searched for a subject or subjects that would allow us long-term “immersion” access, permitting both Rob and me many hours or days of interviews, conversations, and interaction in the subjects’ day-to-day lives.

We searched for an overarching theme that could tie several long-form pieces together, settling on intentional communities in rural Appalachia. We approached members of various communities and met with members of New Vrindaban, a Hare Krishna religious community near Moundsville, West Virginia; Valley View Mennonite Church, a conservative Mennonite congregation in Gallia County, Ohio; the Susan B. Anthony Women’s Land Trust, an all-women community in Athens County, Ohio; and Far Valley Farm, a loosely organized rural community in Athens County, Ohio.

With the exception of New Vrindaban, we chose to abandon our pursuit of stories at the other communities. Although Valley View Mennonite Church provided me ample access into congregation members’ homes and members’ openness to extensive interviews, they were ultimately uncomfortable with identifying photographs of congregation members appearing on the Internet. Members of the Susan B. Anthony Women’s Land Trust agreed to off-site interviews and photographs, but Rob and I were prohibited from visiting the community’s land because of gender-

based visitor restrictions. Some members of Far Valley Farm were open to interviews and providing access for photography, but interviews were difficult to schedule in the limited time frame of the thesis and were often postponed by community members.

Only the members of New Vrindaban provided the kind of long-term, open access for interviews, photographs, and immersion that Rob and I originally envisioned. For this reason, we chose to focus our efforts there.

We spent a total of eight days over three weekends in October 2007, February 2008, and March 2008 at New Vrindaban. We were able to gain access to community members' daily lives and religious services. However, in order to maintain enough distance from subjects so that we were observing but not participating in their lives, we attended religious services but did not partake in chanting, singing, or dancing.

Our first trip to New Vrindaban took place in October 2007. We traveled there with the Global Leadership Center (GLC), an Ohio University certificate program emphasizing international and multicultural experiences. We focused primarily on the GLC students and their experiences, but interacted with Hare Krishna members as well. Simply being there, even though we might not have been working with Hare Krishna followers primarily, helped us to become a familiar and nonthreatening presence. At that time we didn't discuss with residents the possibility of their participation in a long-term project, but, when we did, they weren't as unsure as other communities were because, I believe, the time we had spent among them in October made Rob and I a "known quantity" to the community members. Judging from some members' later comments, the community had had a touchy relationship with the

media in the past, especially during the community's most turbulent days. Members felt journalists intended to sweep in and get a "sensational" story with no real sense of the community.

This feeling worked to our advantage by the time we returned in February 2008. The simple fact that we came back demonstrated that we were interested in more than simply the "fly in" story. In addition, the community is less busy and there are fewer members there in the wintertime, providing us more one-on-one time with members and an increased sense among members that we were there to listen to their stories, beliefs, opinions, and experiences.

It was in February that we had some of our richest experiences journalistically. During one of the numerous worship services we attended, we witnessed one of the very "telling details" that added to the richness of the feature article: the monk bending down and replacing one of the warped floor joists. That was a scene that could only be captured serendipitously by being in the right place at the right time. Descriptive and sensory details, such as the duct tape holding the sprinkler to the wall and the pictures of cows taped to the wall of the barn, could only be captured by extensive time spent in the community. Our efforts at immersion style reporting paid off. I was able to collect several notebooks' worth of information, observations, and interviews, only a small portion of which made it into the final piece. This large well of notes to draw from, however, helped give me the confidence to write the piece (I didn't have to fish for one more scene or detail; I could pick the best ones) and imbued

the piece with a sense of authority that having collected less information and fewer observations wouldn't have allowed.

Between our visit to New Vrindaban in February and our final visit in March, Rob and I compared notes, discussed our approaches, and evaluated photos, and I wrote a first draft of the feature article. This "time out" was crucial to our efforts. It allowed us to collect our thoughts, refocus our efforts, and determine what additional information we needed to make the project work. During our final visit, we conducted the last interviews and obtained the last bits of facts and information that were lacking in the first draft. Our final visit, therefore, was more about "tying up loose ends," collecting final information, and a general wrapping up. Because of our long timeline in completing the project, we were able to devote time to this final visit; time which was well spent and helped form a much more cohesive and unified narrative between the written and photographic content.

Spending so much time with subjects was a challenge at times. During long weekends at New Vrindaban, disconnected from the rest of the world, I sometimes struggled to stay motivated. It was exhausting at times to be in "reporter mode" for several days in a row without a break — there was no "end of the day" or home to go to at night; I had to continue reporting for as long as I was there.

Other times, spending this time with subjects also paid huge dividends. I experienced more "revealing moments" than I hoped or wished would occur, including Chris Fici discussing his troubled life before committing his life to Hare

Krishna beliefs and Jay Prabhupada Das's frank observations about why fellow community members pay merely lip service to the community's dairy operation.

I did not find too much difficulty in becoming "too close" emotionally to subjects, primarily because I didn't spend time with just one person but with many of the residents of New Vrindaban. It was easier to become to close with subjects like Chris, who was similar to me in age and was not as unwavering and sure in his beliefs as residents who had been at New Vrindaban longer (because he was still "feeling out" his beliefs and questioning religious and organizational aspects of New Vrindaban for himself, it was easier for me to do so with him). With other members, who were older and unquestioning of their beliefs, it was easier to maintain a professional journalistic distance.

I took some liberties with "literary" techniques, but none that compromised the "truth" of the narrative. I did not reconstruct scenes or alter quotations, but I did compress the timeline of events and interviews. The events do not take place in chronological order and some scenes, such as Jay in the cow barn, incorporate quotes from several separate interviews. Compressing the timeline added to the readability and literary style without misleading the reader about setting, characters, or the facts of the story.

Additionally, I learned a great deal from working one-on-one with a photographer. The type of close collaboration that we experienced can be rare in the working world, but journalists who can think across media formats are becoming increasingly necessary as news Web sites expand media offerings to incorporate print,

video, photography, and audio in one package. I learned a great deal about what make a compelling photograph, what conditions are necessary for quality photography, how a “visual person” thinks and sees a story, and how to communicate with a visual person. Rob, I believe, learned the same things about a “word person” from me.

Overall, the project was successful in my goals of using immersion reporting, in-depth interviews, and extensive observation to inform a piece of long-form, narrative literary journalism and a multimedia-rich Web site.

Appendix D
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Appendix E
DVD of Web site