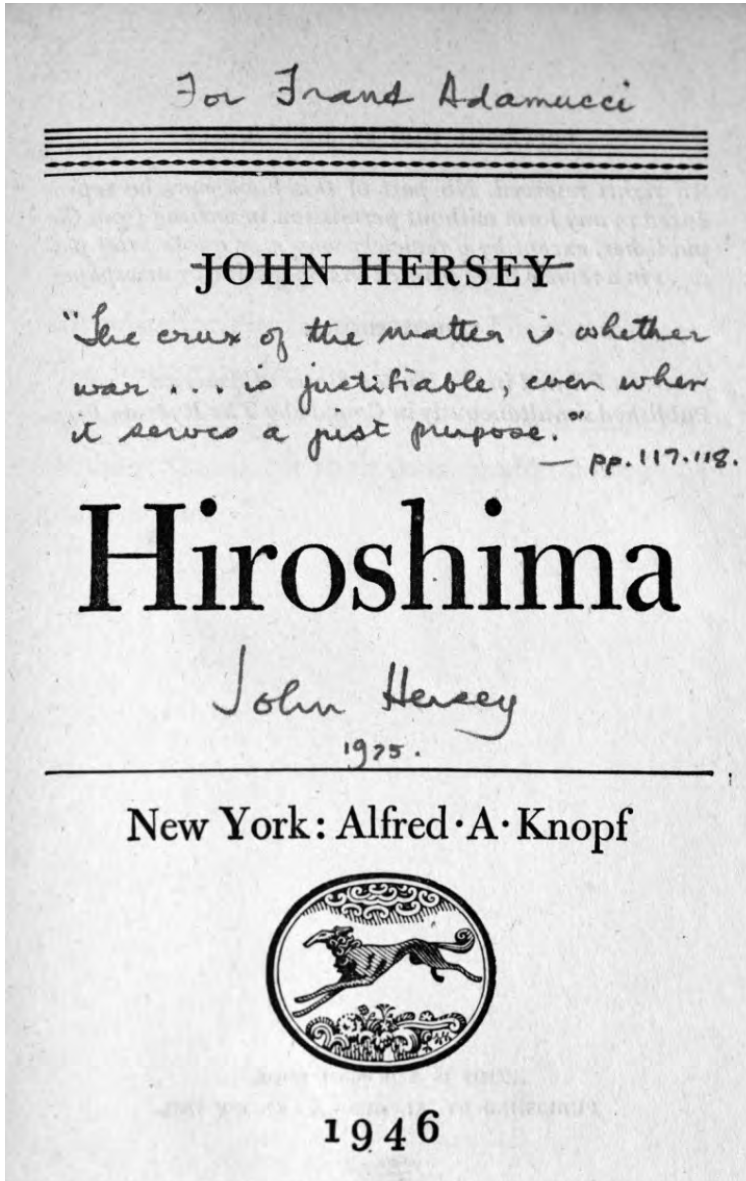


# Book Reviews . . .

Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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Title page of *Hiroshima* with a quotation from the report of Father Johannes Siemes, SJ, and autographed by John Hersey. Photo by Susan E. Swanberg.

## Crux of the Matter: Renewing an Acquaintance with John Hersey

*Mr. Straight Arrow: The Career of John Hersey, Author of Hiroshima* by Jeremy Treglown. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019. Hardcover, 384 pp., USD\$28.

Reviewed by Susan E. Swanberg, University of Arizona, United States

*Mr. Straight Arrow: The Career of John Hersey, Author of Hiroshima* is “a study of John Hersey’s career, not a full biography,” notes author Jeremy Treglown (343). In spite of this disclaimer, Treglown’s affectionate, sprawling take on Hersey’s literary achievements (and pivotal events in Hersey’s life) is much more than a curriculum vitae. The book is replete with carefully-documented, noteworthy particulars—as well as gossipy minutiae that would likely have irritated the reserved Hersey. Because Hersey disliked giving interviews and refused to “flog his wares,” as his son has been quoted as saying (Russell Shorto, “John Hersey, the Writer Who Let ‘Hiroshima’ Speak for Itself,” August 31, 2016), fans and scholars alike will appreciate Treglown’s wide-ranging book, whether they think its revelations are gossipy, over-solicitous of Hersey’s reputation, or spot-on.

“Mr. Straight Arrow” is the not-so-affectionate nickname bestowed on Hersey by an unnamed “*New Yorker* staffer” (196). Treglown describes the nickname as an unkind comparison of Hersey with his second wife’s eccentric former husband and *Addams Family* cartoonist, Charles Addams. In his review of *Mr. Straight Arrow*, Ben Yagoda identifies the late Gardner Botsford, a *New Yorker* editor (not a “staffer”) as the party who gave Hersey the nickname (“‘*Mr. Straight Arrow*’ Review: The Good Example,” 2019; Linda H. Davis, *Chas Addams: A Cartoonist’s Life*, 106). But Treglown uses the moniker without irony, portraying Hersey as a model of civic virtue for an era when civic virtue is fast becoming an anomaly. By most accounts, Hersey *was* in fact the modest, honest, decent neighbor with whom you might have enjoyed a sailing excursion up the Eastern seaboard.

At its best, *Mr. Straight Arrow* delivers perceptive insights into Hersey’s journey from “mishkid” to war correspondent, author, public intellectual, dedicated educator, and civic activist. (“Mishkid,” a term Hersey used to describe himself, refers to the fact that he was the child of missionary parents.) At times, however, Treglown’s appreciation of Hersey’s virtues leads him to soft-pedal Hersey’s literary shortcomings.



In the book's introductory chapter, "A Sentimental Journey," Treglown recounts a 1982 visit Hersey made to Tianjin (Tientsin), China, to explore his childhood haunts, reconnect with friends of his family, and research a novel to be based upon his parents' experiences as missionaries with the YMCA. When Hersey made the trip, more than forty years had passed since his first book, *Men on Bataan*, was published.

Less than a page into "A Sentimental Journey," Treglown confides that "For reasons we'll come to, Hersey would be embarrassed by *Men on Bataan* . . .," a book that "used journalistic sources to give a ringside view of the United States' earliest efforts to fight back against Japan . . ." (3–4). Hersey's embarrassment is not explained until Chapter 3, where, under the subhead, "Grand Larceny," Treglown reveals that Hersey had not, in fact, had a "ringside view" of events on Bataan.

In fairness, Treglown acknowledges that "Little of Hersey's [*Men on Bataan*] material was his own" (63). The journalists who'd had a ringside view of events on Bataan sent their dispatches to *Time* and *Life* magazines. Hersey relied upon these dispatches to write *Men on Bataan*. Many years later, author Ann Fadiman, in *Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader* (110–11) complained of Hersey's alleged appropriations of her mother Annalee Jacoby's work.

Hersey's bemused dedication to *Time* correspondents Melville and Annalee Jacoby and *Life* correspondents Carl and Shelley Mydans suggests that Hersey, the neophyte writer, had a rather casual attitude toward his use of their dispatches:

As for the sections on the Philippines, I have used dispatches which appeared in the press, in *Time*, and in *Life*. I have drawn heavily on the magnificent cables to Time Inc. from Melville Jacoby, *much of whose material has not previously been published* [emphasis added]. And I have also used the early cables of Carl and Shelly Mydans, the *Life* team who were captured by the Japanese in Manila. By their work on Luzon, Melville Jacoby, his wife Annalee, and the Mydanses have put themselves on par with the bravest and rightest reporters of the war. This book is dedicated to them partly so they won't charge me with grand larceny, but mostly out of sincere admiration (Hersey, "Thanks and a Dedication," *Men on Bataan*, 1942. Following the dedication, the publisher noted that in April 1942 Melville Jacoby was killed in an airplane accident near Darwin, Australia).

In defense of Hersey, Treglown suggests that journalism tradition encouraged pooling, rewriting, and "authorial anonymity" (65). In addition, according to Treglown, Hersey paid some of his sources, the *Men on Bataan* narrative was Hersey's, and Hersey had "put a fair amount of work" into the book (66). *Men on Bataan* (along with *Into the Valley: A Skirmish of the Marines*) made Hersey's name as a war writer. *Into the Valley* was based upon Hersey's personal experiences as a war correspondent, which is perhaps why the masterfully written account of a skirmish on Guadalcanal rings so true.

During the course of the battle, Hersey's deeply inculcated humanitarian impulses led him to put aside his pen to assist several wounded marines, acts for which he was commended by the Navy Department (73–74). Years later, the mature writer added a foreword to *Into the Valley* in which he explained why he had chosen not to revise a number of minor "untruths," such as his self-censoring of strong language used by the battle-weary marines (1989, xxvi–vii). He also considered and

rejected revising his references to the Japanese as “animals,” writing that retaining his “shameful words” might “help to show what warfare could do to a young mind that thought it was in pursuit of truth” (xxviii–xxx).

Throughout *Mr. Straight Arrow*, Treglown’s narrative consists primarily of an entertaining stream of events from Hersey’s life punctuated with mini-reviews of books or articles published at each stage of Hersey’s career, including: *A Bell for Adano*, a fictionalized version of the American occupation of Sicily, which was made into a popular movie released in the summer of 1945; Hersey’s later attempts at writing fiction, some of which succeeded and others that fell flat; the articles Hersey wrote for *Time* and *Life* until his relationship with Henry Luce broke down; and Hersey’s long, productive career as a writer for the *New Yorker*. It was, of course, the *New Yorker* that published “Hiroshima” in its entirety on August 31, 1946.

In what is regarded as his crowning literary achievement, Hersey described the aftermath of the August 6, 1945, atomic bombing in a detached tone that “let ‘Hiroshima’ speak for itself.” In passing, Treglown mentions Father Johannes Siemes, a German Jesuit priest whose eyewitness report of the aftermath of Hiroshima was one of Hersey’s sources (127–28). Later, Treglown compares a paragraph from *Hiroshima* to a paragraph written by the priest—ostensibly to illustrate how much better Hersey’s writing was (129).

What Treglown misses is the overall importance of Siemes’s eyewitness report and the way in which some of the events recounted in *Hiroshima* were arguably derivative of Siemes’s report in tone, tenor, reportage, and chronology of the narrative, not to mention the cast of characters. Siemes’s eyewitness account was so important to Hersey that he frequently included an excerpt from Siemes’s account when he (Hersey) autographed copies of *Hiroshima*. The quotation from which the excerpt is drawn reads, in part, as follows:

Some of us consider the bomb in the same category as poison gas and were against its use on a civilian population. Others were of the opinion that in total war, as carried on in Japan, there was no difference between civilians and soldiers, and that the bomb itself was an effective force tending to end the bloodshed . . . The crux of the matter is whether total war in its present form is justifiable, even when it serves a just purpose. Does it not have material and spiritual evil as its consequences which far exceed whatever good might result? (*Hiroshima*, 1946, 117–18)

Hersey’s complex relationships with fact and fiction, war and warriors, morality and amorality cannot easily be summarized, nor can Treglown’s book, which readers will call a biography, notwithstanding the author’s assertions to the contrary.

The ambiguously provenanced nickname that Treglown chose as part of his book’s title is a tantalizing embodiment of the Hersey mythos. While Hersey, the son of missionaries and a civic-minded humanitarian himself, might indeed have made an excellent neighbor, he was a much more nuanced individual than his respectable image intimated. Was Hersey merely following the journalistic conventions of the day when he committed his “larcenies” and was his behavior, therefore, excusable? Is it true, as Treglown suggests, that during Hersey’s era things were better than they are now, or is Treglown’s view of Hersey’s world—and Hersey—overly rosy?

To form a well-founded opinion of the matter one must not only read and reread Treglown's substantial account one must also acquaint (or reacquaint) oneself with the *Hiroshima* author's many works. Hersey's fiction and his nonfiction; his chameleon-like shifts of genre and style; his proximity or lack of proximity to the events about which he wrote; his commitment to social justice; as well as the highs and lows of his abundant output—are all well worth revisiting.

# Longform Storytelling: Multi-Media Perspectives

*Immersive Longform Storytelling: Media, Technology, Audience*

by David O. Dowling. New York: Routledge, 2019. Paperback, 208 pp., USD \$39.95.

Reviewed by Robert S. Boynton, New York University, United States

Economic and aesthetic goals rarely converge, especially in journalism. But technological developments both in the production and consumption of news have raised the importance of immersive experiences for journalism. The more immersive the journalism, the higher its quality, and the more profitable it may be, especially in this disaggregated world that has taken the “mass” out of mass media. As David O. Dowling writes in *Immersive Longform Storytelling: Media, Technology, Audience*, quoting Henry Jenkins, “old media do not die; they converge” (50).

Dowling argues that we are experiencing what Dwayne Bray describes as a “golden age of documentary” (1), which literary journalism is particularly well positioned to take advantage of. Dowling conceives of literary journalism as encompassing more than books and magazine articles; it is “at the nexus of cinema, radio, and print, spawning newly minted genres capable of immersing mobile audiences in ways previously imaginable only in IMAX theaters” (2). He rebuts those, like Nicholas Carr, who decry what Dowling summarizes as the shallow, “manic Twitter-driven news cycle and its attendant superficial online reading practices” (1), using studies showing that “digital journalism has sparked a renaissance in deep reading and viewing associated with the literary mind” (3). Further, Dowling makes the stronger claim that “the digital ecosystem now . . . fulfills the promise of the New Journalism” (10) by reporting on “subjects and events from a deeper perspective, anatomizing them scientifically and psychologically, driving home both fact and the drama of lived human experience” (15). As long as you have a broad conception of literary journalism, Dowling argues that today is the best of times.

I’ve long held that much of today’s most deeply reported, best told literary journalism is being produced in audio, so I was intrigued to see Dowling extend that claim to multimedia forms like online reading, interactive texts, on-demand television, native advertising, and 360 video. Each gets a chapter, the combination of which provides the reader an excellent overview of the way each form is testing journalism’s technological, ethical, and aesthetic limits.





Chapter one focuses on the *New York Times*'s 2012 publication of "Snow Fall: Avalanche at Tunnel Creek." Although it was the most high-profile work of enhanced digital journalism (it won a Pulitzer and a Peabody), it was hardly the first. Dowling explains the differences between "Snow Fall" and clunky, earlier efforts, which were little more than the conventional print article ("shovelware") combined with the flashy tech du jour. "Unlike the conventional news template, its multimedia were not indiscriminately tacked on, but carefully integrated into the narrative world as a system of mutually reinforcing referents" (32). He uses "Snow Fall" to explore the way the latest iteration of multimedia immersion has upended conventional assumptions, such as the "lone wolf reporter." Dowling elaborates on "the increasingly collaborative nature of online narrative journalism" (29), which he likens to "film production" (30). In the new workflow, one often *starts* with the "multimedia elements and digital design" (34) rather than the writing. For example, the *Guardian* began its feature, "NSA Files: Decoded," by assembling the "multimedia elements first, leaving the writing of the text for last" (20).

In chapter two, Dowling takes on the claim that the internet and other technology have dumbed-down journalism content and diminished consumers' attention spans. In fact, he argues, the opposite is the case, and that "the latest wave of online reading communities has harnessed hypersocial participatory internet culture for sustained focus on long immersive works" (49). Social media between the distribution and discussion of longform stories (55), as well as new modes of media consumption, such as "radial reading," Jerome McGann's term for readers "delving deeply within the text and re-surfacing to access supporting data to aid and enrich interpretation" (59). Dowling contends that the new online reading experiences are more immersive than distracting, a "cognitive container," which holds the reader's attention through embedded multimedia elements rather than hyperlinks that send the reader out of text" (57). He cites eye tracking studies (58) showing that users are as drawn to text as they are to video—a claim that will surprise an industry increasingly turning toward video. Dowling reminds us of an essential truth: for all the chaos of the journalism business, there has never been a time when more people have consumed and discussed more journalism and literature. It is a phenomenon "reminiscent of the learned exchanges at coffee houses and bread-and-cheese clubs of the seventeenth century, carrying on the legacy of intellectual discussion and spirited debate with the benefit of online access to the richest data resources in media history, perhaps the most supreme gift of the digital age" (67–68).

Chapters three and four, about on-demand television and so-called native advertising, or advertorials, are weaker than the others. It is less clear how the explosion in the amount of available on-demand video via Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, and Apple represents an advance in immersive strategies. There is a lot more stuff to watch, but I'm not convinced that the ratio of good to bad quality has changed. Dowling's suggestion that "television narratives were shallower in the pre-digital era and evolved toward increasingly complex interwoven plot lines toward the end of the twentieth century" is intriguing, but never really explored (77). The *binge-watching* phenomenon says more about the consumer's ready access to content than the content



itself. And Dowling's claim that we shouldn't be concerned by brand-sponsored advertorial—"editorial content was always mediated by promotional discourse" (4); "much of the best journalistic reporting and writing now bears promotional functions" (5)—dismisses a complex issue too quickly. Simply employing the techniques of immersive journalism doesn't make the product journalism. The fact that longform marketing projects are "so well disguised as editorial content that they can commend viewer payment" (113) says more about economics than journalism.

The chapter on longform audio immersion is more satisfying because it addresses both the aesthetic and economic success of the medium. There was always plenty of nascent creativity in audio, but recent technical hardware innovations drive the podcast revolution. Digital recording and editing dramatically lowered production costs, the internet freed producers from radio stations, and Apple's iPod, iPhone, and iTunes allowed listeners to consume audio when and where they like (122–23). "With podcasting's dramatic growth, the once staid and remote bastion of public radio now finds itself at the epicenter of the digital ecosystem," he writes (117). It isn't just that there is so much more audio available, the form itself is in a "state of radical experimentation" (121), combining "traditional elements of news writing for longform radio with more latitude than ever for narrative creativity" (121). Like the best literary journalism, audio capitalizes on its qualities of voice and intimacy. "Passionate content renders a personal connection to establish a level of knowledge and trust between listener and narrator," writes Dowling, "one not seen since the unabashedly subjective work of such luminaries as Tom Wolfe and Joan Didion" (134).

The confluence of these developments allowed the 2014 podcast *Serial* to reach five million listeners in four weeks, compared to *This American Life*, the show that launched *Serial*, which took four years to reach one million listeners (116, 118). In 2017, *S-Town*, created by the producers of *Serial* and *This American Life*, reached ten million listeners in four days (124).

*Immersive Longform Storytelling's* last two chapters cover, in sequence, interactive online documentary, and then, virtual reality and 360 video. These technologies have lagged behind streaming video and podcasting because they tether the viewer to equipment, whether it is a computer or an unwieldy set of virtual reality goggles. True, VR can transport and immerse the viewer to an unprecedented degree. But without subsidies from the manufacturers of the technical interfaces (Samsung, Facebook), few journalism organizations have made good use of them.

Dowling celebrates the autonomy these technologies grant the consumer, who is granted the freedom to ignore conventional journalism's narrative and explore. "The interactive user is immersed in the process of production, rather than consumption, of spatially oriented online media" (166); "the camera is in the hands of the user, as it were, who is free to view every shot of the film from any angle they choose" (170). Dowling discusses *Bear 71*, an online documentary that allows one to track grizzlies in Banff National Park. Engaging it, the user is as much the "creator" as those who designed the software. "While audio maintains narrative trajectory, open-world design encourages autonomous exploration through hundreds of thousands of pictures, clips, and images captured by motion-detector web cams revealing how

other tagged animals and humans encroach on the bear's territory and affect her life" (158). I don't doubt *Bear 71*'s immersive qualities, but I wonder whether it should be considered journalism, or even the "storytelling" in Dowling's title. At what point are the storyteller's intentions no longer relevant? When does a narrative—immersive or not—disintegrate into a snarl of dead-ends and databases?

In his conclusion, Dowling turns from the consumer's immersion to the producer's. Echoing arguments in favor of immersion journalism like Ted Conover's in *Immersion: A Writer's Guide to Going Deep*, Dowling celebrates the technique's transparency. "Rather than concealing the journalist's methods to render the subject from an omniscient perspective, storytelling from the vantage point of the immersed journalist brings the audience into the world of their subjectivity" (183). It is a needed reminder that a world that doesn't support reporters' ability to immerse themselves will have trouble convincing consumers to dive in alongside them.

## Immersion Journalism and Insights on Intimate Partner Terrorism

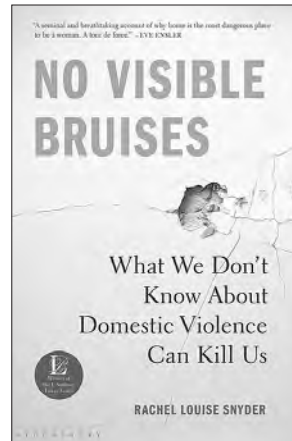
*No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know about Domestic Violence Can Kill Us* by Rachel Louise Snyder. London: Bloomsbury, 2019. Hardcover, 309 pp., USD\$28.

Reviewed by Barbara Selvin, Stony Brook University, United States

The eight years Rachel Louise Snyder spent reporting on intimate partner violence have produced a work of devastating personal histories and hard-won insight, told in lyrical language. Hard-won: The time Snyder spent with frightened women, grieving families, remorseful batterers, police officers, researchers, and advocates left her so drained emotionally that at one point she stopped to regain her equilibrium. “There was a period of time when it took a force of will for me to not look at every man I met as a possible abuser and every woman as a possible victim,” she writes. “This is not the way one wants to walk through life. I knew that. I know that. . . . I took an entire year off from anything having to do with violence. I worked out, and I read, and I painted, and I went to therapy, and I avoided abuse and homicide and police reports” (98).

Snyder’s book is not one immersive account, but several. She probes domestic violence (or intimate partner terrorism, a phrase she finds more accurate but less widely used and thus less useful) from many perspectives, offering a dozen or more detailed portraits drawn from the hours, days, or months she spent with her sources. Its value as literary journalism emerges, too, from the beauty, passion, and skill of her writing—Snyder’s chapter kickers alone are worthy of study for how to propel readers through a book-length reporting project—and from her reflections on the impact of the reporting on herself.

These profiles and perspectives offer models of how to conduct and synthesize sensitive in-depth interviews. They also elucidate the complexity of domestic violence, showing that abuse has no single cause but is a product of multiple influences: economics, education, or the lack of it, abusers’ clinical narcissism, a “male role belief system” that teaches men to nurture anger rather than empathy; and a profound failure of agencies and institutions, from police to the courts to social services, to share their information in a way that would protect women at risk. The layered stories build Snyder’s argument that better communication among the many institutions that intersect with victims is critical to preventing domestic abuse and, chillingly, intimate partner homicides and familicides.



For what became the first part of the book (called “The End”), Snyder made repeated trips to Billings, Montana, to report the death and life of Michelle Monson Mosure, whose husband killed her, their two children, and himself in 1993. Snyder uses Michelle’s story to explore the confounding question of why victims stay with their abusers. For Snyder, this is the wrong question. One of her insights is that, often, victims recant accusations of abuse and return to their partners because they don’t think they—or they and their children—would be safer outside the home; they fear their abusers could find them, or they fear that in leaving they would be isolated from friends, family, jobs, and other support, or they are trying, cautiously, to lay the groundwork for an eventual departure. “[W]e don’t know what we’re seeing,” she writes; “the question of leaving versus staying disregards the cavalcade of forces at work in an abusive relationship” (16).

Look at Michelle Monson Mosure. Look at any intimate partner homicide anywhere in any given year and it will be the same: she tried every which way she could. She tried and tried, but the equation, or rather, the question, isn’t a matter of leaving or staying. It’s a matter of living or dying.

They stay because they choose to live.

And they die anyway.

Michelle Mosure stayed for her kids and for herself. She stayed for pride and she stayed for love and she stayed for fear and she stayed for cultural and social forces far beyond her control. And her staying, to anyone trained enough to see the context, looked a lot less like staying and a lot more like someone tiptoeing her way toward freedom (73).

Other sections of the book portray abusive men seeking transformation and the “changemakers” (16) whose work is saving lives across the United States. Insights emerge: that abusers rarely use women’s names, omitting not just their victims’ names but also their mothers’ and sisters’; “bitch” is the usual substitute. That batterers may need multiple attempts to complete intervention programs before succeeding, just as addicts or gamblers do. That mass shootings often have roots in domestic violence: Adam Lanza prefaced his massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School by shooting his mother, as did Charles Whitman (along with his wife) the day before he killed sixteen people at the University of Texas at Austin in 1966. Snyder shows how small changes from responders can save lives: a laminated order of protection stays legible longer than a paper one; a bag of diapers and some grocery money can give a victim the caesura that enables her to make better long-term decisions for herself and her children. The data Snyder gathers refute common assumptions, proving that despite the constraints of privacy regulations, agencies can work together, can share enough information, such as the existence of prior restraining orders or a history of threats or arrests, to engender effective protective measures.

Snyder approaches one of her conclusions almost gingerly: that the manifest availability of guns in the United States vastly increases the likelihood of domestic abuse becoming domestic homicide. She broaches the subject in describing a two-day meeting of Montana’s Domestic Violence Fatality Review Commission, then barely mentions it again for several chapters until she summarizes the ride-alongs she

conducted with local police in each jurisdiction she visited for reporting. Every cop, she recalls, said he or she wished civilians had fewer guns, and Snyder spends four pages exploring the intersection of gun safety and domestic violence. Perhaps she uses a light touch because the issue of gun control can be so toxic in U.S. culture; perhaps she wants to avoid certain readers rejecting all of her work because they reject her conclusions on gun access. Though understated, her position is clear. And sometimes, as here, an insight quietly uttered comes through with unmistakable clarity.

## Another Look at Truman Capote and *In Cold Blood*

*Untold Stories, Unheard Voices: Truman Capote and In Cold Blood.*  
by Jan Whitt. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2019. Hardcover, 335 pp.,  
USD\$35.

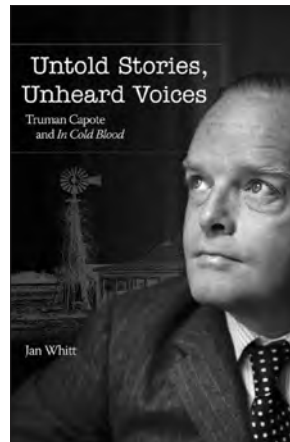
Reviewed by Matthew Ricketson, Deakin University, Australia

Truman Capote remains an important, even iconic, figure in literary journalism studies whose reputation rests primarily on *In Cold Blood*, published first as a four-part series in the *New Yorker*, in 1965, and as a book by Random House in January 1966. The book became an instant bestseller, swiftly garnering for Capote the then—and even now—astounding sum of US\$2 million for paperback, foreign, and movie rights. Confusingly labelled by its author a “nonfiction novel,” *In Cold Blood* won an Edgar award for best factual crime book, but, unlike any of the award’s previous seventeen winners, it legitimized a sub-genre—true crime, as it is now called. Since 1966, *In Cold Blood* has been released in 250 editions, translated into thirty languages, and remains easily available today in the Penguin Modern Classics edition.

Capote, along with Joan Didion, Norman Mailer, Hunter S. Thompson, and Tom Wolfe, is one of the most prominent writers identified with the New Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s. Collectively, their works have spurred much critical attention, both at the time, and in a second wave, as the term literary journalism began to come into critical usage in the 1980s.

So, a classic work, a pioneer, a bestseller, and an influence on later generations of writers: *In Cold Blood* is all of these. It is also a contested, controversial work, and, importantly, has been since its release. Soon after publication, Kenneth Tynan, the English theatre and literary critic, attacked Capote’s ethics and said the book’s title could well have referred to the author’s choice of doing less than he could to help save the two convicted murders, Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, from the gallows. Phillip K. Tompkins, writing in *Esquire* in June 1966, attacked Capote’s oft-stated claims to factual fidelity. Tompkins returned to Holcomb, Kansas, the location of the murders of the Clutter family that had sparked Capote’s interest in 1959, and documented errors of fact and interpretation. Some were small but a worryingly large number weren’t.

In the decades since, various scholars, biographers, and journalists have uncovered more problems with Capote’s work. Some scholars have delved into Capote’s papers



held at the New York Public Library to show, among other things, the extraordinary access to case materials that Detective Alvin Dewey gave Capote or how much unattributed work Harper Lee contributed to *In Cold Blood*. Gerald Clarke, Capote's first and most comprehensive biographer, has revealed that the final scene of *In Cold Blood* is entirely invented and, in 2013, a journalist from the *Wall Street Journal* dug into a cache of old documents held by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to show Capote distorting facts to suit his narrative purpose.

This does not for a moment mean students and scholars should strike *In Cold Blood* from their list—it remains a compelling reading experience—but they should read it with their eyes open to the many questions that have been raised, and proven, about it. One of the curious features of critical scholarship about Capote and *In Cold Blood* is how often critics, in the face of strong evidence, have excused Capote's practices on the ground that he was an accomplished writer with literary ambitions. Granted, the term nonfiction novel opens the door to misreadings (one critic, Sven Birkerts, tartly observed that it was an oxymoronic phrase and a moronic idea), but *In Cold Blood* was ineluctably an account of an actual rather than a fictional multiple murder and its consequences (Birkerts, "Docu-fiction," In *An Artificial Wilderness: Essays on Twentieth Century Literature*, 265–70. New York: William Morrow, 1987). To avoid facing this reality, or to wave away questions about Capote's journalistic and literary practices, undermines the years of careful work done by scholars and practitioners to define the elements and boundaries of literary journalism.

Do we need another book about Capote when there is so much literary journalism being done in the United States and many other countries that merits attention? Probably not unless it offers either a fresh reading of the book or fresh information about its creation or its consequences. *Untold Stories, Unheard Voices* does not offer the former but does provide the latter. Some of this draws mainly on the work of other scholars, such as a 2012 doctoral dissertation by T. Madison Peschock that demonstrates the extent to which Harper Lee, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and childhood friend of Capote, contributed to the research of *In Cold Blood* and how Capote failed to acknowledge her work. As promised in the book's title, the voices of other players in the orbit of the Clutter murders have been included by Whitt. They include a memoir about the Clutter family by the niece of Herbert and Bonnie Clutter (278–84), a memoir about Perry Smith by Donald Cullivan, a former army acquaintance (288–302), and a memoir by Dick Hickock, ghost-written by local journalist, Starling Mack Nations (184–203).

These morsels of new information are moderately interesting, adding a modicum to our understanding of *In Cold Blood*. It would have been good had the author more actively engaged with how these additional accounts intersect with earlier ones. To take one example, Capote writes in *In Cold Blood* that Hickock intended raping the fifteen-year-old Nancy Clutter but was stopped by Smith. The Reverend James Post, chaplain at the prison where Smith and Hickock had been on death row, told Capote's oral biographer, George Plimpton, that Hickock was not the "sex fiend" that Capote portrayed and, indeed, there is no mention of Hickock having sex with underage girls in the mini-biography Capote compiled of Hickock that is among his papers in the



New York Public Library. However, there is evidence in his ghost-written memoir (192) that Hickock intended to rape Nancy Clutter. Nations's account, then, appears to be the source for Capote. Needless to say, this information goes unacknowledged in *In Cold Blood*. Capote regarded Nations as a rival and did all that he could to undermine Nations's attempts to produce a book about the Clutter murders, which Whitt documents in *Untold Stories, Unheard Voices*.

No one, including Nations's son, Michael, who found the ghost-written memoir, regarded Nations as an artist: "He wrote like a sledgehammer," Michael is quoted as saying (Whitt, 181). It is another piece of evidence, though, if any were needed, of Capote's unethical behavior. Whitt is aware of what Capote did to Nations but could have worked harder to bring out the implications of some of the material in her newly unearthed accounts.

*Untold Stories, Unheard Voices* would have benefited from a good editor. It is repetitious; the structure of the book is outlined early on in some detail, then repeated on pages 174–76. Why? Early in the book, Whitt writes that *In Cold Blood* "has outlasted negative criticism and will endure as a fusion of fiction and nonfiction and as a stylistic masterpiece." This phrase, or something like it, is repeated throughout the book with the regularity of a journalist adding an autofill background par to a developing news story. Whitt appears to have been so impressed by a lengthy quotation on page 269 from Madelaine Blais, a literary journalist and professor of journalism, that she repeats it on page 315.

The book contains basic errors that should have been picked up. The pulp true crime magazine, *Male*, is described as "extant" on page 183 but "defunct" on the following page. On page 30 Capote is quoted discussing the news item in the *New York Times* that piqued his interest in the Clutter case. "Eisenhower Appointee Murdered" is the headline he cites, but this is wrong; the correct headline, "Wealthy Farmer, 3 of Family Slain" is actually cited earlier, on page 16. Ironically, in a paragraph on page 21 discussing Phillip K. Tompkins's criticisms of inaccuracies in *In Cold Blood*, a well-known quote of Capote's—"One doesn't spend almost six years on a book, the point of which is factual accuracy, and then give way to minor distortions"—is wrongly attributed to Tompkins.

The book's index is a bare two and a half pages, and its organization is unhelpful. Various authors, such as Albert Camus, Thomas Mann, and William Shakespeare, are listed, even if they have been mentioned only once, and are peripheral to the book's argument. Conversely, few if any of the literary critics and biographers, upon whose work Whitt regularly draws, are listed in the index.

This lack of attention to detail in a scholarly book casts a pall over the interesting material the author has amassed. For literary journalism scholars and for students, then, *Untold Stories, Unheard Voices* is a work to be consulted and added to rather than relied on.

## Stark Observations on Life inside Australia's Manus Detention Center

*No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*

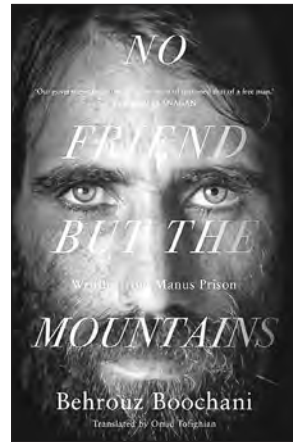
by Behrouz Boochani. Translated by Omid Tofighian. Sydney: Picador, 2018. Paperback, 374 pp., USD\$13.37.

Reviewed by Varunika Ruwanpura, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Kurdish-Iranian writer, journalist, scholar, and filmmaker Behrouz Boochani in his book discusses an increasingly controversial Australian topic—the Manus Island regional processing center for asylum seekers. This book convincingly demonstrates that Boochani's writing is on par with some of the world's best prison literature, which includes U.S. journalist Ted Conover's book, *Newjack*, on New York State's infamous Sing Sing prison. The Australian author, Richard Flanagan, who wrote the foreword to *No Friend but the Mountains*, compares Boochani's writing to prison stories written by renowned authors like Oscar Wilde and Martin Luther King, Jr. Prestigious Australian literary awards that Boochani's book has won include the Prize for Literature and the Prize for Non-Fiction at the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Awards. Shortlisting for other national awards is further proof of its merit.

Boochani was a detainee on the original Manus Island Regional Processing Centre when he wrote this story and remains a detainee at another processing center on the island. The story was laboriously written on a mobile phone and smuggled out of Manus as thousands of text messages. It is an autobiographical account of daily life inside the original detention center, which was closed in 2017. Boochani's descriptions of severe mental trauma sustained by inmates are highly confronting: "The prison landscape is so violent that it is likely that out of a few hundred there could be at least one angry and disenfranchised prisoner who could decide to commit a violent act—and enact it during the night—in the dark, behind the bathrooms, or alongside the obfuscating coconut tree trunks . . ." (177). Most detainees have no idea when they will be released, and many are not welcome back in the countries from which they have fled. These issues have already been widely covered by Australian and international media, so instead, this review focuses on the exceptional quality of Boochani's writing.

Drawing on Norman Sims's description of the five characteristics of literary journalism, as immersion, structure, accuracy, voice, and responsibility in *The Literary*



*Journalists* (1984) may illustrate how Boochani's book can be considered literary journalism. Boochani was literally immersed in the subject of his book because he was an inmate of Manus detention center. But he is also immersed in the book's topic in a metaphoric sense. At times his prose gives the impression that he is almost observing life at the center from afar: "There are so many times the prisoner is forced to straddle the border between human and animal. One has to decide whether to uphold human values or live life like The Cow. . . . When a person is hungry, they rush anything that smells like food. And if there's competition, they attack with even more ferocity" (232–33). The book is also artfully structured as a series of prose chapters interspersed with stanzas of poetry, for Boochani is also a poet. The way poetry is woven into the narrative creates a lyrical reading rhythm.

Sims's characteristic of accuracy in literary journalism is always difficult to assess when reviewing a nonfiction book, as views on accuracy can be subjective. This review's analysis of the accuracy of Boochani's account is based on three factors. First, Omid Tofghian, the academic who translated Boochani's book from Farsi (also known as Persian) to English, is a well-regarded scholar who spent extended periods of time on Manus conversing with Boochani. Second, Tofghian's meticulous explanation of his translation approach, which is found at the beginning of Boochani's book, notes the author's collaborations with leading Australian academics, authors, and human rights activists. Third, Boochani's evocative and humble acceptance speech, conveyed via video link from Manus, when he won the 2019 Victorian Premier's Literary Award, provides the strongest evidence of the book's accuracy. In this speech Boochani says, "Literature has the power to give us freedom." His book is testament to the power of literary journalism to lift our senses and bring true stories to life.

Boochani's voice is authentic, drawing attention to his Kurdish heritage as much as it exposes the tragedy of life as a Manus refugee. An excerpt, in which he reflects on the mountains of Kurdistan, is an example: "Grand mountain peaks covered with snow, full of ice, abounding in cold/ I am there/ I am an eagle/ I am flying over the mountainous terrain" (30). Having visited Kurdistan in my youth, I can clearly visualize from reading this passage Boochani's longing to return to his homeland.

Sims's final characteristic of literary journalism is author responsibility. There is no doubt that Boochani takes absolute pride in and responsibility for his writing. This is evident in his own reflections on how he conceptualized and wrote *No Friend but the Mountains* and in the content of the book itself.

Overall, this work of literary journalism is one of the most important to emerge from Australia in recent years. For literary journalism scholars, the book provides a rich subject of study. *No Friend* offers not only stark insights into the unfortunate lives of Manus detainees, but also commands appreciation that such a highly evocative and creative work of literature could be produced under such dire circumstances. Reading *No Friend but the Mountains* reminded me of Viktor Frankl's having conceptualized his theory of logotherapy during his imprisonment at Auschwitz. For me, the extraordinary way this book was written is what is most meaningful about this book and why I highly recommend it to other scholars.

# The Burning and Rebuilding of the Los Angeles Public Library

## *The Library Book*

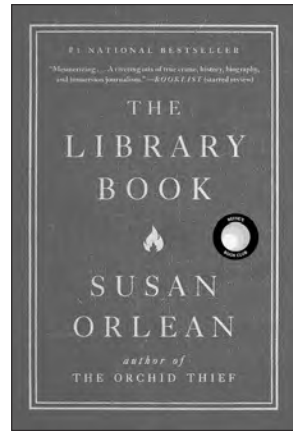
by Susan Orlean. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018. Hardcover, 335 pp., hardbound, USD\$28.

Reviewed by Lisa A. Phillips, SUNY New Paltz, United States

The morning of April 29, 1986, the Los Angeles Public Library caught on fire. The seven-hour blaze destroyed four hundred thousand books, damaged seven hundred thousand more, and shut down the library for seven years. The fire, as Susan Orlean reconstructs it in *The Library Book*, started with smoke “as pale as onionskin” and escalated into a conflagration that spiked to 451 degrees, the ignition point of paper, as we know well from Ray Bradbury’s dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*. Book covers “burst like popcorn” and pages “flared and blackened and then sprang away from their bindings” (23).

Library fires are not unusual. Libraries burn because of arson, still the presumed cause of the LAPL fire. They burn because of human error: a cigarette tossed in a waste basket, or faulty wiring. And they burn in wartime, because they are located in city centers that fall victim to fire bombings and aerial attacks, or because the enemy specifically wants to destroy books. The Nazis, Mao Tse-tung’s Red Guard, the Khmer Rouge, the Taliban, and Islamist jihadis all targeted libraries. It’s not an efficient way to bring down a nation, but it is a devastating blow to a nation’s spirit. “Destroying a culture’s books is sentencing it to something worse than death,” Orlean writes. “It is sentencing it to seem as if it never lived” (103).

What we do to resist the existential nightmare of being forgotten is one of the primary themes of *The Library Book*. Orlean confesses at the outset that before she started researching the LAPL fire, she thought she was “done with writing books” (92). This line made me smile—I’ve heard the same from almost every author I know who is over forty-five, worn out from the soul-scraping effort of wrestling a topic into a coherent narrative, and many of them *do* go on to write more books. Her words also made me wince, because the literary world would be a lesser place if she had kept to the resolution. Orlean was moved to write about the LAPL fire after taking her young son there and being reminded of her own childhood trips to the local library with her mother. Orlean’s recollections are bittersweet, as her mother was suffering from dementia and could no longer remember these trips herself. Orlean finds the idea of



being forgotten “terrifying,” because it threatens to make life meaningless (93). Keeping a record of existence—what both libraries and authors do—allows us to make meaning out of the past: “Writing a book, just like building a library, is an act of sheer defiance. It is a declaration that you believe in the persistence of memory” (93).

Orlean, a longtime *New Yorker* writer and one of the most acclaimed literary journalists publishing today, interweaves the high narrative whodunnit story of the library fire with the cultural history of the Los Angeles Public Library and the larger public library movement. Orlean can write the hell out of any subject, and she’s particularly good at finding unusual ones: taxidermy, origami, orchids. With *The Library Book*, she takes on a subject that isn’t obscure. Libraries are right under our noses. They are everywhere (one of the many thrilling facts Orlean tosses out is that libraries outnumber McDonald’s [289]), and they intersect with a wide swath of humanity in emotionally, intellectually, and socially significant ways. The ubiquity of libraries makes them no less a perfect vehicle for Orlean’s literary journalism, which, as Jan Whitt describes in *Settling the Borderland: Other Voices in Literary Journalism*, is “the lens by which news . . . becomes an extended look into the human psyche, into the universal truths of being human” (149).

*The Library Book* showcases other Orlean trademarks. She fashions complex, irresistible characterizations of quirky people: accused arsonist Harry Peak, an aspiring actor, charming space case, and compulsive liar; Mary Jones, the innovative and effective head city librarian who refused to stop coming to work after she was replaced in 1905; Charles Lummis, the far less qualified and far more colorful journalist and adventurer who replaced her, sparking a petition drive and street protests led by Los Angeles society women. Orlean immerses herself in the everyday life of the LAPL, guided by her keen radar for paradox. In *The Orchid Thief*, Orlean renders the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve as both an inhospitable, unpleasant, wild place and one that harbors the Ghost Orchid, a thing of delicate, ephemeral beauty. The LAPL, through Orlean’s immersive gaze, is noble, the walls covered with philosophical declarations and bas-relief stone figures of Virgil, Leonardo da Vinci, and Plato. Yet it is also revolting, thick with body odor and the “vegetal smells of dirt embedded in clothes that were advancing in the direction of compost” (241), worn by the library’s homeless clientele.

Orlean’s reporting is relentlessly, deliciously fascinating. We learn that mid-twentieth century movie studios dispatched emissaries to the library to steal the books they needed for movie research rather than be beholden to a due date; the library in turn would send an employee out to the studios to get the books back. We meet the “Art, Music, and Recreation” (266) librarian who, sensitive to the competition and secretiveness among the classical music ensembles in the greater Los Angeles area, delicately steers one ensemble away from borrowing a score if she knows another is programming the piece that season. We journey to the spacious, light-filled library in Aarhus, Denmark, which features a marriage license bureau, an excellent coffee shop, and a wide main staircase where toddlers like to play.

*The Library Book* is also an account of how libraries are changing. They are increasingly less about physical books. I found myself struck by the strenuous efforts

made to restore the thousands of volumes soaked by firefighters' hoses in the 1986 fire. McDonnell Douglas engineers put a batch into their space simulation chambers in an attempt to dry them out. I couldn't help but muse (and please forgive me) how much easier it would have been to buy a cheap replacement from Amazon's endless used book selection, had it been available back then. Some books wouldn't have needed hard copy replacements at all. Near the end of *The Library Book*, Orlean tours the Cleveland headquarters of OverDrive, a digital content catalog for libraries and schools. She finds herself enraptured by a wall map that pinpoints the moment one of their ebooks is borrowed, the name and location of a library, along with the book's title.

The LAPL does not lack for corporeal patrons, though. They hover at the entrance before the doors open and are reluctant to leave at closing time. But many are not there for the books. They want computer time, Wi-Fi, heat, a clean bathroom. They attend English language conversation classes and a crowded one-stop-shopping type event that connects them to social service agencies from around the city. The LAPL illustrates wider library trends. In my community and elsewhere, librarians train to administer NARCAN to reverse opioid overdoses and assist patrons with filling out the online census. I found myself wondering, as one forthright LAPL staff member does, where libraries should draw the line. Is the mission of libraries today becoming impossibly broad?

Perhaps I'm just being nostalgic. I, too, had a mother who took me on weekly trips to get stacks of books at my local public library. I got my first job there, making minimum wage as a teen clerk. It was the least demanding job I have ever had. The early evening shift was slow, and I would disappear into the stacks, ostensibly to reorganize the nonfiction books into proper Dewey Decimal order. Much of the time, I sat on the floor in an empty aisle and read, on the taxpayer's dime, giving myself quite an education with *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality*, *The Cinderella Complex*, and other books about feminism and sex. Today in that job, I'd likely be kept busy monitoring computer stations, giving out the Wi-Fi password, and straightening up meeting rooms for Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, resumé writing sessions, and teen manga clubs. Just like the patrons, I'd spend a lot less time sunk in a book.

## Looking in New Ways at Frontiers for Literary Journalism

*At the Faultline: Writing White in South African Literary Journalism*  
by Claire Scott. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2018.  
Paperback, 208 pp., USD\$27.

Reviewed by Lesley Cowling, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

The study of nonfiction writing in its variety of forms has not had an established disciplinary home in South Africa and, indeed, the very definition of what is being studied, where, is still open to discussion. As other writers in this journal have noted repeatedly over the last decade, English literature departments in many countries have studied fiction, poetry, and theater, with nonfiction rarely given the nod. This has been true of South African universities too, where, as Leon de Kock wrote in *South Africa in the Global Imaginary* in 2004, literature departments until the late 1970s had been “smugly Anglophile and dismissive of the ‘local’ ” (6).

Journalism programs, a potential disciplinary home for literary journalism, have tended to focus on preparing students for work in the media sector. With South Africa having so few platforms for literary and longform journalism, little attention has been given to these forms beyond feature writing and magazine courses. Nonfiction writing must necessarily find its way into the academy through other disciplines. It has done so through African literature, history, library sciences, and the more recently emerging creative *writing* programs. It is also being ushered into local scholarship via the particular research interests of individual scholars.

Thus, although South Africa historically has had a rich set of writers of literary nonfiction, some of whom have been internationally recognized, their study is fragmented over academic disciplines. For example, Olive Schreiner’s novel, *Story of an African Farm*, might be studied in English departments, but not her many nonfiction works, which received wide attention when they were published in the 1900s. The nonfiction of journalist/writers such as Sol Plaatje, Bessie Head, Noni Jabavu, and Ezekiel Mphahlele might be studied in an African literature department or find their way into history reading lists. The ways in which their works are journalistic is overdetermined by the focus on how they are literary, or historical, and, I would argue, the emphasis on the *literary* in literary journalism over the journalistic continues. So does the fragmentation across disciplines.





Claire Scott's book, *At the Faultline: Writing White in South African Literary Journalism*, comes, therefore, at an interesting time. She establishes her book firmly as a study of literary journalism, a nod to the emerging courses, studies, and programs that are starting to explore literary journalism as a potential area of interest. She locates her work also in whiteness studies, a growing area of scholarship in South Africa.

Scott proposes to investigate representations of whiteness through looking at four key texts—Rian Malan's *My Traitor's Heart* (1990), Kevin Bloom's *Ways of Staying* (2009), Jonny Steinberg's *Midlands* (2002), and Antjie Krog's *Begging to Be Black* (2009), the last book in a trilogy that started with *Country of My Skull* (1998). Simultaneously, she seeks to examine the ways in which the writers attempt to find new narrative forms to address these complexities (5).

The intersection of literary journalism and whiteness studies extends recent debates on the question of whether the genre of literary journalism can deal better than other writing forms with the racial divides still painfully operative in South Africa in the post-apartheid democracy. This question arises in turn from debates in South African literary studies over the last thirty years, cutting across the fiction/nonfiction divide, about the role of literary writing in telling "the South African story." Thus, concerns about racial division, writing the "frontier," white identity, and the subaltern position of local and black writers have long informed discussions of South African writing.

Scott opens her book by referencing one highly publicized discussion between two of the writers she looks at—Malan and Krog—at the annual Franschhoek Literary Festival in 2010, where each argued a different position on white South Africans in the post-apartheid era. "Malan argued that white South Africans were excluded from the national conversation due to their white skin, while Krog countered that South African whiteness continued to enjoy unwarranted privilege and protection" (2). Their debate was picked by the news media and continued to reverberate in talk shows and opinion pages.

As Hedley Twidle noted in 2012 in *Safundi* ("In a Country Where You Couldn't Make This Shit Up?"), the claim has also been made that nonfiction had outstripped fiction as a cultural phenomenon. It was *the* genre from which to write post-apartheid South Africa. (Do we hear an echo of Tom Wolfe's similar claim for journalism written like fiction in his 1973 writing of *The New Journalism*?) The question was also asked whether nonfiction was a way to cross the boundaries that still exist between communities in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa. Steinberg, Malan, Krog, and Bloom have often been heralded as frontrunners of this *new* literary nonfiction.

Scott designates the nonfiction books produced by these writers as literary journalism and argues for the importance of the choice of genre for the negotiation of whiteness. Her most basic claim is that the writers were all journalists, and—in the case especially of Krog and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission—thus witnessed and reported critical events in the transitional period. This may seem at first glance an obvious point, but given the assiduously policed separate worlds created

by apartheid, and the regulated veil drawn over the horrors committed in Black communities, the act of going to *what really happened*, reporting it, and reflecting on it, has an emotional charge and authenticity for readers.

The argument that literary journalism attains its power from the reader's knowledge that *this is a true story*, combined with the use of literary tactics to bring that story alive, is a relatively simple idea. Scott's thesis, however, goes further: she argues that it is the intersection of storytelling forms, such as fiction, history, and journalism, which provides "moments of indeterminacy [that] destabilize accepted notions of identity and belonging," thus allowing new forms to emerge (2). For Scott, it is "the form of narration" itself that provides possibilities for white South Africans to make sense of the changing social and political milieu and to renegotiate their identity. She suggests that "the literary journalism of Rian Malan, Kevin Bloom, Jonny Steinberg and Antje Krog . . . represents attempts to find this 'form of narration' that will open new rhetorical spaces in which South Africans can learn to converse" (5).

I find this an optimistic perspective; there are other motivations for writers to turn to nonfiction. Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee's novel, *Disgrace*, tells—in part—the story of a farm attack, including the rape of a white woman, and was widely criticized as representing Black South Africans as violent and primitive. However, as Scott points out, Steinberg, Malan, and Bloom describe similar violent events in their work, but have not been similarly attacked. Fiction writers are vulnerable to the criticism that the works they produce come from an imagination filled with white fears and racial stereotypes, what Krog calls "the preoccupations, perceptions, and prejudices of the writer" (quoted in Scott, 29). Nonfiction writers, choosing *actual events*, are more insulated from such critique, even though selecting such stories to tell is a way of setting the agenda for discussion.

What literary journalism offers these writers is the opportunity to put themselves in dialogue with the difficult events that are being discussed. Scott notes the ways in which each text makes use of first-person narration in order to reflect and comment on the environment. For Malan, writing in the apartheid era, this meant a reckoning with both the violence of his own *tribe*, Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, and the violence (endemic, in his telling) in communities across the country. Krog, some years later, turns the focus fully, in *Country of My Skull*, on the violence committed by white men in the name of the apartheid state. This inaugurates a trilogy of books that reflect upon the place of white South Africans in the new dispensation, their inability to assimilate in a larger "African" culture, and their complicity with the deeds done to privilege them in the society.

Kevin Bloom reflects on violence too, both through the personal loss of a family member to violent crime and the recounting of other stories of violence. He uses this as an occasion to reflect on whether whites can *stay* and under what conditions. And Jonny Steinberg investigates the murder of a white farmer in an area of the country charged with the historical significance of colonial dispossession and frontier wars. Seemingly an outlier, with a book that appears at first to be a meticulously reported story of a white community feeling under threat rather than a set of personal reflections, Steinberg also explores the condition of no longer feeling at home that

white communities experience, and finds himself unable to enter Black experience of this ancient frontier conflict.

Scott thus shows, as others have before her, the ways in which white identity has, in these books, become uncertain, how complicity is surfaced as an important issue to be dealt with, and how whites struggle with ways to narrate a place for themselves in South Africa.

However, the question of whiteness that she poses in her work seems harder to parse. If whiteness is the invisible, taken-for-granted landscape from which white South Africans operate, a landscape powerfully connected to global whiteness, then these texts confront the same conundrum of whiteness studies, in which the very focus on making visible the deep assumptions and entitlement of whiteness can move Black experience once again to the margins.

The recent proliferation of nonfiction books by Black writers—some identifiably journalism, some generically closer to memoir and personal life writing—provides an opportunity to imaginatively cross the boundaries that have prevented South Africans from knowing each other's lived experience. But before white South Africans can properly engage with such narratives, whiteness must be destabilized and—in Scott's words—"move out from under the umbrella of its global sanctity and into 'folded-together-ness' with its many 'others'" (179). Scott argues that Bloom, Malan, Krog, and Steinberg have managed to use literary journalism to create "narrative instability"—to reveal the "anxiety and possibility of 'in-between'" (179).

I am not as optimistic that these texts have the liberating potential Scott sees in them, but she raises important questions around the ways in which literary journalism can deal with South Africa's intractable whiteness. Such questions may also be relevant to other former colonies and their settler nations.

## The Rise of Narrative Journalism in the Newsroom

*Rewriting the Newspaper: The Storytelling Movement in American Print Journalism* by Thomas R. Schmidt. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Hardcover, 180 pages, USD\$35.

Reviewed by Jeffrey C. Neely, University of Tampa, United States

In his new book, *Rewriting the Newspaper: The Storytelling Movement in American Print Journalism*, Thomas Schmidt provides a detailed account of the rise of narrative journalism in newspapers in the last half of the twentieth century. In doing so, he offers an invaluable record of the men and women who pioneered storytelling as a cultural and institutional movement in the newspaper industry, situated within historical contexts that simultaneously shaped and resisted narrative innovation in the industry.

After an introduction in which he provides a brief overview of the book and establishes the theoretical lens of his research—a synthesis of institutionalism and cultural analysis that he refers to as “cultural institutionalism” (101–18)—Schmidt begins with a deep dive into the *Washington Post’s* innovative transformation of the “For and about Women” section into the Style section, beginning in 1968. Under the leadership of iconic editor Ben Bradlee, the section shifted from what had been home for gendered coverage of “women’s interests” into a holistic lifestyle section that responded to and reflected the changing social mores of the late 1960s. Central to all of this, Schmidt shows, was the adoption and adaptation of narrative to the professional culture of the *Post*. In an era when the media landscape, too, was being transformed by factors such as the dominance of television and migrating audiences, the *Post* was the first to break with institutional tradition and experiment with narrative structures and storytelling techniques, which had captured cultural cachet in the New Journalism movement and many popular magazines of the day.

This transformation was not, however, without its detractors. From readers, to reporters, editors, and even then-publisher Katharine Graham, many people in and outside the newsroom resisted the new editorial style with expressed feelings ranging from apprehension to abhorrence. Through robust examples of archival research (e.g., letters to the editor), Schmidt notes that it was not that these people categorically objected to the use of storytelling in journalism, but that they did not expect to see it in the *newspaper*. “They would probably not have been so surprised had this been a magazine



story or a fictional narrative. Apparently, their expectations of *what* a newspaper should report, and *how* it should report, were upset” (37). In spite of this resistance, Schmidt shows, the wager on the new Style section paid off for the *Post*. Moreover, Schmidt situates the influence of Style into the broader institutional context of journalism history in noting that it was largely due to Bradlee’s insistence that in 1977 the advisory board for the Pulitzer Prizes voted to create a new category for Feature Writing.

In Chapter 3, Schmidt broadens his study to the broader adoption of narrative journalism in newspapers across the United States. Specifically, he notes the pivotal role played by Eugene C. Patterson, who had formerly worked as managing editor at the *Post* under Bradlee, and his hiring of Roy Peter Clark as a full-time writing coach for the *St. Petersburg Times*. This decision, and Patterson’s overarching effort to make the *Times* a “test case for demonstrating what improved writing in a newspaper could look like” (51), would prove to serve as a model for the narrative movement in newspapers across the country in the years to come. Clark’s goal, writes Schmidt, “was to teach a critical vocabulary so that reporters and editors would have a shared understanding about how to construct good stories, both as reports and narratives” (54). Through a variety of initiatives, Clark emphasized that narrative, when appropriate for the subject matter, could enhance both the informational content and the reader’s experience of a story. But it required not only a different approach to writing, but also how journalists collected their information. Telling a story that readers found both richly informative and deeply engaging required writers to approach their reporting with an eye for detail and a feel for the humanizing elements of the people involved. It required that these journalists seek not just the facts but also their importance. Schmidt notes that Clark’s arrival was initially met with skepticism in the newsroom; however, in time, reporters at the *St. Petersburg Times* would come to describe their experiences with him as “the most important thing that’s ever happened to me in my four years as a pro” and one that “raised the consciousness of the staff to good writing” (57).

In 1978 Patterson became president of the American Society of News Editors (ASNE). After the association’s conference that year, more than 1,500 copies of a special report written by Clark were sent through the association’s secretary to editors and reporters around the country. ASNE also began that same year to organize annual awards contests for the best examples of newspaper writing. While many publishers and editors saw narrative newswriting as a practical way of combatting readership decline, advocates like Patterson and Clark championed the idea that it was more than mere attractive marketing; good storytelling about substantive news topics, in Clark’s words, “has important political implications for a democracy” (61). At the same time, Schmidt notes that the narrative movement in newspapers had its critics and internal challenges, the most visible being the Janet Cooke scandal and her fabricated story of “Jimmy’s World,” published in 1980 in the *Post*. While such journalistic iniquities and other abuses of narrative journalism’s stylistic affordances undoubtedly stained the movement’s reputation, it also provided an opportunity for its practitioners and proponents to honestly and carefully consider their ethical obligations and the limitations of journalistic storytelling.

In Chapter 4, Schmidt follows the history of the storytelling movement as it progressed into the mainstream in the 1980s and 1990s. Along with a case study of the (Portland) *Oregonian* in the early 1990s—another success story for the movement—Schmidt chronicles the rise of narrative journalism conferences, professional trainings, and academic programs outside the newsroom. In 1991 the National Writers Workshops began in Wilmington, Delaware. Shortly thereafter, the Poynter Institute began organizing local writing weekends. In 2001, Harvard University held the Nieman Conference on Narrative Writing, a milestone in marking the credibility of the craft. Likewise, top journalism schools at the University of Missouri, the University of Oregon, and Boston University also began developing sustained programs focused on training current and future journalists in the art of storytelling. Textbooks and anthologies dedicated to narrative news writing were published and sold. Newsletters on narrative from organizations like Poynter grew in circulation to professionals across the country, and the storytelling movement was legitimized through articles in publications like *Columbia Journalism Review* and *American Journalism Review*.

In the midst of this blossoming literary press movement, Schmidt notes, newspapers also began targeting more affluent niche audiences. While Schmidt acknowledges that industry pressures certainly played a role in shaping the storytelling movement in newspapers, he argues that critics who suggest such macro-level influences were the only compelling factors in driving the adoption of narrative techniques in newspapers fail to acknowledge the importance of individual journalists during this time. While it is true that declining readership, the rise of television, and the changing tastes of the U.S. public forced newspaper owners and executives to reconsider how they viewed their product, it is also true that reporters and editors were shaping the topography of narrative in ways that defied traditional hard/soft, serious/fluff, news/features dichotomies.

As noted earlier, Schmidt has provided the field of literary journalism studies with an invaluable historical account of the narrative movement in newspapers over the last half of the twentieth century. Moreover, he has situated this account in a rich and useful theoretical framework of “cultural institutionalism” (10–11) that reconciles the macro-, meso-, and micro-level variables that gave rise to the phenomenon. If there is a shortcoming in his analysis, it is that the theoretical considerations could be woven more fluidly throughout the work. Schmidt lays his foundation clearly in the introduction. He also returns to it in the final chapter with a cogent, concise (yet thorough) conclusion that identifies the implications of this “narrative turn” (105–18) with three primary takeaway concepts: 1) narrative journalism as news logic, 2) narrative journalism as a media regime, and 3) narrative journalism as a cultural institution. However, most of the book is dominated by straight historical accounts that comprise the narrative movement, and it is easy to feel disconnected at times from the underlying theoretical framework. This is not to say that the theoretical framework is absent from the discussion; it is *implicit* throughout the text. However, moments of explicit theoretical articulation feel a bit fleeting, leaving the reader to wait until the final chapter to realize the full value of Schmidt’s “cultural

institutionalism” applied to the narrative movement in newspapers.

Schmidt is to be commended in providing both a detailed, robust chronicle of this important era in daily newspapers and a thoughtful, nuanced contribution to theoretical scholarship in the field. It is likely more theory packed throughout the chapters could have risked diminishing Schmidt’s own rich storytelling of narrative journalism’s history in daily newspapers. *Rewriting the Newspaper* is a rigorous work that is academically enlightening and a genuine pleasure to read.



## The Hard Work of Modernity

*Mühen der Moderne: Von Kleist bis Tschéchow—deutsche und russische Publizisten des 19. Jahrhunderts.* Edited by Horst Pöttker and Aleksandr Stan'ko. Cologne: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2016. Paperback, 544 pp., €34.

Reviewed by Kate McQueen, University of California Santa Cruz

In 1810, Heinrich von Kleist—that troubled luminary of German letters—fell into journalism in an old, familiar way. Financially desperate and hungry for an audience, the then-little-known writer launched *Berliner Abendblätter*, the city's first daily newspaper. Kleist served as publisher, editor, and reporter, barely able to avoid the censor while courting a skeptical public and enduring critique from his literary peers (Wilhelm Grimm dubbed it “die ideale Wurstzeitung”—the ideal wrapping for sausages) (42). The paper lasted five months. Still, Kleist managed to anticipate trends that would help define the press in the modern era. This included a “feel for the boulevard,” which manifested in “authentic, fact-oriented, and detailed” coverage of local crime (40).

Kleist is revered today as a literary modernist *avant la lettre*, whose haunting fiction thematized the crisis of order and meaning nearly one hundred years before its time. But it is the curiosity, if not outright irony, of Kleist's foresight in the realm of journalism that makes him worthy of the opening chapter in *Mühen der Moderne: Von Kleist bis Tschéchow—deutsche und russische Publizisten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, a collection of essays recently published in Halem Verlag's scholarly series *Öffentlichkeit und Geschichte* [Public and history].

As its title suggests, the volume chronicles the journalism of influential nineteenth century German and Russian authors. These range from writers well known as journalists in their home countries (Heinrich Heine) to authors primarily famous for their fiction (Lev Tolstoj). What unites the fourteen freestanding chapters is a shared animating idea: that this journalistic activity might serve as a sign of burgeoning modernity in Germany and Russia, nations late to the social, political, and technological advancements already underway in neighboring countries to the west.

Edited by Horst Pöttker, professor emeritus of journalism at the Technische Universität Dortmund, and Aleksandr Stan'ko, professor of journalism at Southern Federal University in Russia, the collection is the fruit of a long-standing multidisciplinary collaboration between scholars in both countries. “[T]he book,” the editors explain in their foreword, “should bring German readers closer to nineteenth



century Russian culture, and Russian to German” (14). Indeed, intercultural understanding drives many aspects of the collection. This includes, most noticeably, its unusual bilingual format. Each article appears in both languages, the German version printed on the left side of every page, and Russian version on the right.

The impulse for outreach also means that readers new to nineteenth century Russian and German literature will gain the most from this volume, less so experts in one or both. The chapters serve as introductions to individual authors, and the methodology in play is primarily philological, combining biography digested from of longer works of secondary literature with brief textual analysis. As with all volumes of collected essays, *Mühen der Moderne* exhibits some unevenness in the depth between contributions. The chapters offering more sustained analysis of sample texts are the most satisfying to read, largely because they are able to better show the link between the featured author’s journalistic contribution and the coming modern world. Of particular note are the chapters by coeditor Horst Pöttke—on Heinrich Heine and Georg Büchner—which are longer, argument-driven, and clearly speak to the collection’s thesis.

If the broad sweep across one hundred years, fourteen authors, and two countries loses depth, it certainly gains horizon. The book as a whole provides a wide-angled view to various intersecting constellations of figures and publications, all advocating in their own way for the public sphere during a deeply undemocratic moment. A sense of common struggle comes across, in pointillist fashion, against repressive laws, heavy-handed censorship, arrest, and exile. Some of these figures moved in the same circles; Heinrich Heine, Ludwig Börne, and Karl Gutzkow, for instance, are all affiliated with the Young Germany movement. These Young Germans, and later others like Aleksandr Gercen and Georg Weerth, fled to London and Paris, inspired, and ultimately disappointed, by the revolutions of 1830 and 1848.

The volume also makes clear how often literary strategies served as political protection, especially for those who were unable, or chose not to leave their home countries. This aspect of the collection will no doubt be of most interest to literary journalism scholars. “Times of censor are times of camouflage,” Gunter Reus points out in his piece on Kleist (48). Those who opted to openly use their polemical skills faced consequences, as plenty of anecdotes in the book show. Some are amusing, like Ludwig Börne’s censor offering stylistic critique in addition to policing content. Some are heart wrenching; the idealistic and morally scrupulous Vladimir Korolenko spent years under constant arrest and banishment. Many learned to work around the censor by cloaking social and political critique in satire, historical narrative, pastiche, blends of fact and fiction, or by cloaking themselves in *noms de plume*. Especially diverting is Aleksandr Puškin’s politically strategic use of fantasy, from pastiche to imagined conversations with the czar, as described by coeditor Stan’ko.

In this respect, although *Mühen der Moderne* was not conceptualized as a piece of literary journalism research, scholars in the field with reading knowledge of German or Russian will find this book to be a handy introductory guide to key players in nineteenth-century journalistic practice, and a useful springboard for detailed future study.