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Stepping Up to the Book Watch

Nancy L. Roberts,
University at Albany, SUNY, U.S.A.

This issue marks my first as book review editor for *Literary Journalism Studies*. I can't thank enough my predecessor, Thomas B. Connery of the University of St. Thomas, U.S.A., for his hard work to set a standard of excellence for this section. I will do my best to uphold it, with your help. Please contact me at nroberts@albany.edu to suggest books for possible review in this section and to offer to review them. We seek to publish reviews of at least three different types of books (including non-American titles): works of literary journalism, scholarly studies of literary journalism, and books about "doing" literary journalism.



In reviewing these and other types of books, the aim is to illuminate the connection to our field in a way that less specialized journals do not. That means, for instance, that a book such as Janet Malcolm's *Iphigenia in Forest Hills* should be discussed as a work of literary journalism and placed within that context. A scholarly work such as Leonora Flis's *Factual Fictions: Narrative Truth and the Contemporary American Documentary Novel* should be considered vis-à-vis how it is connected to the field's scholarship and what it contributes to that body of knowledge. And books about writing literary journalism should be evaluated with an eye toward clarifying how they might inform the student writer (particularly of literary journalism).

So, if you have suggestions for books to review and/or wish to volunteer to review, do get in touch. We are particularly grateful when our readers bring relevant books to our attention that do not get readily reviewed elsewhere because of their specificity.

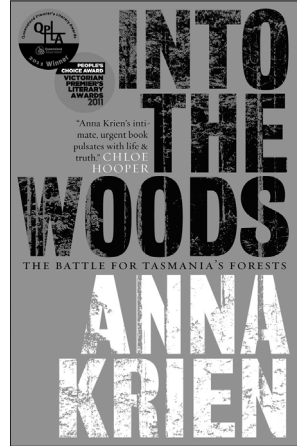
Discovering a New Voice

Into the Woods: The Battle for Tasmania's Forests

by Anna Krien. Black, Inc., 2010. Paperback, 304 pp., \$30.

Reviewed by Lindsay Morton, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

For almost two decades, much of the scholarship and public discourse surrounding Australian literary journalism has been centered on the nonfiction of Helen Garner. Recognizable as much for the controversial ethical debates her reportage engenders as for her highly literary approach, Garner is arguably better known internationally than investigative journalists such as David Marr, Estelle Blackburn, and Margaret Simons. At 69, Garner may be characterized as the matriarch of the form in Australia. More recently, however, three emerging female voices are joining Garner in the spotlight with their own styles of literary journalism: Anna Funder (*Stasiland*), Chloe Hooper (*The Tall Man*), and, most recently, Anna Krien (*Into the Woods*).



The youngest of this trio, Krien has written in a variety of forms for various iconic Melbourne publications, including *The Age* broadsheet. Like Garner, Funder, and Hooper, she prefers the general title “writer” to the more specific and politically charged “journo.” Her first book-length work, however, is undeniably journalistic in practice, as well as a fine example of the self-aware, literary style reminiscent of Garner’s work. *Into the Woods: The Battle for Tasmania’s Forests* (2010) focuses on the most recent developments in a decades-long conflict between government, loggers, and protestors (“ferals” or “ratbags” in the Australian vernacular), and uses current protests as a platform to investigate the wider issues surrounding the logging of old-growth forests.

Krien becomes involved in the issue after receiving a text message from a close friend—a feral—informing her of disturbing footage in which loggers smash the windows of a car containing nonviolent protestors. In less than an hour after viewing the footage, Krien has booked passage from her native Melbourne to Launceston, Tasmania’s northern port city, where she will begin what initially is a three-day investigation of the protest. Invariably, three days stretches into a month, and one trip into four, as Krien immerses herself in the issues, the factions, the stories, and the landscape.

A mainlander, Krien’s initial impressions of the island are informed by writers and filmmakers. As she ruminates on this on the ferry across Bass Strait, a fellow traveller interrupts her thoughts:

It is a gothic place with a bloody undercurrent, where behind every magic faraway tree is a logger kicking in the head of an activist . . . a place where Exclusive Brethren and pig farmers alike fund thousand-dollar advertising campaigns, and where a 2000-year-old protected tree is axed, drilled and filled with diesel before being spray-painted with the words ‘Fuck You Greenie Cunts’ and set alight.

“It’s nice out here, isn’t it?” a voice says behind me, parts of it disappearing in a gust of wind (10).

Such brazen irony is typical of Krien’s writing, although she relies less on structural playfulness than her open, searching, yet self-effacing narrative voice to guide the reader through the moral and political complexities of Tasmania’s timber wars. Arriving at the ferals’ home base, Krien is surprised at what she finds:

To the uninformed eye, Camp Florentine looks like a shit heap. Which is how it looks to me. The torched cars are still lingering like a hangover next to the road. Rectangles of sunlight spill through the axe wounds onto melted seats and burnt calico shopping bags. The stink of rubber catches on the wind (34).

The picture that emerges of “Camp Flozza” is an example of quintessential literary journalism. Krien’s eye for detail is ravenous, which should not be surprising, as she lists Tom Wolfe and Joan Didion among her strongest influences. In Wolfean tradition, she uses the camp as entry point to the physical space the ferals inhabit, but also as to symbolically introduce their position in wider political and social contexts. Krien writes:

At first I assume [the ferals] all know each other, but in time I realise that some don’t know the first thing about their companions. There is an odd lack of curiosity in the camp. People float in and out, asking few questions of one another, as if the past is erased and this, what they are not, is all that matters. I find this depressing (38).

Her unease becomes a motif throughout *Into the Woods*; as Krien moves through stages of understanding the issue from different perspectives, she becomes more deeply concerned about the transience and disconnectedness of the protestors’ lives. At times she openly confronts her friends, Ula and Wazza, about their goals, and the means they employ to reach them; at other times she is simply an outsider observing, “People breathe out, others are thinking hard. A sea of dirty dark hoodies, all accustomed to talk of the cops and bail and bunnies” (283), but with a tangible sense of disappointment in what the movement could be—and is not. Krien’s great achievement here is that she does not take the moral high ground; at most she is disillusioned. In the epilogue she makes friends “with a girl who has nothing to do with trees. She is a rare find” (281) and together they explore a beach for remnants of settlers’ broken tea sets. Krien writes, “The broken plates looked like shells, just as curious and gentle, not like they don’t belong at all. It is a relief to find beautiful traces of us” (282).

While Krien uses the ferals as both an entry and through line for the narrative, a great journalistic strength of the book is its even-handed representation of the stakeholders. The five sections of the narrative: Ratbags, Loggers, The Company, Groundswell, and The Mill are reported firsthand by Krien, as she employs her own

subjectivity to create the narrative drive and explore the complexities of the industry. While the initial representation of the loggers is damning—the recount of the blockade action is a chilling opening to the narrative proper—Krien spends time in pubs, homes, and the workplaces of loggers to get their perspective, at times at her own peril. The only female in the bar of the National Park Hotel, she walks in and orders a beer: “Ignoring the hush, I try to act as if I always walk into pubs full of men in the middle of nowhere” (75). When asked, “Are you a greenie?” by a logger, she shrugs and offers:

“I dunno. Are you?”

His mates semi-shriek and fall over themselves, while he puffs himself up.

“No way!”

I tell them I’m a writer and that I’ve been staying at the Florentine blockade up the road. The men recoil (76).

In a later interview, Krien admits she has no doubt that if she were a man she would have been beaten up outside the hotel, but as a woman and a writer, she is afforded some level of respect from the workers. She chats with a local, John, who is “a thoughtful presence amid the fluoro rowdiness” (77) and educates her on the some of the essential inside workings of the industry. This is not only Krien’s initiation, but also the reader’s, and is easily digestible in dialogue form in preparation for the more dense expository detail of later chapters. John is a personable character and a third-generation logger, and is paralleled later in the narrative by Matthew, another third-generation logger who is twenty-six years old and has mortgage and child-support payments to make. Krien draws the reader into the loggers’ world as she is, despite being wary of making alliances:

I got a shock once when, while I was travelling in a logger’s car, a wheezing old Datsun pulled up long side us at a red light, carrying a bunch of Pink Palace crew. Carefully I pressed myself into my seat and turned my face away, feeling like an adulterer, but not sure who I was cheating on (294).

Even out of the view of her friends, she seems conflicted about loyalties: “Later . . . I’m standing next to my car when a truck comes out of the coupe and starts down the main road. I see Matthew in the passenger seat. Instinctively, we wave” (296).

A classic feature of literary journalism, this tag-line at the paragraph break is loaded with implication—but Krien’s conflicting sympathies are never resolved.

Perhaps the least love is lost on politicians and corporate executives in *Into the Woods*, although Krien has good reason to be wary about her interviewees. She records:

My repeated attempts to speak to Gunns [Gunns Limited: Tasmania’s largest logging company] are not simply refused—they are ignored. . . . When I ask locals and state reporters if Gunns speaks to them and why its representatives won’t speak to me, I get a reply that induces a sinking feeling: Oh, they will. After you publish (158).

This passage seems Garneresque: both her first and second book-length journalistic efforts were impeded by subjects who refused to be interviewed. But, unlike Garner, who uses introspection to bridge the gap in content, Krien turns to archives.

Snatches of interviews continue the narrative line while expository passages provide detailed background to the political and big business aspects of the timber industry. Here a disturbing picture is painted of corporate greed and rogue-mateship, coupled with mind-boggling mismanagement of taxpayers' money. Krien deftly handles the facts and figures, largely exchanging her distinctive narratorial voice for a more neutral, objective exposition that anchors the text, and provides balance to what might otherwise be an unhealthy emotional narrative (Krien does not shy away from reporting bodily functions and spontaneous outbursts of tears).

Despite Gunns' eventual capitulation on building a controversial pulp mill—a victory for the greenies, albeit a temporary win—one does not feel that a resolution has been achieved at the end of *Into the Woods*. Loggers continue to log, politicians continue to plot, groups of ferals and ratbags disband and melt into the ether, and Krien is soon to return to her beloved Melbourne. But like all great works of literary journalism, this book signals a story beyond itself: Tasmania is only one small battleground in the war for the world's forests. Through the investigative process, Krien has found that blockaders versus loggers is in fact a false battleground; it is the environment versus the economy where the real war is being waged both locally and globally, and she can see no end in sight on either front.

The book finishes on a distracted and slightly ambiguous note: is Krien distancing herself from all of the stakeholders, including the ferals, determining not to side with any of the camps? The final passage suggests as much. Again, in the tradition of Garner, Funder, and Hooper, Krien has used her own curiosity as the medium through which to navigate an emotionally and politically charged arena for all Australians, and ultimately refuses to represent the issues as any less complex than she has found them. For Krien, objectivity is “a disguise to hide behind,” thus her transparent subjectivity not only refreshes, but also produces currency in an economy where self-interest is endemic.

Into the Woods is a distinctly Australian-flavored book, peppered with vernacular and private jokes about the mainland's embarrassing relative across the Strait, but these are assets for the growing canon of national literary journalism. Anna Krien has proven herself a willing student, a brave and balanced reporter/researcher, a gifted writer, and an exciting new voice in the tradition of female literary journalists. Garner has led the way for subjective, personal investigative journalism of controversial issues in Australia, and as she redirects her efforts back to her roots in fiction, Funder, Hooper, and Krien are worthy recipients of her mantle.

How Real Life Came to Be Told

Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life

by Thomas B. Connery, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011. Paperback, 306 pp., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Jan Whitt, University of Colorado, U.S.A.

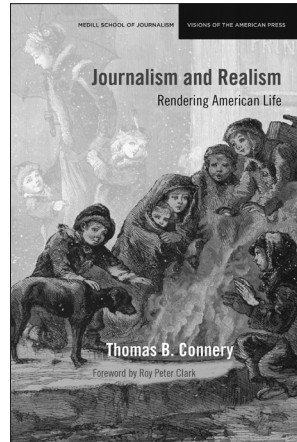
Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life is a sweeping study of journalism, literature, illustrations, and photography that will appeal to readers across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Employing historical analysis, literary criticism, and visual communication, Thomas B. Connery explores the role of journalism in the emergence of realism in nineteenth-century America.

Especially striking in Connery's detailed historical analysis is his ability to tell a story with emotion and energy. Excerpts from both popular and obscure writers of the period suggest Connery's desire to engage the reader; to deal compassionately with class issues, especially the "marginalized working class and the poor" (10); and to explain how human interest and snapshots of real life would come to define much of literary journalism and New Journalism.

Following a foreword by Roy Peter Clark, a senior scholar at the Poynter Institute, the book is divided into eight chapters: "A Paradigm of Actuality," "Searching for the Real and Actual," "Stirrings and Roots: Urban Sketches and America's Flaneur," "The Storytellers," "Picturing the Present," "Carving Out the Real," "Experiments in Reality," and "Documenting Time and Place." *Journalism and Realism* is ambitious in its scope: although Connery focuses upon the nineteenth century, he introduces writers from Charles Dickens to Ted Conover.

In the preface and first chapter, Connery clarifies his objectives and addresses particular genres, including essays, fiction, news reporting, and sketches. He writes:

This study makes no attempt to consider the validity of nineteenth-century realism; nor does it assess realism or its impact. First, it explores the role of journalism in participating in this broad, significant cultural shift, and secondly, it considers the ways that journalism both helped create that shift and reflected it with its content and commentary. I call this shift a paradigm of actuality (6) . . . While many histories of journalism tend to look at how newspapers covered major events and people, or at how certain publications served their readers or shaped attitudes toward gender, race, or ethnicity, this study examines and reexamines a selection of writers, journalists, and illustrators in order to connect them to an important development in American cultural history (9).



And although he addresses confluences and developments from the 1830s to the turn of the century, Connery is especially interested in 1890 to 1910, when realism held sway.

As a professor of communication and journalism who worked for newspapers and the Associated Press, Connery is passionate about the role of reporting in a free society, close observation and effective interviews, class consciousness and social movements, and published chronicles of everyday life.

Most importantly, Connery addresses the symbiotic relationship between journalism and literature, arguing that “journalism wasn’t merely linked to realism; it was part and parcel of a realistic movement with repeated attempts to record life observed” (xx). Furthermore, Connery focuses on observed life and the writers who employ “facts and accurate detail” to create meaning “around themes and well-defined characters” (82).

Connery is especially adept in his analysis of contributions by Stephen Crane, George G. Foster, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman. In a discussion of *Innocents Abroad*, for example, Connery celebrates Twain’s “questioning of myth, legend, and the ideal,” but especially admires the humorist’s “persistent advocacy of and belief in the personal observation of things—and life—as they are rather than as they should be.” Connery argues that these abilities make Twain “not just a practitioner of the real and actual but a critical voice as well” (99-100). Most importantly, Connery suggests Twain’s influence on A. J. Liebling, Hunter S. Thompson, and Tom Wolfe.

Connery’s portrait of Walt Whitman is similarly sound. Especially in *Leaves of Grass* (1855), Whitman “absorbed the urban spectacle and regularly shared his wonder and pleasure at this passing parade of people and activity” (41), Connery writes. As other historians and literary critics have noted, Whitman the poet relied upon his time as editor of the *New York Aurora* (1842) and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (1846-48) for much of his subject matter. Connery writes of Whitman:

He clearly was enamored by the ordinary—whether people or an everyday street scene. His writing, however, treated them as extraordinary by their very nature, but never in a sensational way. Whitman, enamored with democracy and America’s potential, was celebrating America and Americans, the one in many (48).

However, as much as he admires Whitman, Connery finds Foster more central to the themes he develops in *Journalism and Realism*. He writes:

Despite Whitman’s later role as a cultural mediator and influential iconic poet, it is Foster’s work, which documented the urban underbelly, that more specifically anticipates the growing number of written and visual portrayals that exposed urban poverty and vice, as well as the emerging chasm of class in America (70).

The breadth and depth of Connery’s study can be illustrated by even a partial list of those whom he features. The editors, photographers, illustrators, novelists, and reporters include: Nellie Bly, Mathew Brady, William Cullen Bryant, Abraham Cahan, Francis X. Clines, Stephen Crane, Rebecca Harding Davis, Richard Harding Davis, Theodore Dreiser, Edward Eggleston, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Others are Josiah Flynt, George G. Foster, Hamlin Garland, Alexander Gardner,

Hutchins Hapgood, Oliver Wendell Holmes, William Dean Howells, Henry James, Jack London, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Frank Norris, Timothy O'Sullivan, Frederic Remington, Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, and Walter A. Wyckoff.

Connery does not allude to morality plays, but in his analysis of the writers who addressed crime, drunkenness, poverty, and prostitutes, and who devoted column inches to immigrants, women, and workers of the lower classes, he is clearly interested in texts that encourage what Foster calls "Philanthropy and Justice" (62). Connery praises the self-deprecating humor some nineteenth-century writers employ and celebrates their interest in the actual and the real—as opposed to the ideal or the imaginative—and focuses upon their "*observation of life being lived*" (15).

In addition to his astute analysis of the contributions of individuals, Connery makes particular time periods such as the Penny Press and the Progressive Era come alive. For example, he argues that journalism during the Penny Press "had been covering the range of city life, telling tales about real people and events to the working-class and middle-class urban population before fiction started to do so" (23). Referring to columns such as the "Office Report" and to the sensational local news for which the Penny Press is known, Connery writes: "To a large extent, this type of writing and reporting resembled the conventions in the popular pamphlets that told stories of actual crimes, but it also resembles the conventions of the sentimental novel of the early nineteenth century" (30).

It is paradoxical and unfair to praise a scholar for the scope of his or her study and then request additional material. Ambitious and meticulously researched, *Journalism and Realism* does, however, suggest at least two possibilities for future research. First, some nineteenth-century journalistic texts might be better explicated by introducing naturalism as a subset of realism; and second, introducing more women writers (or explaining why they do not play a prominent role in the journalism and literature of the period) would enrich the study.

The distinctions and similarities between naturalism and realism bear mention, especially when dealing with Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, Lafcadio Hearn, Frank Norris, Jacob Riis, and Upton Sinclair, whose stories of "urban helplessness and broken dreams" (167) are so darkly evocative. For example, Hearn, who is best known for his descriptions of Cincinnati and New Orleans, wrote about "murders, hangings, dissections, abortion houses, the 'Stink Factory' where dead animals were processed, suicides, opium dens, autopsies, building hauntings, and grave robbing" (136), Connery writes. The bleak and godless landscape that motivated naturalists is light years away from the colorful, bustling crowds that enchanted Whitman and others like him.

Journalism and Realism also points to the potential for additional research about women journalists. Connery's portrayal of Rebecca Harding Davis—who wrote about workers who breathed "from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot" (73)—is especially noteworthy. References to social reformer Helen Campbell and to female *Washington Post* reporters also suggest compelling research possibilities.

Part of the Medill School of Journalism's "Visions of the American Press" series, *Journalism and Realism* is cultural commentary, historical analysis, and literary criticism at their best. The authors, editors, and reporters who contributed to the rise of social movements defined a century and deserve to be remembered in Connery's sprawling and engagingly written tribute.

The Roots of Truth Instability in American Journalism

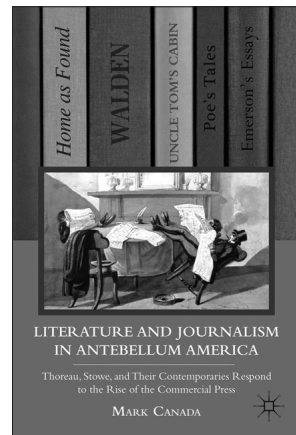
Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America: Thoreau, Stowe, and Their Contemporaries Respond to the Rise of the Commercial Press

by Mark Canada. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Hardcover, 203 pp., \$80.

Reviewed by Karen Roggenkamp, Texas A&M University-Commerce, U.S.A.

Since the publication of such groundbreaking studies as Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *From Fact to Fiction* (1985) and David Reynolds's *Beneath the American Renaissance* (1988), a growing number of scholars have worked to untangle the complex web that intertwines the histories of journalism and literature in nineteenth-century America. Mark Canada adds to the effort in his concise book, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America*, which offers an analysis of what he calls the "sibling rivalry" between the two forms of writing during the antebellum period.

Canada argues that as the literary marketplace exploded in the third decade of the century—fueled in no small part by the rise of the Penny Press—the once-comfortable relationship between journalism and literature became strained. Both forms of writing pursued "the same things: the story and the truth" (11), but the discrepancies between how various writers *defined* "truth" signaled a widening gap between types of writing that had in earlier decades lain rather comfortably side by side. Where journalists defined truth in terms of factual information, imaginative writers turned toward more metaphysical understandings of truth, or the "truths beneath or beyond the facts" (3)—what Nathaniel Hawthorne would famously call the "truth of the human heart" in his 1851 novel, *The House of the Seven Gables*. While journalists and imaginative authors generally shared common purposes and even narrative tech-



niques, they increasingly disagreed “over which discipline is better equipped to tell the truth” (13). From the 1830s on, then, the literary marketplace played host to a sometimes heated competition between the news and the imagination as each sought to establish the superiority of its truth claims—and to delineate the very definition of “newsworthy” itself.

Canada divides *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America* into two sections. Part I details the narrative intertwining of journalism and literature as seen through sensation-mongering pens of such editors as James Gordon Bennett, and the more contemplative pens of novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper. Journalists and imaginative authors alike saw the writer as a mediator of reality, and both the newspaper and the novel privileged stories built on human interest, “conflict, novelty, and irony” (20). Similarly, both kinds of writers marketed their wares to a readership that was bombarded by an exploding number of print resources. In terms of publications that purported to have the truth, supply outstripped demand, and competition between journalism and literature was the inevitable result.

Even as some authors tried their hand at both journalism and fiction (Canada calls them “crossover writers”), the act of producing the news turned some of “its practitioners into some of its harshest and most penetrating critics” (44). Taking a cue from the scholars who have preceded him, like Fishkin and Reynolds, Canada reads the skepticism toward journalism as expressed by canonical figures of American literature like Edgar Allan Poe, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville against the backdrop of a newly story-driven news narrative. In the face of novel ideas about delivering the news to a mass audience, imaginative authors lobbed their criticisms against what they saw as the excesses of mass-market newspapers, and Canada points out that at the heart of these negative critiques lay literary authors’ skepticism about the ability of journalism to achieve any substantive or meaningful “truth,” criticism that drove their attempt to show how literature “was better equipped to pursue and capture the truth” (64).

Part II of *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America* trains its lens more closely on four literary figures of the time and their efforts to craft what Canada calls “news of their own,” an “alternative form of journalism” expressed through imaginative creations (87). One chapter, for instance, examines how Thoreau and Dickinson manipulated journalistic language and concepts to offer an alternative “news” outlet through literary nonfiction and poetry. In the hands of these authors, readers could encounter “journalistic” language that ultimately undercut journalism, and writing that exposed underlying “truths” or principles rather than merely sensational, superficial, time-bound facts. Another chapter looks at Poe’s engagement with journalism through his crafting of hoaxes and investigative fictions. Although scholars have studied such famous (and infamous) cases as the “Balloon Hoax” and “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” Canada offers a fresh reading of these moments in literary and journalistic history, which is particularly strong in his discussion of Poe’s 1835 story, “The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall.” The theme of investigative fiction as an alternative to superficial journalism extends, for example, to a consideration of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Rebecca Harding Davis, who crafted *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*

and “Life in the Iron Mills,” respectively, to assert the “superiority of literature in investigating and exposing hidden realities” (121).

As Canada confesses, any study of journalism and literature risks oversimplification, given the diversity and complexity of the two fields in the nineteenth century, and he warns against “suggesting that a group of diverse people over the course of nearly three decades spoke with a single voice” (59). Still, the book sometimes verges on presenting a binary between journalists and imaginative authors, with the former standing “for” journalism and the latter “against.” The truth, so to speak, is of course more complex, and to his credit Canada does strategically remind his audience about the intricacies of the literature-journalism interplay. Similarly, Canada sometimes associates “indirect, ambiguous, suggestive language” exclusively with literary expression. Yet, this kind of language was frequently employed in journalistic contexts as well, and a longer study might have taken up, even further, truth claims as envisioned by antebellum journalists who composed their own forms of “literary journalism” or who approached newspaper work from a solidly “literary” ethos. To provide one example, Canada writes that newspaper editor Charles Dana “espoused a common journalistic view of truth—that of objective, visible reality” (42). While doubtless true to a degree, a reader wonders what the word “objectivity” signified in the antebellum period. And how would a figure like Dana, who adhered to transcendentalist viewpoints and projects during the antebellum period, understand a phrase like “visible reality”? How might consideration of a transcendentalist/editor figure like Dana complicate our understanding of journalism in the 1830s-1850s? Continued exploration of such questions could extend Canada’s study and enrich its thesis.

In the end, though, *Literature and Journalism in Antebellum America* has much to recommend it, and the book is at its strongest when it focuses on the details of how specific literary works portray and critique newspapers. Readers interested in literary journalism specifically, as well as the histories of literature, journalism, and American print culture more generally, will find Canada’s concise work an engaging and useful study of this time period. The book’s accessible and energetic style will appeal to a broad audience, and while it is directed principally toward an academic readership (from undergraduate to professional levels), it could attract a general audience as well. Ultimately, as contemporary print media outlets in America face their own crises about relevance and truth claims (or, as comedian “newscaster” Stephen Colbert puts it, “truthiness”), Canada’s book goes far in establishing some of the national roots of truth’s instability. As Canada notes, consumers in the early twenty-first century “stand on the threshold of a new age in information and communication” (7), with the fate of traditional print journalism—and, I would add, perhaps even literature itself—in question.

Mom and Dad, Suffering and Literary Journalism

Chronicling Trauma: Journalists and Writers on Violence and Loss
by Doug Underwood. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, History of Communication series, 2011. Hardcover, 210 pp., \$50.

Reviewed by Linda Kay, Concordia University, Canada

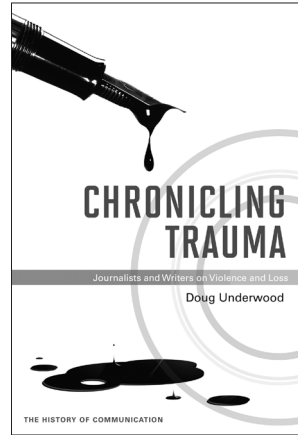
Essayist Charles Lamb, who worked as a journalist for the *London Magazine*, struggled to maintain equilibrium in a difficult life punctuated by a deeply traumatic episode. Lamb cared for an invalid mother, a senile father, and a manic-depressive sister who killed their mother with a carving knife one evening in 1796 as dinner preparations were underway.

Poet Walt Whitman, a newspaper editor, came from a family riddled with dysfunction: his father drank heavily, his mother was a hypochondriac, a brother was retarded, a sister may have been psychotic, another brother became an alcoholic, and a third died in an insane asylum.

Novelist Ernest Hemingway, who worked as journalist for the *Kansas City Star* and the *Toronto Star*, could be considered the poster-boy for writers whose early life experience led to an emotionally imbalanced life. His mother dressed him as a girl from a young age, and his father, a physician who was prone to convulsive rages, committed suicide, as did Hemingway's sister and brother—and the writer himself.

Lamb, Whitman, and Hemingway are among 150 journalist-literary figures living in the United States and Great Britain from the 1700s until today that Doug Underwood considers in a book documenting traumatic episodes “that can be viewed as contributing to their emotional struggles, the vicissitudes of their journalism careers and *their development as artists*” [Italics are mine].

Chronicling Trauma: Journalists and Writers on Violence and Loss builds on Underwood's earlier work, *Journalism and the Novel: Truth and Fiction, 1700-2000*, which examined the intertwined relationship of journalism to literary writing. In that earlier book, Underwood, a professor of communication at the University of Washington, defined the term ‘journalist-literary figure’ as a writer of fiction and/or nonfiction who had an important career in journalism and built literary work on that foundation. It was while doing research for *Journalism and the Novel* that Underwood first noticed “how often issues of trauma, emotional instability, and substance abuse have played a role in the lives and the careers of these journalistic writers.”



While traumatic experience is commonly defined in dramatic terms and associated with catastrophic events (war, terrorist attacks, violent crime, and natural disasters), Underwood takes a different approach. He identifies with the work of literary scholars who've expanded the meaning of trauma into the realm of psychological issues that can be connected with childhood stress and emotional loss, which then interact with what Underwood terms "inherited psychological attributes and temperamental proclivities that can have a powerful and often lifetime impact on the individual." For his study, he adopts the definition of trauma used by Janice Haaken in her 1998 work, *Pillar of Salt*, which she defines as "an acute subjective distress response to an unbearable reality and/or an overwhelming external event . . . Trauma may take the form of a discrete event, such as the loss of a parent or birth of a sibling, or chronic strains and stresses, such as neglect and abuse."

Underwood's work chronicling these patterns of personal loss, childhood stress, family disturbance and inherited characteristics in the lives of 150 journalist-literary figures—some of them literary giants, others lesser known—is an admittedly fascinating exercise for the reader, akin to devouring psychologically probing personality profiles of the type that appear in the magazine *Vanity Fair*. There's Edgar Allan Poe (drunkard father abandons family when Poe is an infant; mother dies before his third birthday); Mark Twain (mentally unstable mother); Willa Cather (imperious and depressive mother); Nellie Bly (lost her father at age six); Jack Kerouac (older brother died when Kerouac was a young child); Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (mother committed suicide), and Jimmy Breslin (two alcoholic parents).

Underwood argues that his study suggests that these points of psychological and emotional stress played an important role in driving these figures to artistic accomplishment—and may have led them to the profession of journalism in the first place, since journalism, he argues, with its exposure to risky situations and potential danger, could be seen as a magnet for unstable personalities seeking a way to fulfill their literary ambition.

I'm not sure. In my opinion, Underwood's broad definition of trauma is too broad, too all-encompassing, somewhat of a grab bag. Is it a stretch when Underwood notes that more than two-thirds of these 150 journalist-literary figures suffered some form of "employment trauma" while working in journalism, including being fired from a job, having their writings censored or suppressed, covering military conflicts or other stories in dangerous circumstances, or having an emotional breakdown while in the journalism job? Should all these "traumas" be considered in the same category as other psychological trauma—and are they traumas at all?

Traumatic incidents vary widely by degree. Certain traumas are more particular to an era—losing a parent at an early age, for instance, was not uncommon in the 1800s—and responses to the same traumatic event can vary person to person, as Underwood duly notes. Moreover, very few lives are trauma-free, if governed by the generalities that Underwood applies. I would venture to guess that the type of traumatic episodes Underwood describes have marked the early lives of many people in the helping professions—police officers, firefighters, nurses, doctors, and social workers—and perhaps mark the lives of many people no matter what profession.

Underwood notes that his list of journalist-literary figures is selective and should not be viewed as statistically or scientifically representative of all journalists who have engaged in fictional or literary writing. In his consideration of the family dynamics at work in the early lives of journalist-literary figures, Underwood really seems to be revisiting an age-old question: Does the production of great art require great suffering? The notion of the tormented and emotionally unbalanced artist has been around for centuries and, as Underwood notes, many contemporary studies have found evidence of an association between creativity and predisposition to mental illness. Underwood's book, then, provides food for thought in linking an early childhood trauma to that predisposition in journalist-literary figures.

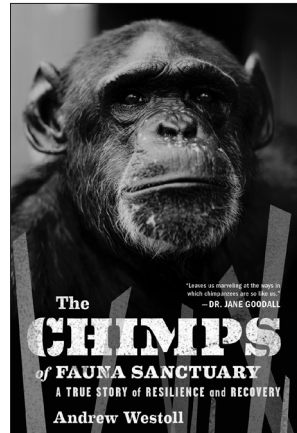
Hanging with Chimpanzees, Agee-style

The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary: A True Story of Resilience and Recovery
by Andrew Westoll. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011. Hardcover, 268 pp., \$25.

Reviewed by Nancy L. Roberts, University at Albany, SUNY, USA

In the best participant observer tradition of literary journalism, Andrew Westoll spent ten weeks living and working as a volunteer caregiver at Fauna farm, a rural sanctuary outside Montreal for chimpanzees retired from a New York State biomedical research laboratory. The result is this first-rate addition to the corpus of contemporary literary journalism. *The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary*, recently awarded the 2012 Charles Taylor Prize for Literary Non-Fiction in Canada, establishes Westoll as an able contributor to the genre. The book is richly informed by immersion research, participant observation, sharp storytelling in service of a distinct point of view, and a literary sensibility that takes the reader from everyday facts (i.e., the history of biomedical research on great apes) to ultimate reflections (on the philosophical meaning of our shared evolutionary history with chimpanzees).

A remarkable animal rights advocate, Gloria Grow, with her veterinarian husband rescued fourteen chimpanzees in 1997 and brought them to Canada to found the sanctuary. Eventually she invited Westoll, a Canadian journalist who had once studied primatology in the South American rainforest among wild capuchin monkeys, to write the chimps' biography. Westoll adroitly characterizes these great apes,



easing us into a disarming recognition of their uniqueness. There is Sue Ellen, “a senior citizen whose teeth were knocked out with a hammer and chisel when she was young” (13), who “has a weakness for large, bearded men,” perhaps “a remnant of her childhood in the circus” (35). And epper, Sue Ellen’s best friend and protector, who is extremely intelligent and terribly claustrophobic” (13). And Binky (aka “the Bub”), who resembles “a boxer crossed with a gymnast,” Westoll writes, “. . . his thighs like industrial pistons” (10). And there is “Regis, the diabetic who refuses to take insulin [years as a biomedical research lab subject have made needles an object of terror to him]; Jethro, the alpha male who runs around mediating everyone’s disputes . . .” (13), as well as Chance, who spent the first five years of her life in total isolation in a lab in a tiny baboon cage. (Like humans, chimps suffer severe psychological stress when they are socially isolated.) The most disturbed Fauna resident is Rachel, who suffers from lab-induced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that makes her rock incessantly and mutilate herself. When Westoll observes her, “She shivers wildly, as if being stung by a thousand bees” (172). Yet, “Before being abandoned by her human owner at the age of three, Rachel enjoyed taking bubble baths and wearing frilly dresses” (caption, following 114). Her best friend is Toby, who likes to chase geese and sports a scrunchie on his wrist, like a bracelet.

Typical of lab primates, the chimpanzees had been removed from their mothers only days after their birth and kept for years in small cages, sometimes in isolation for years, where they were repeatedly infected with lethal diseases such as HIV and hepatitis for research study. Infected apes then underwent repeated “punch biopsies” of the liver under general anesthesia, in which a long needle was pushed through the abdominal wall to retrieve a fresh sample of liver for analysis. Even a routine blood draw required the chimp to be knocked unconscious (in lab lingo, to be “knocked down”), usually with a dart gun.

Westoll, who has watched videos of these scenes, describes how:

The target chimpanzee goes berserk with terror inside his cage as the technician lines him up in the sights . . . As he spins and crashes his body against the steel bars, the other chimps in the unit—his friends, perhaps his family—begin screaming and howling and banging with all their might. Every time a chimpanzee is shot with a dart gun, those in nearby cage watch him grow groggy and lethargic and then crash to the floor in a matter of minutes, sometimes from high up on a resting bench. As far as these innocent bystanders, know, a dart gun equals something close to death. When they see a chimp about to be shot, they react as if their friend’s life is about to be taken (70).

Tom, whom Westoll describes as Fauna’s quiet, wise old man, endured being injected with different strains of HIV for thirty years, during which time he was knocked down at least 369 times. Because Tom and other lab chimps endured severe trauma, both physical and mental, for so long, they arrived at Fauna Sanctuary with a deeply felt distrust of humans. Throughout the book, Westoll’s perspective is plain: he wants us to be sobered by considering that the United States is the world’s only country that still conducts biomedical research on chimpanzees, our closest evolutionary relatives. In fact, a one-page appendix details “How You Can Help the

Chimps,” i.e., through donations to chimpanzee sanctuaries and through political action. Interestingly, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), historically a major U.S. funder of primate research, announced just late last year that it will not fund any new projects for biomedical and behavioral research involving chimpanzees (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-12-025.html>). It is impossible to connect Westoll’s advocacy directly with this development, but his book certainly raises the alarm.

However, *The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary* is also an uplifting account of how these troubled apes slowly come, in retirement, to reclaim their lives as chimpanzees. Their hair grows back, their color improves, and they put on healthy weight. And learning to play simple games of tickle-chase, to groom each other, to roughhouse are all ways that the chimps show they are on the mend.

The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary is both about the healing triumphs of these great apes and the attendant spiritual growth of their caretakers. Ultimately it is a story about resilience and compassion, both human and ape, and the triumph of the wild spirit.

Westoll reveals the story in many layers, most appropriate for this setting that is, as Grow tells him in one of many interviews, part “maximum security prison, a Zen retreat, an old folks’ home, and a New York deli during the lunchtime rush.” The troubled chimpanzees’ histories are complicated, but the remedies that Grow and her staff try to help the apes transcend their longstanding residue of anger, insecurity, and depression are fairly simple: patient, loving kindness.

Westoll segues seamlessly from straightforward science reporting to vivid sensory description. He paints a picture of the detritus he captures during one cleaning day in the chimpanzee house that evokes James Agee’s gift for environmental portraiture in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*:

I shovel, sweep, and bag a surreal cornucopia: yogurt cups, urine-soaked hay, torn cardboard, soiled tambourines, mini-pianos, plastic xylophones, baby bath toys, Lego people, stuffed animals, paper bags, peanut shells, pistachio and walnut shells, hollowed-out pumpkins, lettuce leaves, lettuce hearts, apple cores, mango pits, empty water bottles, full water bottles, half-empty water bottles with a hole toothed in the cap, children’s magazines, adult magazines, young adult novels, crayons, markers, necklaces, bracelets, headbands, socks, gloves, dress-up dolls, wide-brimmed sun hats, cotton cardigans, faux-silk scarves, paintbrushes, painting palettes, paintings by a Chimpson Pollock (159).

He also zeroes in on the most telling details, such as the particulars of chimpanzee mourning rituals, so much like human ones: “When Donna Rae died of kidney failure, . . . Pepper, Susie, Rachel, Petra, and Chance [all chimps] gathered around Donna and spent the next three hours preparing her for her final journey. They groomed her fingernails and toenails, tried to feed her water, occasionally tickled her to make sure she wasn’t just sleeping” (161).

Westoll has also written *The Riverbones* (Surinam in the United Kingdom), a travel memoir about his search for a rare frog in the Surinam jungles. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia and has written

for many publications, among them the *Globe and Mail*, the *Guardian*, *Utne Reader*, *Canadian Geographic*, and the *Walrus*. His work has been included in *Cabin Fever: The Best New Canadian Non-Fiction* and his science column can be heard occasionally on CBC Radio One. Clearly, *The Chimps of Fauna Sanctuary* propels him into a prominent place among Canadian literary journalists.

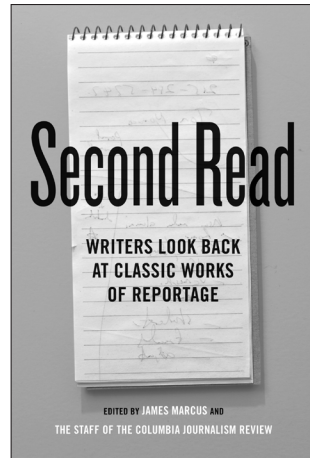
Some Clues to Origins of the Literary Imagination

Second Read: Writers Look Back at Classic Works of Reportage

edited by James Marcus and the Staff of the *Columbia Journalism Review*. New York: Columbia Journalism Review Press, 2012. Paperback, 184 pp., \$24.50.

Reviewed by Brian Gabriel, Concordia University, Canada

We all have our favorite pieces of literary journalism, so what makes *Second Read* a welcome addition to the bookshelf of the literary journalism scholar or anyone else loving great reporting is that it gives today's top literary journalists a chance to pay homage to the reporters and the work that inspired them. Its editor James Marcus, also a deputy editor at *Harper's*, writes that *Second Read* took root in 2004 with the purpose of allowing "distinguished journalists to look back at the books that truly fired their imagination" (vii). While several essayists pay their respects to literary journalism's familiar voices (Didion, Mailer, McPhee, or Wolfe), others reacquaint us with the overlooked and neglected writers whose nonfiction is worth a first read. That is what makes this book with its twenty-three sharply written essays stand out. The reader is reminded, for example, that Betty MacDonald, a writer remembered best for introducing Ma and Pa Kettle to Americans, was a wonderfully comedic memoirist and that Cornelius Ryan's *The Longest Day* is not only a substantive work of history but remains today an exemplar of excellent reporting technique and research. Every essay here deserves mention, so it's a challenge to review adequately such a stellar collection. Some general comments, instead, may suffice.



First, *Second Read* is useful because it cuts to the core of what makes good journalism. Yet, as anyone who practices, teaches, or studies journalism knows, the definition of good journalism—literary or otherwise—can be fluid, depending on who is doing the defining. According to Marcus, the essays “suggest a number of contrasting models for contemporary journalism” (viii), from the participatory journalism of Norman Mailer’s *Armies of the Night* to A. J. Liebling’s hands-off approach in *Earl of Louisiana*.

These essayists with their own style and tastes argue persuasively about their subjects as great reporters. In the book’s opening selection, for example, Rick Perlstein writes about Paul Cowan’s *The Tribes in America*, a story of America’s 1970s culture wars, telling how Cowan, who died in 1988, stepped into worlds mostly filled with people whose ideas he disliked. In Perlstein’s view, “He did so brilliantly—eyes open, with a courage I can scarcely believe” (3). It is the mark of a great reporter to test, as Cowan did, his or her own “prejudices against reality” while holding onto the values and principles “worth keeping” (8). He gave his subjects, whether he agreed with them or not, a sense of dignity. For different reasons, Michael Shapiro’s essay on Cornelius Ryan’s *The Longest Day* is another reminder about a reporter doing great journalism. Ryan, who was in Normandy on D-Day, did not write a memoir, choosing instead to retell the day based upon exhaustive research and extensive survivor interviews. According to Shapiro, who tells us his affection for the book is partly due to its being the first “grown up” book he ever read, “Something was taking place in the telling of this story that transcended the journalistic equivalent of mere looks—a richness, a depth” (96). Ryan got the details right in his set pieces, in Shapiro’s view, arguing that *The Longest Day* stands as an early example of what the later New Journalism came to represent.

Each essay serves an important dual purpose, offering biographical insight into the essayists, their subjects, and their literary motivations and connections. Ted Conover’s piece on Stanley Booth’s *Dance with the Devil: The Rolling Stones and Their Times*, for example, informs the reader that Conover’s editor suggested the book when Conover began writing his classic piece of literary nonfiction, *Coyotes*. He says that Booth’s immersion into the rock ’n’ roll life of his subjects “seemed similar to what I had in mind with Mexican migrants: participate and immerse rather than simply interview and observe” (52). He credits Booth’s tale for getting him through a writer’s block, breaking “a dam and start a flow” (53). The essay also reflects a cautionary tale about participatory journalism’s dangers. In Booth’s case, the rock ’n’ roll life left him immobilized as a writer, forcing him to wait years until he could clearly reflect on that life and write about it.

Second Read offers varied perspectives about what makes journalism literary. John Maxwell Hamilton’s essay, for example, on Vincent Sheean’s *Personal History* persuasively advocates for its resuscitation in the canon. “What elevated Sheean among luminaries in journalism,” Hamilton writes, “was the literary quality of his reporting, his uncanny abilities to situate himself in the slipstream of monumental news, and the intensity of feeling with which he viewed those events” (125). Marla Cone also makes a strong case for the literary merits of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. While an

exceptional book—"No other environmental book has had such a far-reaching impact" (34)—it is not considered, in this reviewer's opinion, particularly literary. Yet to challenge Cone's assessment would miss the point and the point of the book. Her essay and others like it reveal that what makes something literary is linked intimately to personal sensibilities.

Connie Schultz's essay on Michael Herr's *Dispatches* is another case in point because it adds to the continuing debate over truthfulness in literary journalism. While Herr's composite approach in *Dispatches* has offended the orthodox—and Schultz doubts that it could pass muster in today's world of "online fact-checkers and self-anointed 'citizen journalists'" (91)—she argues that most of us have never been to war and that the book, despite its "flaws maybe as straight journalism," stands as a testament to those who served in Vietnam. While Schultz's essay naturally brings to mind John Hersey's "Legend on the License" essay, warning against even truthful inventions, she counters, "I have neither the right nor the will to pass judgment on how he [Herr] brought home the war to millions of Americans who had yet to face it" (91).

The book is not perfect, because no collection like this can be. It shows, for example, a strong gender bias with the contributors and their choices being mostly male (no Martha Gellhorn or Lillian Ross showcased here). And, despite the inclusion of a few writers like Miles Corwin (his piece on Gabriel García Márquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*) or Naresh Fernandes' Palagummi Sainath (*Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts*), the essays favor American writers. Despite these limits, Marcus and his fellow editors have put together an impressive, satisfying grouping. *Second Read* is a highly recommended testament to great reporters who did (and are doing) great literary journalism. For that reason alone, we need *Second Read II*.
