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**Book Review: Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic
Traditions and Transnational Influences, edited by John S. Bak and Bill
Reynolds**

Sandhya Rao

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[What is This?](#)

This extensive anthology updates one last revised in 2003 (before the publisher was taken over by ABC-CLIO, explaining the move to the West Coast). The editors, at Washington State and California State, Fullerton, respectively, have gathered nearly thirty original chapters on (often unintended) imagery impact, and arranged them into six parts. That the issue is important shows up almost daily in reports or complaints about some image or other contributing to a stereotype—or worse.

The initial section, “Marking and Demarking Images: Narratives and Identities,” includes five chapters on such things as ethical responsibilities and the power of pictures, stereotypes and photojournalism, images in readers’ construction of news narratives, how some media reports serve to diminish humanity in image and deed, and—taking a positive point of view—images that can empower and heal. The “Images of Race and Ethnicity” section turns to a case study of the Lenape as an example of either cultural survival or assimilation (or perhaps elements of both), commodifying Native American cultural images, African American images in the news, racial “passing” (for white) by some ethnic minorities, and a study of exiles and the media function of “erasure” of those people and their culture.

Part 3, “Delimiting, Denying, and Selling Our Gender and Sexuality,” offers five further chapters on the iconic imagery of Matthew Shepard, the gay Wyoming man gruesomely murdered in 1998; selling sex; men as a “disposable sex”; dissecting the images in a music video; and transcending stereotypes of feminine and masculine in the media. “Images of Age, Illness and the Body,” Part 4, reviews the use of mediated images of kids to sell products—Pepsi’s generation gap in its advertising, stereotypes of the body, media myths and breast cancer, and changing images of disability in the media.

The fifth section examines “Images Shaping and Constraining Religions and Ethnicities” and turns to Jewish youth and their self-image in TV news, the media’s view of Mexican Americans, exterminating the enemy (or multiple enemies) in editorial cartoons, the trend in images of Gulf Arabs from caricatures to their becoming managers of their portrayals, and Muslim voices in the web era. These last two chapters have become far more salient since the last edition of the book eight years ago.

Finally, “Images of Inside, Outside, and Other” wraps up with chapters about the images of Haitian immigrants to the United States, exotic babies (of various colors and ethnicities) for sale, virtual world stereotypes, and editorial cartoons and their stereotypes of politicians.

Ethicist Clifford Christians offers a conclusion, and the editors add an afterword. This is a hugely important topic, sympathetically treated and updated here with sensitive new scholarship and examples.

Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences. John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, eds. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. 320 pp. \$28.95 pbk.

Reviewed by: Sandhya Rao, *Texas State University, San Marcos, TX, USA*
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Journalism training in Western education systems has long focused on skills such as fact finding and objective writing. Moreover, scant space in newspapers has forced journalists to be economical with the number of words they use, so much so that Jenny McKay, writing about reportage in the United Kingdom in *Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences*, edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds, comments that none of her journalism professors ever mentioned a connection between journalism and literature. This is probably true of most journalism instructors in general, unless they were teaching a course in literary journalism. Hence, it is not surprising that literary journalism is more of a specialized area of study rather than a part of a regular reporting class.

This book—"essays that place literary journalism in an international context"—provides rich information about the history, traditions, and practices of literary journalism around the world. Yet the picture that emerges at the end is that the intersection of journalism and literature remains unclear, and becomes foggier in an international context. Take a few of the bewildering variety of definitions of literary journalism: creative nonfiction, literary reportage, narra-descriptive journalism, narrative journalism, and New Journalism—where fact intersects with fictional styles, and where the objective and subjective get blurry.

Given that the origin and purpose of literary journalism vary from country to country, based on contextual factors such as the social, political, and economic climate, it is not surprising that this genre has taken different shapes and forms. For example, Bill Reynolds, who teaches at Ryerson University in Toronto, writes that in Canada, seven young literary journalists have formed a group known as FCC (earlier the initials stood for False Creek Coalition, later the Foreign Correspondents Club, and now the acronym itself). These journalists travel the world and narrate their experiences in a subjective manner in the larger context of the world. For their part, Clazina Dingemans and Rutger De Graaf trace the roots of Dutch literary journalism to literary pamphleteering that used innovative and imaginative ways of conveying information such as dialogues and dream stories and explain how the newspapers took on some of their literary tones.

The book is divided into three parts: toward a theory of international literary journalism, journalistic traditions, and transnational influences. In the introduction, Bak—who teaches American literature at Nancy Université in France—traces the origin of literary journalism to the end of the nineteenth century. This genre of journalism survived even though after World War I it was believed that journalism had to be "objective" or "polemical," he writes. Although on one hand it has been recognized that democracy and freedom of information fuel the growth of literary journalism, Bak states that oppression has probably been an even better catalyst for its growth. This is well illustrated in Peiqin Chen's chapter on literary journalism in China. "Leading Chinese critics believe that sharp criticism of society is the soul of literary reportage," Chen says, "and without this edge of social criticism, any work of literary reportage becomes meaningless." He says that this genre became more common during times of transition and conflict; after the People's Republic of China was

formed in 1949, literary reportage became a tool of government propaganda. Norman Sims, who has spent three decades studying literary journalism, says the genre builds bridges between cultures where traditional news reporting cannot. "International literary journalism has gained audiences even in countries that do not have a Western press system or a democratic government," he writes. "In its ability to portray characters with real emotions and the drama of everyday life, literary journalism has a natural advantage that almost ensures its survival even in harsh conditions."

An important contribution of this book is its global and transnational perspective on literary journalism. For instance, Isabel Soares writes about pioneers of literary journalism in Portugal at the end of the nineteenth century who were influenced by the New Journalism of France and Britain. One example is "new" journalist Eca de Queiros, who wrote "Eca's English Letters" from London in the Portuguese newspaper *A Actualidade* during the second half of the 1800s, addressing a wide range of social, political, and cultural topics and international conflicts, even commenting on scandals. His popularity spread across the Atlantic, as he wrote his letters from England for a paper in Brazil for seventeen years.

In days of shrinking news budgets and newsholes, a major problem facing literary journalism is budgetary. As Sims says, "[F]inding economic support for literary journalism, given the time and labor it takes to produce, will continue to be a problem everywhere." Contributor Jenny McKay observes that word limits will curtail the time spent on research as well. Despite these constraints, Sonia Parratt predicts that literary journalism will continue to flower in Spain especially, because of articles that provide depth that is lacking in other media. Although Finland does not really have literary journalism, Maria Lassila-Merisalo says traces of it exist.

This book opens a lively international discussion about the many facets of literary journalism. Bak acknowledges that "international literary journalism still needs to establish its boundaries," and calls for more research in this area.

Media and Environment: Conflict, Politics and the News. Libby Lester. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2010. 205 pp. \$69.95 hbk. \$24.95 pbk.

Reviewed by: Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., *University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA*
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Because Libby Lester teaches journalism at the University of Tasmania, it is not surprising that Tasmanian environmental politics plays a prominent role in her exploration of the media's coverage of environmental issues. What is surprising is the broad scope of her exploration of similar coverage around the globe. The fact that she earned her doctorate at Cardiff and did postdoctoral research at Oxford not only helps to explain the breadth of her investigation, but also provides some clues about the approach she takes to making sense of all this diversity.