

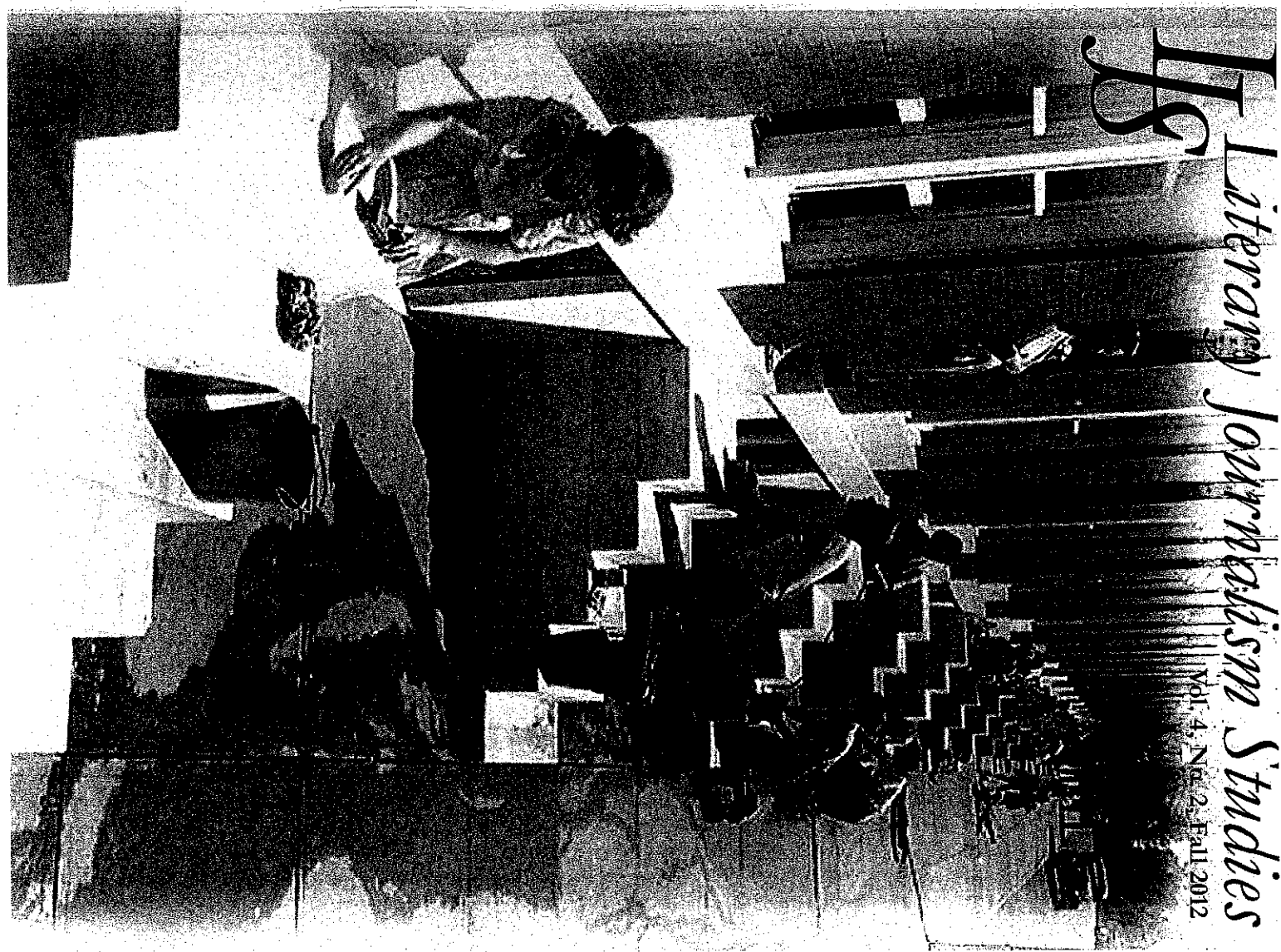
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Nancy L. Roberts, Book Review Editor

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A Road Map for the World

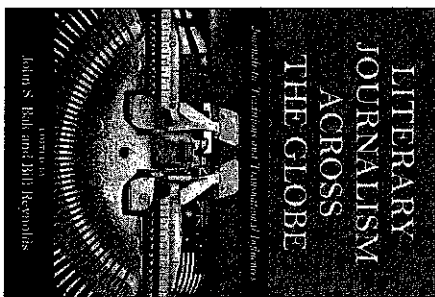
Literary Journalism Across the Globe: Journalistic Traditions and Transnational Influences
Edited by John S. Bak and Bill Reynolds. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011. Paperback, 306 pp., \$28.95

Reviewed by Kathy Roberts Forde, University of South Carolina, U.S.A.

Over the past several decades, scholars have built the intellectual base for the academic field of literary journalism. They have cleared a path through a vast wilderness of intelligence and print culture, setting up road signs and gathering the material necessary to build the scholarly houses of literary journalism. Although the great bulk of the resulting scholarship has focused on the American context, studies of other countries' traditions have been appearing with increasing frequency. *Literary Journalism across the Globe* joins this emergent literature as an important contribution that may well shape the discipline for years to come. This intelligently edited collection of sixteen essays provides not only the first scholarly survey of the field of international literary journalism but also a rudimentary map for future scholars to follow, enhance, and refine.

The authors contributing to this volume hail from Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, England, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and the United States. Together they document the practices and fortunes of literary journalism and literary reportage in these countries and others, including Russia and countries of the United Kingdom. As John Bak explains in the introduction, the essays explore "how the form has been viewed, read, written, and studied throughout the world" (2), concentrating on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What emerges from this collective effort is the understanding that literary journalism is a generative form of print culture that has been produced around the world across time in diverse cultural, social, and political conditions.

The essays in this book are arranged in three parts. The first, titled "Towards a Theory of International Literary Journalism," is meant to "address several, and solve some, of the problems associated with defining a form that is more culturally bound than literature and more politically sensitive than journalism" (Bak, 7). The second and third parts address the topics suggested in the book's subtitle: "Journalistic Traditions" and "Transnational Influences" respectively. Part II examines traditions of literary journalism in the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, China, Brazil, and Finland. As Bak observes, these essays suggest that "journalists most often turn literary when their nations are at war, be it with others or with themselves" (14). Categorization is often the Achilles' heel of edited volumes as some contributions defy the chosen categories.



Each of the essays in Part III, "Transnational Influences," examines closely "the notion of transnational influence," or so we are told (14). Yet some of these essays focus very little on such influences and more on a particular writer working within or helping to build a national tradition. Readers wishing to chart transnational influences should depend on Bak's thoughtful introduction and their own close readings of the collected essays.

Scholars have long suggested that literary journalism has historical roots in the United States and England. *Literary Journalism across the Globe* now complicates this narrative. As we would expect, a number of authors document the influence of the Anglo-American tradition on other national traditions. Isabel Soares explores the influence of the British *Pull Mall Gazette* on Portuguese journalists in the late nineteenth century and documents the emergence of a Portuguese literary journalism at the *fin de siècle*. Peiqin Cain describes the influence of American writers Edgar Snow and Upton Sinclair on Chinese literary reportage (*baogao wenxue*) in the 1930s and 1940s, a time of social and political turmoil. Chinese literary journalists gained energy from the American New Journalism movement when key works were first translated into Chinese in the late 1980s. Nikki Hessel suggests that the literary journalism of Upton Sinclair and George Orwell inspired the work of Robin Hyde in New Zealand in the 1930s. Maria Lassila-Merisalo discusses the influence of American Hunter S. Thompson's gonzo journalism and the New Journalism movement on Finnish journalism in the 1980s. Sonia Parrat describes how the New Journalism energized literary journalism in Spain and Edvaldo Pereira Lima suggests it did the same in Brazil in the case of the magazine *Realidade*. Willa McDonald tells us that Helen Garner, a contemporary literary journalist in Australia, has been influenced by Janet Malcolm of the *New Yorker*.

While the Anglo-American influence has been important to many national experiences with literary reportage, transnational influences have crisscrossed the globe, sometimes without any reference to the Anglo-American tradition or the English-speaking world. In the lead essay, John C. Hartssock, author of the acclaimed book *A History of American Literary Journalism*, explores the role of the Prague-born Egon Erwin Kisch's literary reportage in the international communist movement following World War I. Kisch's work travelled in multiple directions, Hartssock writes, influencing not only Joseph North, the editor of the *New Masses*, in the United States, but also writers engaged in proletarian struggle in China. Sonja Merjalk Zdovc suggests that Kisch also influenced journalists in communist Slovenia in the 1960s, who used narrative techniques to comment indirectly on the social and political problems of their country, thus "disguising their reportages as fiction" (238). Bill Reynolds describes the influence of Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński on a contemporary group of Canadian literary journalists in Vancouver. In an especially fine-grained critical analysis of Kapuściński's reportage, Soenke Zehle discusses a transnational critique of the reporter's work on Africa as a kind of literary-colonial exploitation and misrepresentation.

Several essays in *Literary Journalism across the Globe* make especially substantive contributions to new knowledge. The first is editor Bak's finely written introduction,

which points out and analyzes points of historical and theoretical connection and rupture as he maps the territory covered in the volume. Bak usefully notes the primacy of war and various political ideologies and systems as transnational historical forces shaping the development of different traditions of literary journalism and reportage around the world. He also suggests several strategies scholars and practitioners should pursue to enrich the field of international literary journalism studies.

Hartssock's essay makes an especially important contribution to our knowledge of international literary journalism. It is a model of rigorous comparative analysis of European traditions of literary reportage. What's more, it generates not only substantive new knowledge about these traditions but also a template for theorizing about the various modalities and rhetorics of the form. Peiqin Chen offers what may be the first English-language historical analysis of the Chinese tradition of literary reportage from the 1850s through the late twentieth century. She shows how *baogao wenxue* has been used as a tool for social advocacy in periods of social and political dislocation and turbulence. Finally, Clazina Dingenanse and Rungger de Graaf document how the Dutch literary pamphleteering tradition, which began in the sixteenth century and flourished for centuries, influenced the development of a literary journalistic tradition in Dutch newspapers in the nineteenth century. Dingenanse and de Graaf's careful historical study demonstrates how particular genres and features of print culture were appropriated across time as new print genres emerged. This study provides a model that other historians of literary journalism may wish to pursue.

Literary Journalism across the Globe is an important book, a significant scholarly contribution to the field of literary journalism studies.

Mumbai's Under-citizens Partially Explained

Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity
by Katherine Boo. New York: Random House, 2012. Hardcover, 256 pp., \$27.

Reviewed by Miles Maguire, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, U.S.A.

It is undoubtedly unfair to judge by its cover a book as thoroughly reported, as gorgeously written, and as modestly presented as Katherine Boo's *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*. But it's also hard not to forget the image that is there on the dust jacket, an apparently perfect representation of one of Boo's major points, that even crushing poverty and overwhelming squalor cannot extinguish hopes and possibilities.

The cover image is this: a beautiful young girl squatting beside a lake of sewage, her head tilted upward, her eyes shut and a faint smile emerging on her lips as she feels the first drops of a rainstorm. In the midst of this slum, then, the future beckons and a better life may yet emerge. The picture matches well with Boo's subtitle: *Life, Death and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*.

The photo is, unfortunately, a bit of fakery, as the credits listed on the inside flap make clear: two different images from two different photographers, one of the slum in the background and the other of the girl up front. It is not a photograph so much as a photo illustration, true pictures used to tell a true story, perhaps—or used to create an illusion through juxtaposition and montage.

Like any work of literary journalism, Boo's book invites a suspicion that it has been similarly constructed out of art and artifice. In an author's note she counters such concerns by enumerating the extent of the fact gathering that went into the book: interviews with 168 people to reconstruct a single event; more than 3,000 public records; three and a half years spent in the slum district of Annawadi; and a full range of documentary devices, including "written notes, video recordings, audiotapes, and photographs" (249). She even enlisted slum residents in her reporting, allowing them to use her Flip camera to capture some of the stories retold in the book.

The product of this effort is a narrative both vivid and swift, depicting in painful, desperate detail the economic, political, and moral struggles of a group of people Boo calls "undercitizens" (1). Her focus is primarily on three families: the Waghekars, whose matriarch is intent upon becoming the slumlord of her neighborhood; the Husains, whose oldest son is an expert garbage sorter and the key to their brightening financial prospects; and the Shaikhs, whose hut shares a wall with the Husains. A dispute about this wall becomes the central incident in Boo's book: the self-immolation of one-legged Fatima Shaikh, a distorted version of which leads to criminal charges, and the pre-trial imprisonment, of three members of the Husain family.

