

Reviews

The reviews pages are edited by Tor Clark. If you have a book you would like to review or have come across a new book we should know about please get in touch. Also if you have recently had a book published and would like to see it reviewed, please contact Tor on tclark@dmu.ac.uk

The Reviews section

Edited by Tor Clark, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK.

We may have only just waved off the Three Wise Men, but this New Year edition of *Journalism Education* is able to offer readers its own holy trinity – three Professors of Journalism (no less) offering us their wisdom on recent and classic texts.

This edition's Classic from the Journalism Bookshelf is an apt choice. Richard Keeble, Professor of Journalism at Lincoln University, and himself a prolific author, pays due tribute to acclaimed journalist Phillip Knightley, who died in December.

Perhaps best known journalistically for his Evans-era work on the Sunday Times, Knightley leaves a rich journalistic legacy, especially in the form of his seminal work about war reporting: *The First Casualty*.

It's a rare book, working as an enjoyable read and a valuable academic text. Most dissertation tutors faced with the many students over the years interested in war reporting as a topic, will direct them to start right here. Professor Keeble is a fan of Knightley and his classic text and suggests it is a fitting tribute to the late journalist.

Professor Ivor Gaber of Sussex University reacquainted himself with the latest edition of the classic US text, Lance Bennett's *News: The Politics of Illusion*, and was delighted to find some major movement in its central thrust, despite this being its tenth edition. Using Donald Trump's election campaign as a backdrop, Professor Gaber hails the latest version of this book in the context of the political communications landscape in which journalists, academics and students must now all operate.

Meanwhile our third wise man, Professor Mick Temple of Staffordshire University, grapples with one of the biggest issues of our journalistic time – the possible demise of print journalism in a new edited collection *Last Words? How Can Journalism Survive the Decline of Print* by leading journalists, academics and industry experts, edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait.

Declaring an interest, we will leave it to Professor Temple to cast a verdict on such a major issue as addressed by a diverse cast of more than 40 contributors from the UK and the wider world.

Finally, another wise man, though not a professor, John Mair, lead editor of the above-mentioned collection, the 18th of his 'hackademic' series, many co-edited with Professor Keeble, and a regular contributor to the Journalism Education reviews section, offers us an inside line on one of the UK's best-known journalists, Jeremy Paxman.

Paxo, the scourge of politicians over a quarter of a century on Newsnight, has penned revealing memoirs, which Mair compares with the real man he has known and worked with for almost four decades. He con-

cludes Paxo has indeed offered us some wisdom from his high profile career and should be properly recognised for his contribution to TV journalism.

So, a small, but top quality reviews section. We would like to make it longer in future, but we do of course need you, our readers, to volunteer to review texts for us and to recommend books about journalism to feature. If you would like to get involved as a reviewer for a future edition of Journalism Education please email TClark@dmu.ac.uk

Until the next edition, a big Happy New Year to all our readers. Enjoy your journalism and enjoy our reviews section.

A classic from the Journalism bookshelf

The First Casualty by Phillip Knightley

Review by Professor Richard Lance Keeble, Lincoln University.

In the obituary I wrote for Phillip Knightley, who died on December 7, 2016, I described him as ‘the supreme journo, always sceptical, fiercely intelligent, courageous, witty, highly sociable, politically astute – as well as being a brilliant writer and storyteller’.¹

His achievements in journalism and publishing were vast: major roles in The Sunday Times’s investigations into the thalidomide scandal and Kim Philby, the British intelligence chief exposed as a Soviet spy; twice winner of the Journalist of the Year award; closely involved in the work of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists – and so on.

The First Casualty, first published in 1975 with follow-up editions in 2000 and 2004, remains the seminal text on Western war reporting. As I commented in the obituary, like all his other books (such as The Second Oldest Profession, on spying, and his autobiography, A Hack’s Progress), it captures the best elements of journalism: original, clear writing, a political awareness, an immediacy; a sense of history and a fascination with the complexities of human nature. Moreover, its elements are so varied: Knightley records the cock-ups and the heroic scoops, the fictional ‘exclusives’ and the often intense rivalries amongst the press packs; the attempts of governments and militaries to muzzle the media and sanitise the reporting of atrocities – and the too-often willingness of editors, columnists and frontline reporters to beat the warmongers’ drums.

Most striking is the way in which Knightley synthesises such a vast amount of information. His sources include interviews with reporters and photojournalists (including Wilfred Burchett, Martha Gellhorn, Tim Page, John Pilger, Nicholas Tomalin), transcripts of TV interviews, letters, back issues of newspapers and magazines (from France, Germany, Poland, South Africa, the UK and US), biographies, autobiographies, academic journal articles, political and military histories. The selected bibliography lists more than 130 texts.

At the end of A Hack’s Progress, Knightley wrote: “So my advice for the new generation of journalists is to ignore the accountants, the proprietors and the conventional editors and get on with it. And your assignment is the same as mine has been – the world and the millions of fascinating people who inhabit it.”

That fascination with people appears most strikingly in The First Casualty in the many, short, concise, extremely detailed and often witty profiles of journos, censors and military folk dotted about the book. For instance, of Irvin Cobb, the American reporter who became extremely popular during the First World War, he wrote: “His appearance – melancholy expression, apple-red cheeks, alligator jaw, fierce eyebrows and a permanent cigar – made him easily recognisable and the American troops regularly mobbed him. ... Cobb, scrupulous about important facts, was not above altering minor ones if it was to his advantage.”

British censor Captain Charles Tremayne is described as: “One-time chairman of the Duke of Beaufort’s hunt committee and captain of the English polo team. He was seldom sober. The correspondents, well able to handle liquor themselves, remember him as the heaviest drinker they had ever seen. He drank neat gin for breakfast and was known to have finished six bottles in two days.”

Knightley is also keen throughout to debunk some of the many myths surrounding war correspondents and the events they cover. For instance, William Howard Russell is often glorified as the heroic ‘father’ of

war reporting – with his brave despatches for The Times from the Crimean War about the incompetence of the British military command supposedly leading to the downfall of the Earl of Aberdeen government in January 1855. But the press was merely one factor amongst many as a powerful section of the elite moved to dislodge Aberdeen. And of Russell, Knightley wrote perceptively: “Although he criticised the lot of the ordinary soldier in the Crimea, he was careful not to hammer too hard at a comparison with that of the officers, to whose social class he himself belonged. . . . Above all, Russell made the mistake, common to many a war correspondent, of considering himself part of the military establishment.”

Knightley never deals in high theory. Concepts such as ‘the propaganda model’, dominant ideology or the ‘the society of the spectacle’ are nowhere to be seen. But *The First Casualty* is bursting with ideas, analysis and meticulously detailed argument. And throughout he makes clear his loathing of those journo who succumb to the lure of the secret state, getting too close to the spooks – and of those (such as Claude Cockburn during the Spanish civil war) who peddle propaganda ‘and disseminate it as honest reporting’.

Not surprisingly, *The First Casualty* has won international acclaim. In the Introduction to the 2000 edition, fellow Australian John Pilger hails it as a ‘clear sighted and principled book’ which should be read ‘by those who retain pride in our craft of truth-telling, no matter how unpopular and unpalatable the truth.’ My University of Lincoln colleague, Professor Brian Winston, describes it as ‘the best, most serious and ground-breaking book ever-written by a journo from the belly of the beast’. I agree!

The First Casualty by Phillip Knightley published 1975 by Purnell.

Note

1 <http://www.communicationethics.net/news/index.php?nav=blogs&pg=?p=232>

News: the Politics of Illusion (10th edn) by W Lance Bennett

Review by Professor Ivor Gaber, University of Sussex.

This is an important book giving a comprehensive account of contemporary news values, political communications and the current challenges facing the American media. It is pithy, authoritative and enhanced by a stream of appropriate case studies. It is also, almost very timely – timely that is but for Brexit and the US presidential election.

A word of explanation: This is the tenth edition of Lance Bennett’s book, that is in itself is a mark of its significance in the political communications literature. In Bennett’s words it marks something of a sea change ‘the great transformation edition’ as he calls it. Why? Because he makes the focus of the book not his notion of ‘indexation’ as in previous editions (though the concept is well covered) but because he now sees the central challenge facing the American media, and by extension the media in most of the developed world, as the disruption to legacy media posed by ‘native digital upstarts’, news websites such as the Huffington Post, BuzzFeed and political blogs, to which I would add Twitter, Facebook and YouTube.

Bennett writes: “The legacy press is struggling to reinvent itself while maintaining, as best it can, journalism standards developed in the last century; balance and objectivity, timeliness, credibility and relevance to name a few. Those standards are being disrupted.”

Important and as relevant as this contention is, I describe the book as only ‘almost timely’ because, although Bennett admirably covers much of the recent US election campaign (but not the result), he focuses not on what came to be the central media issue of the campaign, but on how the legacy media sought to compete with the online media in terms of interactivity and fine targeting. However, as the latter stages of the US presidential campaign revealed (as did the Brexit campaign) the real challenge facing both old and new media was that created by the growing phenomena of post-truth politics and fake news, challenges that Bennett foresees but only in passing.

In earlier editions Bennett had talked about audiences being ‘captive’ because of the relatively few infor-

mation channels available to them and how small differences there was between them was. In this context he developed his gate-keeping theory of indexing: "Information in the news media tended to be packaged around cues from prominent authorities... Those cues shaped opinions and channelled participation in politics." But Bennett now argues in the disruptive media ecology of today, with a multitude of sources offering audiences a 'Daily Me', indexing as previously conceived has changed, not only because of changes in the media but because of growing disillusionment with conventional politics and the fragmentation of modern society.

Bennett doesn't abandon indexing per se but adapts it to suggest the media has increasingly come to see itself as one of these prominent authorities (strong support here for the mediatisation hypothesis) and as a result much political coverage involves one journalist interviewing another to supposedly reveal inside information. He suggests this has reinforced the 'inside the Washington Beltway' syndrome in which West Wing-style politicians, aides, journalists and lobbyists all swim in the same aquarium, leaving the rest of America pushing their noses against the glass to try and gain some insight into the political process, or more likely to just apathetically turn away.

Then along came Trump. He identified this phenomenon and based his entire campaign on being seen to side with those with their noses against the glass. And here's where Bennett's re-working of the indexation hypothesis requires further revision. For in a very counter-intuitive way Trump represents a rather surprising return to the status quo. For his pronouncements during the campaign, such as those about Mexican and Muslim immigrants, or Hillary's emails, had all the media, legacy and digital alike, dancing to his tune, despite the contention of Trump and his supporters that the media were irredeemably 'liberal' and untrustworthy.

From the media's point of view, notwithstanding how outrageous or palpably untrue Trump's remarks might have been, they were great box office. As Leslie Mooves, chief executive of CBS put it: "It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS." Hence, Trump can be seen as exemplifying a classic case of indexation, with the media, perhaps against its better judgement, portraying him as a 'prominent authority'.

For a legacy media suffering serious financial challenges the Trump campaign represented something of a goldmine as audiences and revenues rose. CNN, for example, estimated its Trump coverage was worth at least \$100m in additional advertising revenue and, in return so-to-speak, Trump received the equivalent of \$3bn worth of coverage from the main news channels.

In the context of Trump's undoubted ability to set the news agenda, there were two particularly troubling aspects to his relations with the media. First, he became a past master in the 'art' of post-truth politics, or in American comedian Stephen Colbert's memorable phrase 'truthiness', by which he meant a politician, or anyone for that matter, making statements that only 'might be true' or 'sound like their true' or are, in fact, straightforward lies. During his presidential campaign Trump's truthiness became almost his calling card, with one fact-checker recording him lying once every 50 seconds during one of the presidential debates. Bennett addresses the problems this phenomenon poses for journalists who, under the indexing hypothesis, can only challenge these statements if they can find another comparably 'authoritative' source to shoot them down. However, such sources are often extremely reluctant to give such claims further air time and therefore refuse to comment, allowing the post-truth statement, the lie, to remain on the record.

The other issue, which goes beyond Trump, is fake news, often generated by news websites designed to look authentic but anything but. Bennett addresses the issues of truthiness and fake news but only in the context of the daily news comedy shows now such an important part of the American political communications ecology.

Despite small reservations, I am unstinting in my praise of this book. Often new editions of books involve little more than a re-worked introduction and some cursory updating of the text, but not in this case. As a survey of the political communications and news landscape it represents a tour de force, an excellent source book for teachers, students and scholars alike.

News: The Politics of Illusion (tenth edition) by W Lance Bennett published by University of Chicago Press, paperback, £24.50, 304 pp.

A Life in Questions by Jeremy Paxman

Review by John Mair, academic and former BBC TV producer

Jeremy Paxman truly is a riddle wrapped in an enigma. He is simply the best television journalist of this generation, in and out of the studio, yet surprisingly unconfident and to read these, his early memoirs, an accidental man lucky in school, lucky at Cambridge, lucky in the BBC.

But it is luck made by a huge talent.

Paxman is aggressive in his work yet depressive in his private life. He admits in the book to regular therapy to compensate for an oppressive father and one of his BBC bosses told me that in dealing with him he had to constantly work around the 'Great Dog'. In the closed world of TV journalism he is revered both for his professional skills but also for his personal kindness.

Reviewers should declare an interest. I have known JP for nigh on four decades. We spent a year as close colleagues on London Plus. One of the highlights of my own modest TV career was Paxo telling me during the Real Lives walk-out at the BBC in 1985 that he had almost resigned live on air that night in disgust because 'I knew only you would let me..' We have been sort of friends (JP's favoured mode) since. I am a huge fan.

As an interviewer he is unparalleled. Each encounter is a challenge. He prepares for it meticulously. On Newsnight he had a brainstorming session each night with his producers just like a matador getting ready for the bull. His technique is simple – aim for the solar plexus with the first question. It is difficult to recover after that. Ask the hapless Chloe Smith, whose ministerial career was destroyed in five minutes by Paxo simply asking her: "When did you know about this decision? Before or after lunch?"

Ask Shaun Woodward, the rather posh defector from the Tories who had taken his butler up north with him, who was asked on winning St Helens for Labour in 2001: "Mr Woodward did your butler vote Labour?" Or Tony Blair, who was asked whether he and President Bush prayed together.

The most famous grilling/toasting of them all was then Home Secretary Michael Howard, asked 14 times in 1997: "Did you threaten to over-rule Mr Lewis?" about a decision he had made. Howard took a long time to die. Paxo later claimed he was filling space. I think he is being economical with the actualite there. I produced a tribute dinner to him a decade ago. I sat him and Howard next to each other. It was tres amusant; not a meeting of minds.

Paxo giving interviewees a stuffing comes in a short tradition of British television losing its deference to politicians and authority. It was only five decades ago that Robin Day transferred his interrogatory skills from the courtroom to the TV studio. Commentators say the central Paxman dictum is that of Louis Heren on politicians: "Who is this lying bastard and why is he lying to me?" He denies it. Many have tried, and still try, to imitate Paxman on screen. Most fail. In his book Paxman damns all others bar Jon Snow with less than faint praise for their skills. Aggressive questioning is no substitute in itself for good research.

Yet he is a creature of the format. Give him a gladiatorial one-on-one and he thrives. Get it wrong and he shows his contempt and looks ordinary. The Channel Four Referendum debate in June 2016 was a dog's dinner and Paxo as MC could not rescue it.

But TV history will also remember Paxman as one of the great film reporters. From Spotlight in Northern Ireland through to Tonight and Panorama on the BBC he has understood the central yet understated role of the reporter on film – words, well-crafted but few, plus presence on screen. One speaker at the Paxo tribute dinner had interviewed him for his first job in Belfast. After he left the room the BBC appointments panel turned to each other and said: "Do you think we impressed him?!" Honing his reporting skills in The Troubles was the perfect journalism academy – one mistake and you could be on the way to being a dead man with the terrorists.

He dominated Newsnight for a quarter of a century. Since his 'retirement' it has lost kudos, gravitas and audience. When he was the anchor woe betide any new programme editor with ideas like using new media or having a weather forecast. Paxo killed them simply by being withering on air. On form, on the night he was superb, a great journalist prepared to do his homework and to dig and dig until he got to what he considered to the truth or kernel of the story. Not the science of propulsion but a lesson for all wannabes now and in the future.

But who is Paxman? Some clues come across in the book though he protects his personal privacy very well. The product of a solid middle class family, less solid once his father left the Navy and guaranteed status for the uncertain world of Midlands manufacturing. Keith Paxman ultimately left his family behind for a new life in the Southern seas. His mother, Joan, was rich enough through inheritance to put her children through the local (minor) public school, Malvern College. He achieved a Cambridge scholarship. There, the 'accidental man' was lucky again falling into student journalism.

But you will not discover a huge amount about Paxman the man from these 325 pages. Those secrets are left on his therapist's couch.

This book is a good read, as you would expect from a good journalist. Will it answer your questions about the meaning of life and media, will it face up to the great cultural studies issues of our times? Barely, Paxman has decided. His skill is not grand theory but practice day after day. Appreciate it, honour it, but most of all salute a master of the craft.

A Life in Questions by Jeremy Paxman, published by William Collins, 2016, ISBN 9780008128302, £20.

Last Words? How can journalism survive the decline of print? Edited by John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait

Review by Professor Mick Temple, Staffordshire University

With the publication of Last Words? John Mair et al deliver their latest up-to-the-minute collection of essays from the great and the good in all aspects of journalism. Owners, academics, broadcasters, editors, CEOs, distributors and various other interested parties, all put their opinions into this fascinating collection.

In total, there are 50 chapters, ranging from bite-size to regular chapter-size. As always with Mair's collections, the authors are authoritative – if not always convincing in their arguments. Throughout, the opinions are overwhelmingly bullish and hyper-optimistic about the future of journalism, if not always the future of printed newspapers.

Sadly, as Roy Greenslade has often pointed out, talking optimistically doesn't change the future. The harsh reality is printed newspapers are dying, sales are dwindling and the 'traditional press' has yet to find an economic model for the new online world.

Sir Ray Tindle presents his long-established belief that newspapers will live for ever but his chapter effectively ignores the online world. The press will always be with us, the downturn will be reversed, is his message, but Sir Ray also fails to tell us the ways in which his newspaper empire survives. Fewer and fewer journalists producing stables of local newspapers must weaken the quality of independent journalism those local papers produce and that will have an effect on an audience increasingly searching for something other than rewritten press releases.

Mark Thompson, now its CEO and President, argues the 'New York Times way' is the only way: 'every story should be worth paying for'. It's difficult to disagree with his assessment that the business models for digital news providers, based on building big traffic and digital display advertising, are suspect. The overwhelming majority of British local newspaper online sites (in particular) are disasters, with pop-ups, generic video content and intrusive advertising seriously inhibiting the end-user experience. But the paywall model is unpopular with British users and general internet advertising has decreased print revenue.

The emphasis of many of the chapters is on the local and regional press, which lacking a national online audience arouse the most concern among us long-term lovers of newspapers. Davd Hayward's interesting chapter correctly notes that, contrary to some of the opinions in the book, the regional press is 'certainly in need of radical change'. Hayward posits the importance of creative online video to create compelling content and also cites the important words of Phillip Trippenbach from Edelman – 'don't interrupt the content they're consuming with ads. Create the Content They Want to Consume'. That message needs to be absorbed by everyone involved in the production of public service news if our great print titles are to survive

and prosper in the new online environment.

Perhaps Roger Parry's chapter offers the most apposite words of wisdom to local newspapers 'after the fall'. Pointing out the daily publication on newsprint is not the answer, despite the heartfelt beliefs of Raymond Snoddy and Sir Ray Tindle, Parry supports Mark Thompson's view that the future of local newspapers is multi-media and subscription-based. Publish in all media and charge for access, after working out what people will pay for in terms of both content and format. As he acknowledges, 'easy to say, hard to do'. But it has to be done.

Some of the most interesting suggestions come from outside of the newspaper/online bubble. Richard Tait worries that by comparison to broadcasters, newspapers have much less detailed information about their readers, which seriously inhibits their ability to respond to rapid changes effectively. As Tait points out, editors who boast of their intuitive knowledge of who their readers are and what they want from the paper are actually 'largely in the dark'. For Tait, the different online permutations tried by the newspaper industry, ranging from almost entirely free and advertising-funded to subscription, has been a distraction. Compelling content should be the focus. As GQ editor Dylan Jones puts it, content is king; 'if it's good, if it's relevant, and if it's entertaining and sold in the right way, it works'. Get to know your audience and get closer to them online. Registration could be the key.

Of course people won't pay for rehashed press releases produced by hard-pressed and low-paid journalists. But there are some things we need to know about what is happening in our world. Most observers agree the only future for 'journalism' – especially in an age of fake news and celebrity PR bumpf – is producing quality public service journalism and making people pay for it. How to do this is the difficult bit.

In the meantime, this entertaining section of chapters will no doubt provide the industry and journalism academics with much to debate. My congratulations to John Mair and team for the range and quality of these assessments; this collection will be essential reading for my students.

Last Words? How can journalism survive the decline of print? By John Mair, Tor Clark, Neil Fowler, Raymond Snoddy and Richard Tait (eds), 363pp, Abramis: 2016, £19.95. ISBN 978-1-84549-696-8