

Books

The books 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 or promoted, please contact Tor on tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk or ajejournal@gmail.com

Fake news, sport and literary genius - read all about it!

Welcome to the latest Journalism education reviews section, which features an eclectic but useful mix of new texts which we think will be of interest to Journalism students and their tutor.

Professor Richard Lance Keeble of Lincoln University is a stalwart of the AJE and well known for his scholarship of our practice, of ethical journalism but also of George Orwell. He has two relatively recent books out distilling much of his scholarship on Orwell. These are reviewed by another eminent Orwell scholar, Professor Robert Colls of De Montfort University and formerly of the University of Leicester, who finds much to admire in Keeble's work while also debating several of its contentions. A great read for scholars of Orwell, and journalism generally.

Professor Jonathan Baker, formerly of BBC News and the University of Essex, has produced a worthy follow-up to 2007's *NCTJ Essential Reporting*, which should find its way to the top of every practical Journalism course's reading list, according to its reviewer.

Sport is an essential part of any Journalism programme, so a useful new text by Tom Bradshaw and Daragh Minogue is praised by Joseph Andrew Smith of the University of Leicester.

And finally – keeping up the Lincoln and Leicester links in this reviews section – Professor Brian Winston of Lincoln University and his son Matthew Winston of the University of Leicester have collaborated successfully on a long-overdue book examining fake news. Here is a topic on every Journalism course's discussion schedule, but not often covered at length in one place. Professor Chris Frost of Liverpool John Moores University recommends it to Journalism students and staff.

So you don't necessarily have to have a connection with a UK university beginning with L to appear in the Journalism Education reviews section, but on this occasion it seems to have been an unintended prerequisite.

If I was a tabloid sub-editor I might even suggest this has been one L of a reviews section. Happy reading.

As always, if you are producing a book AJE members and their students will find interesting and useful let us know. We are also always very keen to find reviewers for new Journalism books, so please do let us know by emailing tor.clark@leicester.ac.uk

The Roots of Fake News: Objecting to Objective Journalism by Brian Winston and Matthew Winston

Review by Professor Chris Frost, Liverpool John Moores University

If controversy in journalism is what you are looking for then a book that discusses objectivity in journalism is probably the best place to find it.

Journalism has long been attacked for a variety of sins: gossip-mongering, intruding into people's lives simply to make a profit, distorting the facts and scapegoating whichever celebrity has fallen out of fashion. Many of these attacks are justified but some are not and no-one would claim journalism and journalists are without sin.

But the rise of the internet and with it the explosion of fake news that has flourished there, has given back-bedroom keyboard warriors free rein to peddle whatever froth or nonsense they wish. Of course many of these new 'citizen' journalists are no worse (although rarely much better) than their professional competitors. Free speech and a free media allows them as much right to put their view of the world in front of the public as anyone else and, as father-and-son academic authors Brian, professor of journalism at Lincoln, and Matthew Winston, of the University of Leicester, show, they do it for precisely the same reason as the traditional press barons, editors and journalists – to make money, to influence people, to inform, or to simply express their own views, prejudices and hatreds.

The Roots of Fake News digs deep into the past to explain that despite our horror at the range and depth of today's internet-bound fake news, it is doing little that has not been done before. The book contrasts, for instance, the medieval blood libel accusations that did so much to stoke anti-Jewish sentiments down the years with the modern-day Pizzagate conspiracy theory that helped some Trump supporters at least confirm their antipathy to Hilary Clinton.

This intelligent book goes beyond the common, but unhelpful discussions about the meaning of fake news and how to deal with it that range from the stricter regulation beloved of one-party states to having some kind of 'truth' verification system. The Winstons' main thesis is journalism itself is to blame and its own attempts to clean up its act at the start of the last century were themselves the roots of the problem.

The Winstons identify the belief by journalists of the pursuit of objectivity as a central tenet of news journalism to be the cause of the fall into fake news. By claiming to be in pursuit not just of truth, but objective truth, when journalism is usually clearly anything but, we have allowed others to claim similar attributes when they either similarly fail or don't really make the attempt at all.

Not only is objectivity impossible to achieve, something most 21st century journalists and journalism teachers accept, even if grudgingly, it is not even desirable, the authors claim.

To show the problem is one of perception by journalist themselves, the Winstons start with another favourite claim that journalism is a profession. That is not the same as saying journalists behave professionally – getting the job done, being reliable and so on. The Winstons use Jay Rosen writing in his 1999 *What Are Journalists For* to identify how many journalists think of themselves as professionals, comparing them with scientists and lawyers. "But journalism is like most honoured professions in other ways... If a professional is one who hears a calling in the opportunity for a career, then most journalists consider themselves professionals."

But do journalists think of themselves as professionals? The Winstons examine scientists, lawyers and philosophers to compare their attempts to separate fact from guesswork, fiction and untruth and finds, unsurprisingly, that journalists are not able to compare their efforts at information gathering with the practices of trained, regulated and peer-reviewed professionals. Journalism is a trade that has a number of motivations of which truth-seeking is an often overlooked, but not perhaps unwanted, part.

For the Winstons, journalism is not and never should be considered objective. "The only way to cut off the head of the [fake news] dragon," they say, "is to move society's understanding on news past the myth of objectivity to the point where pointing at an item of news coverage and saying 'this is an example of unbiased journalism' is generally, and correctly, understood to be ridiculous." (p201)

The authors assert that the 200-year-old ideology of partisan, subjective journalism makes a lot more sense than the ‘objective’ journalism that is claimed to have replaced it.

This robust and trenchant argument for the reality of journalism is an intelligent examination of the methods used by true professions to be able to replicate, confirm, challenge or cross examine their findings or witnesses. It produces a clear and convincing argument for a reality that many have come to pass over the past 30 years but it is presented in a way that is happy to hold its head up high and support subjective journalism for what it is – the reality of all that is ever best about seeking the truth through journalism.

To quote a meme doing the rounds on Twitter: “Patient: Doctor, when will this pandemic end. Doctor: I don’t know, I’m not a journalist.”

The Roots of Fake News: Objecting to Objective Journalism by Brian Winston and Matthew Winston, published by Routledge, 2021, pp211 £34.99, ISBN: 978-0-367-14546-0

Journalism Beyond Orwell: A Collection of Essays by Richard Lance Keeble

George Orwell, the Secret State and the Making of Nineteen Eighty-Four by Richard Lance Keeble

Review by Professor Robert Colls, De Montfort University, Leicester

Richard Keeble is Professor of Journalism at Lincoln University and a regular contributor to George Orwell Studies. From 2013 to 2020 he was chairman of the Orwell Society. In these two books, each a collection of previously published pieces, he comes to praise the great man but also, bit by bit and right up to the chin, bury him.

Journalism Beyond Orwell finds its theme in what Keeble calls ‘activist’ journalism, by which he means being political in the way that he is political. Reporting from a right-wing, or a conservative, or a politically-resistant point of view, one gets the feeling, would not be acceptable to the professor. Pacificism, socialism, anti-racism, ‘immediacy, clarity, [and a] sense of urgency’, on the other hand, are what he wants from his hacks and although for the most part Keeble himself writes in a mild academicspeak (eg ‘Orwell and the silencing role of the dominant consensus’), to be fair, he is also capable of writing in his own words with the clarity he commends.

The problem is he has such a pinched sense of what constitutes activist journalism, that when he does come across a great journalist in action, he can’t see what they are because he is too busy lamenting what they are not. Thus, he takes Lynn Barber to task for not asking the former government minister and diarist Alan Clark about his ‘politics’ even though everybody knew what they were (bastardised Tory), and even though she was too busy skewering Clark as a ‘little boy passing for grown up’ to ask about such paltry things as his opinions. When you are shown a schoolboy standing in government ministers’ gumboots, what more needs to be said? Or, indeed, when The Beverly Sisters come sashaying down the stairs on their way to be interviewed in the bar singing ‘How Much Is That Doggie in the Window?’ what more could you possibly want to be said? Barber writes as she pleases and you take what you get. ‘Peck. Peck. Peck. It was like being nibbled to death by gerbils’.

Now be honest. Who would you rather be locked in room 101 with? Roy Greenslade droning about newspapers as ‘playthings of MI5’ (a quote Keeble repeats three times), or the Demon Barber being nibbled to death by three senior pop singers?

Richard Keeble has spent his academic career admiring a man who felt compelled to write against imperialism and capitalism and militarism – and this is what he thinks makes a good journalist. The notion that his students might start out writing independently about what is in front of their noses, and work from there, never quite comes out.

The problem is compounded in *Orwell and the Secret State*. Given his call for young activist-journalists to get up and fight the secret state, Keeble makes the case that our hero worked for it.

In March 1949 Orwell gave British Intelligence a list of 38 names of writers whom he believed could not be trusted to defend the reputation and interests of the United Kingdom. He called these people ‘crypto-communists, fellow-travellers or [those] inclined that way’. In July 2003, following disclosures by *The Guardian*, the list was released to the public, and it would be fair to say news that George was a snitch did not go down well on the Left. Worse, Keeble tells us this was not a one-off but is ‘best seen as consistent with those of a man already caught up for a number of years with intelligence’.

Keeble’s evidence for this, such as it is, rests first on Orwell’s friendship with David Astor and Malcolm Muggeridge, two well-connected men about town who, during the war and maybe after it, worked for MI5 and MI6, and second on Orwell’s acquaintance with a clutch of people known to have secret service functions. They include Robert Conquest and Celia Kirwan (IRD), AJ Ayer (SIS), Harold Acton (SHAEF), and Ernest Hemingway (OSS). While working in Paris early in 1945 for Astor’s *Observer*, it appears Orwell might have attended a conference of Allied intelligence and European resistance groups. Hemingway remembered Orwell visiting him in his Paris hotel room at this time and telling him that he feared for his life.

What can we make of the charges? The list is well documented. Orwell took the names from another older, longer list as a favour to Celia Kirwan. He did not spend time compiling it or touting it. She asked him to do it and he obliged. In 1942 he had compiled a list of those who he thought would go over to Hitler if the Nazis invaded and there were plenty other lists as well – old songs, best books, getting the shopping. Whatever other motives he had for making the 1949 list was consistent with his implacable hostility to Soviet subversion and shows not only that he supported Attlee’s Labour government (which was looking for support) but that he meant it.

As for friends and acquaintances, all we can say is that Keeble’s evidence is speculative and circumstantial. Orwell was a private man capable of keeping secrets. He may, in 1945, have done more than report for *The Observer*. This was a time of intense intelligence activity on all sides, especially in Paris, and intellectuals were being canvassed as advisors and analysts. It’s pretty clear, for instance, that Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir, Arthur Koestler (Kirwan’s brother-in-law), Richard Gibson, Richard Wright, Julia Kristeva and others were in the mix, and it’s not impossible that Orwell was too.

However, although some of his very brusque and off-hand information was based on personal acquaintance, nearly all of it was freely available in the public domain. JB Priestley, for instance, often seen as a complete innocent in such matters, made no secret of his high regard for the Russian people and the Soviet Union. He wrote in praise of its arts and letters when it had been murdering its artists and writers for years. Orwell, Astor, Muggeridge, Camus, Koestler, Conquest and Ayer made no secret of their anti-Communism. If Hitler was the enemy, they never accepted the official line that Stalin was the friend, although plenty did and some betrayed their country to prove it.

If Orwell was a spook, he was more spooked against than spooky. Special Branch had taken an active interest in him since his first trip to Paris in 1929. Code name CX/12650/1988/ 8 Captain Miller of Scotland Yard reported how ‘he spends his time reading various newspapers’. Right up to his death in 1950, Orwell was watched by Special Branch and others – in Uxbridge and in Hayes, in Hampstead and in Wigan, in Barcelona and Huesca where he was spied on by both sides, in his time at the BBC and working for *Tribune* newspaper during the war, and after it when he was seriously ill in Scotland and then in Gloucestershire. It was from a sanatorium bed that he handed Celia the list. It’s not impossible that at that very moment, MI6 were spying on themselves spying on him.

Chapter 3 is the typescript of an interview by the author with David Astor (very brisk). Chapter 7 balances charges of misogyny with some mention of some very strong women who were his friends (and lovers). Chapter 8 makes a nice case for his sense of humour (very droll). Chapter 11 claims to find ‘insights’ in Alex Woloch’s book *Or Orwell* (but forgets to say what they are). Orwell’s friend was Brenda Salkeld not Salkend.

Mixed bag, but budding journos can’t go far wrong in their war on cliché if they keep Orwell in their hard drive. And many will have Richard Lance Keeble to thank for first introductions.

Robert Colls is author of *George Orwell. English Rebel* (Oxford University Press 2013)

Journalism Beyond Orwell: A Collection of Essays by Richard Lance Keeble published by Routledge, 2020, pp206, ISBN 9780367333553 £34.99

George Orwell, the Secret State and the Making of Nineteen Eighty-Four by Richard Lance Keeble, published by Abramis, 2020, pp182 ISBN 9781845497613 £14.95

Sports Journalism: The State of Play by Tom Bradshaw and Daragh Minogue

Review by Joseph Andrew Smith, University of Leicester

Tom Bradshaw and Daragh Minogue's wide-ranging *Sports Journalism: The State of Play* (2020) is an excellent addition to the journalism education canon.

A prescient contribution, it is not so much a technical manual instructing readers how to write a match report or construct a news story, but rather offers a number of excellent analytical chapters focussing on the likes of nationalism and politics, the history of sports journalism, the relationship one must nurture with sports communications personnel, public relations staff and media management – particularly important in the contemporary sports media landscape – media law, diversity (race and representation, sports reporting and gender, and disability representation) and an intriguing final chapter touching on the future of sports journalism: the 'Big Data' revolution.

The authors are accessible in voice and present to the reader experiences from a range of current sports media professionals, all of whom are operating in high-profile roles throughout the industry and who offer invaluable advice, otherwise unobtainable to the student. Scattered here and there within topic discussions are case studies where working professionals are quoted at length – these are particularly insightful – with the whole experience offering a qualitative 'feel' for the industry which students of the discipline will find very helpful.

The authors do well to emphasise the relentlessness of working in the contemporary sports media. To be a sports journalist is certainly no longer 'professional loafing', as cricket analyst Simon Hughes's tongue-in-cheek summation of the profession from 2006 proffered. Bradshaw and Minogue use Hughes's comment as a base from which to jump into a discussion of the rise of the digital in sports journalism during the book's first chapter – the mid-2000s marking the transitional period between analogue and digital forms of the profession.

Anecdotally, I remember, when studying for a degree in sports journalism in 2010, being told by my tutor – a national newspaper journalist and prominent voice in his sport – that being a sports journalist involved 'lots of downtime, mixed with periods of great intensity'. A journalist whose prominent years were in the 1990s, he was handing down wisdom right on the cusp of the social media revolution in sports journalism, which I experienced professionally almost immediately, and found to be precisely the opposite to the advice he gave. Bradshaw and Minogue's observation that the 'rhythm of sports journalists' working life can be relentless in the digital era – with phones buzzing with notifications, and with social media feeds updating all the time, it can be hard to switch off' (2020: 21) will be particularly relatable to current professionals. It is important that the challenges which today come along with what is otherwise such an attractive career are clearly outlined for budding professionals.

Of course, the culture industry comprises the interweaving, interplaying tripartite of text, producer and audience. Existing scholarship focuses heavily on the former two terms – the technicalities of writing like a journalist and the journalist's position as a textual producer. Bradshaw and Minogue place more emphasis on the roles and responsibilities of the journalist – which, to a degree, does stand their work apart – however it also contributes to the continued absence of the role of the audience in journalism education. This is perhaps a little harsh as a criticism – no work can cover *everything* – however the impact of fannish productivity on the professional realm is ever-increasing (as Bradshaw and Minogue note themselves). Content creators really ought to have a good idea about the motivations of the audience for whom their work is being catered, why outlets may cover the same story from different angles, and appreciate the place of fan-created outlets like AFTV (formerly ArsenalFan TV), which earlier in the year was, according to *Forbes*,

‘on the brink of hitting a billion overall views, which is about twice as many as Arsenal’s official club account’, in the wider mediascape.

This should not, however, take away from an impressive work, which will help any student reading the book to gain a deeper appreciation of the responsibilities of the sports reporter. Sports journalism, it is fair to suggest, is a topic which is often underestimated by its students; there is more to the profession than simply describing and relaying to the reader sporting action from the pitch. The ability to appreciate, for example, that societal inequalities of various kinds are often reflected in the sports object is a feature of the work of the profession’s very best (see the writing of Jonathan Liew, *The Guardian*’s multi-award winning, and current SJA Awards Sports Writer of the Year). The greatest strength of Bradshaw and Minogue’s work is to highlight this.

Sports Journalism: The State of Play (2020) by Tom Bradshaw and Daragh Minogue, published by Routledge, 2020, pp202 ISBN 9781138583528 £32.99

Essential Journalism: The NCTJ Guide for Trainee Journalists by Jonathan Baker

Review by Tor Clark, University of Leicester

Every old hack always remembers who taught them their key journalism skills, either on the job or on their pre-entry or block release courses. For many, especially from the north-east, that was Jon Smith at Darlington College.

As an editor, I used to enjoy driving up to Darlington to visit my trainees on his course and catch up with him. His wisdom and judgement of the trainee’s capabilities were both always impressive and his company delightful.

In 2007 Smith distilled his collected wisdom about the reporter’s craft into an NCTJ-backed text *Essential Reporting*, which myself and I suspect all other university Journalism course leaders immediately put at the top of our reporting modules’ reading lists.

Now the NCTJ has seen fit to update Smith’s work and commissioned Jonathan Baker, founding Professor of Journalism at the University of Essex after a distinguished career in national journalism, particularly at the BBC, to write a successor text for our times.

And happily Baker’s *Essential Journalism: The NCTJ Guide for Trainee Journalists* (Routledge, 2021) pays full tribute to the predecessor Smith text from the outset, while noting how much journalism has changed in the 14 years since its original publication.

Baker has produced a worthy successor, covering not only the basics Smith had highlighted but also significantly widening the scope, which to some extent is acknowledged in the use of the word ‘journalism’ rather than ‘reporting’ in the title, a useful nudge that being a journalists now involves so much more than taking an accurate shorthand note and writing up a punchy story to a set deadline.

This is a weighty tome, at 451 pages, even in paperback format, but makes an attempt to really cover the whole context of being a journalist that the eager trainee would need to know.

The first part sets the scene and positions the journalist in a changing landscape of news and the ethics around it, which has never been more important or prominent.

The second section is, pleasingly, all about ‘stories’, which Sky News’ Alex Crawford in his preface, remembers the legendary trainer Walter Greenwood demanding of his charges at the TRN training centre in Newcastle. Baker focuses on finding stories as well as just telling them – a vital journalistic skills in an era of so much recycled digital content.

Baker then takes the trainees through the various platforms they will be expected to master very quickly, another development since 2007, when a print reporter could happily ignore the section on broadcast skills. Today’s trainee must have skills to report in every medium and Baker offer a useful introduction to all.

Finally, Baker picks out specialist beats to describe, including the feature writer, court reporter and politi-

cal reporter. It is excellent to see covering politics being featured here alongside the threatened but very specialist craft of the court reporter.

This book must have been an immense undertaking for Baker, filled as it is with examples and helpful comments from seasoned and often well-known journalists. It is also divided up into exceptionally well-organised sections, allowing the reader to get to exactly the guidance they need.

This book went straight to the top of my Journalism programme's reading list because it offers everything the modern aspiring journalist needs – apart from sport – between one set of covers. My only criticism – and this is beyond Baker's control – was that the institutional ebook version was very expensive at almost £500, meaning we were forced to order hard copies for our university library instead, which rather defeats the object of a book which has to focus so much on the digital world, especially in these times of increased digital access to materials.

So all credit to Jonathan Baker for this immense effort of scholarship and industry knowledge, which I hope will be very well used by a new generation of trainee journalists.

In his acknowledgements, Baker says of Jon Smith: "...so much of Smith's wisdom, common sense and explanations of the basics of good, accurate, ethical journalism remain highly relevant and applicable today." This book is a worthy, updated successor.

Essential Journalism: The NCTJ Guide for Trainee Journalists by Jonathan Baker, published by Routledge, 2021, pp451, ISBN 9780367645892 £32.99 (PB) £29.69 (ebook).