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## A classic from the Journalism bookshelf

### Towards the End of the Morning by Michael Frayn

Review by Michael Foley, Dublin Institute of Technology

**I started my career in Fleet Street, and it was still the Fleet Street of Michael Frayn's novel, *Towards the End of the Morning*, even though Frayn set his book ten years before I had my first pint in the King and Keys in 1978.**

Most national newspapers had moved out by 1967 when *Towards the End of the Morning* was set, but there was still the *Express* and the *Telegraph* actually on Fleet Street and by the time I arrived there lurked, up side streets major newspapers, the *Evening Standard*, *The Sun* and the *Mirror*. Times Newspapers and the *Guardian* were up Gray's Inn Road, *The Times* in Blackfriars, but all within pub distance.

*The Irish Times* office, where I laboured as a freelance, was at 85 Fleet Street, which was, as many old hacks will recall, the HQ of the PA and Reuters. I, as a very young journalist, revelled in jumping into a taxi at the Houses of Parliament, having just covered Northern Ireland Questions, nonchalantly giving my destination as either the 'PA building', or 'Reuters', depending on how I saw my career developing and which one would most impress the taxi driver.

But it was still the Fleet Street of Frayn's very funny novel. Lorries delivering newsprint blocked side streets, pubs were full most of the time because somewhere someone was always coming off a shift, and there was the improbably named drinking club, the City of London Golf Club. In Bouverie Street, Fetter Lane and Shoe Lane you could hear the rumble of printing presses and the comings and goings of reporters with notebooks and newspapers under their arms and printers moving from one office to the next.

*Towards the End of the Morning* tells the story of a few journalists working in a miscellaneous department – crosswords, nature notes, church notes – of a newspaper that could be the *Guardian*. While the Fleet Street of the novel seems ageless, the lunchtime pints, expenses, the gentlemanly pace and the assumption that everyone would join the NUJ, and journalism's obsession with itself, there are subtle changes taking place. Darcy, the head of department is seeking ways out, but while everyone seems to think they have to out by 40, with a book deal, Darcy is looking towards television and a new fangled thing called celebrity. There is the new sub, Erskine Morris, representing the flash modernity of the 1960s – he even has an electric typewriter – who talks about the great future newspapers have and that he might even buy a title.

If one could only recommend one novel about journalism to students, would it be Waugh's *Scoop* or Frayn's *Towards the End of the Morning*? I would plump for Michael Frayn. He is funnier and more humane and *Towards the End of the Morning* tells a story that still resonates – if the reader has imagination.

**Towards the End of the Morning by Michael Frayn, Faber and Faber; First published 1967. This edition with an introduction by the author, 2000. ISBN 0571204244.**

## All The Truth Is Out by Matt Bai

Review by Richard Jones, University of Huddersfield

**Before Bill Clinton, there was Gary Hart. Charismatic, intelligent and youthful, he was the overwhelming favourite to win the Democratic nomination for the 1988 presidential election. But then his campaign was spectacularly derailed by a piece of investigative journalism.**

It was the *Miami Herald* which discovered a woman, not Hart's wife, coming and going from the candidate's Washington townhouse. An infamous photo was published of the woman, actress and former beauty queen Donna Rice, perched on Hart's lap on a yacht. In the snap, the politician wore a T-shirt bearing the boat's name, *Monkey Business*. Both Hart and Rice said they were just friends, but the Senator's hopes of the White House were over forever.

In *All The Truth Is Out*, long-time *New York Times* political writer Matt Bai (now with *Yahoo*) revisits the scandal, and argues it led to a significant change in how the American media covers politics. Before Hart, reporters would look the other way when a John F Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson took mistresses. Since then, almost everything has been fair game.

Bai shows America's collective memory of the scandal isn't quite how it played out. In response to rumours about his private life, Hart is well remembered for his hubris in challenging a journalist to 'follow me around', only for the *Herald's* Tom Fiedler and his colleagues to do just that. In reality, the quote appeared in a *New York Times* article on the same day the *Herald* published its story and was a complete coincidence.

The *Herald's* reporters don't come out with spotless reputations. Lurking in the bushes outside Hart's place, they forgot to stake out his back door, so couldn't have known for sure whether Rice had really stayed the night or not. Then, they confronted Hart in an alleyway, writing up the whole escapade in a breathless third-person narrative, just like their heroes Woodward and Bernstein. What did or didn't happen on the *Monkey Business* wasn't exactly Watergate, but it was still enough to bring down a major political figure.

The post-Hart focus on a candidate's 'character' rather than policy positions has, Bai suggests, contributed to the dreary soundbites of the modern professional politician, and a lowering of the standards of American political debate. Presidential candidates are no longer allowed by their handlers to bat complicated issues around in long, late-night, chats with reporters. For their part, journalists and their editors are generally much less interested in explaining those policy positions, too. There's no room for nuance on 24-hour news, much less Twitter. In this context, perhaps we shouldn't be surprised it's non-politicians like Donald Trump and Ben Carson who have been making much of the running in this current US election cycle.

Not that this is all Hart's fault. What happened to him was bound to happen to somebody, sooner or later. The fact it had already come around once by the time Clinton became embroiled in the Gennifer Flowers scandal during his run for the presidency four years later, helped him survive it. Bai reveals around 1990, Clinton had met Fiedler, and asked him where he thought journalists would now draw the line over reporting a candidate's extramarital affairs. When the media came at him, Clinton was ready for it.

The book ends with a poignant final act, Hart in a long semi-retirement with his wife at his remote Colorado home, occasionally sharing his foreign policy insights with Clinton in particular, but never getting the call to return to public life in a major role. He seems to have been too proud to ask for a job, even as politicians involved in far worse scandals were

rehabilitated. Bai argues if Hart had given the now familiar tear-filled public apology on a TV sofa, he could have come back. But even a quarter of a century later both Hart and Rice still refuse to confirm or deny anything that may, or may not, have happened, something Bai clearly admires.

This book would be particularly useful for students on undergraduate modules that deal with the reporting of politics, investigative journalism, or journalism history more generally. It fills in some of the 'what happened next' in American journalism for when students have finished *All The President's Men*. The tale of the *Herald's* pursuit of Hart offers a classic case study for ethics seminars.

Shortly after the book's publication last year, the long exile finally ended when Hart was appointed by his friend John Kerry to be the new US special envoy to Northern Ireland. But even if he manages to achieve some progress there, Hart will always be the 'Monkey Business guy'. If it means intelligent, thoughtful people like him are put off standing for political office, it makes America and the rest of the world all the poorer.

**All The Truth Is Out by Matt Bai, Alfred A Knopf, 2014, ISBN 978-0307273383, RRP £17.76, 263 pp.**

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## Media Power and Plurality: From Hyperlocal to High-Level Policy, edited by Steven Barnett and Judith Townend

Review by Tor Clark, De Montfort University, Leicester.

**When ITV, several years ago, provocatively suggested it could no longer afford to produce its teatime regional news magazine programmes across the UK it caused an outrage among politicians, bemoaning the threat to diversity and plurality the proposed closures would cause at local level.**

It was a reaction welcomed by many journalists and even more locally-based politicians. It raised the issue of media plurality more prominently than had previously been the case despite shrinking of local and regional news providers over previous decades.

Sceptics pointed out local MPs were only making such a fuss because they needed to get themselves on regional TV to ensure recognition among their constituents. They also suggested the BBC ran more popular, often more professional-looking programmes covering the same geographic areas and often exactly the same stories. Those in the regional press also added those very stories had often been broken and already featured prominently in local newspapers. No matter. The legacy of this issue was it significantly raised the political profile of media plurality and, whatever their motives, at least politicians had an understanding and stake in the issue.

Though it might seem as the media grows exponentially the issue of media plurality has become unnecessary, this new collection of articles, stresses how the need to ensure a diversity of opinion and information has never been more necessary.

This is a timely contribution to an area often taken for granted or overlooked, and its reach extends from the very local to international affairs. The authors each focus on specific areas and issues. They analyse the existing situation and current problems, and mostly

suggest solutions towards greater guarantees of plurality. These solutions are interesting, but not without practical difficulty.

The four-part structure of this work is helpful. The first is an 'overview of the policy landscape' emphasising the UK. Barnett, a regular expert contributor to national media on this topic and the BBC in particular, contributes a useful chapter on protecting public service broadcasting.

The second part focuses on the place where arguably plurality is of the greatest and most pressing importance – the regionals and local media in the UK. The third part looks at media policy-making through international case studies and the final section offers comparative international case studies.

The editors have assembled a diverse cast of academics and other informed contributors to illuminate the landscape of plurality, including Raymond Kuhn (on media plurality in France), Peter Humphreys (on media policies in Europe) and Philip M Napoli (on US media policy-making).

The stand-out chapter for me was by Martin Moore, Director of the Media Standards Trust, and looked at lack of plurality at the smallest level, locally. In comparison to the issue of regional TV news mentioned above, where the threat was that plurality became a BBC monopoly, Moore points out in a growing number of areas (he uses the example of Port Talbot in south Wales) even the monopoly has vanished, to be replaced by an absence of locally-produced news. The impact for this on civic participation and democracy is a troubling scenario. The value here is that while this issue has been recorded in a piecemeal fashion as it has developed in trade press and the like, Moore has pulled the issues together in a compelling exposure of the crisis in parts of the UK regional media, a crisis of civic engagement and democratic participation receiving little attention.

The issues are laid out well throughout the book and solutions proposed. State intervention in proactive media policy to ensure plurality is much discussed, as is a US-style model of news media as charitable enterprises. Both these remedies deserve greater exploration in the UK, but despite the need for them, it seems unlikely these initiatives are or will become Government policy priorities. Perhaps it is time to rattle the cages of those local MPs again?

It is easy for those of us with entrenched interests in the plurality of journalism to become depressed by the issues raised in this book, but ultimately its value ought to be to give plurality greater exposure to students, academics, policy-makers and the wider public. For these reasons, this text deserves to be on the reading lists of as many Journalism, Media and Politics courses as possible.

**Media Power and Plurality: From Hyperlocal to High-Level Policy edited by Steven Barnett and Judith Townend, Palgrave, 2015, Hardback, 228pp**

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## Getting Out Alive: News, Sport and Politics at the BBC by Roger Mosey

Review by John Mair, journalist and academic, co-editor of *The BBC Today; Future Uncertain*.