Ehrlich, Matthew C., and Joe Saltzman. *Heroes and Scoundrels: The Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture*. Champaign: U of Illinois P, 2015. 256 pages.

In Dan Gilroy's 2014 feature film *Nightcrawler,* petty thief Louis Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) begins taking pictures of freeway accidents and murder victims and builds a photojournalism business by manipulating crime scenes, exploiting a local network news producer's need for high ratings, and satisfying her audience's appetite for salacious pictures. In this modernization of Maupassant's *Bel Ami*, the nocturnal denizens of recession-era Los Angeles swim or drown in the shifting currents of public opinion, palely gleaming beneath the mercury vapor lamps of a desperate Southland as if their aura of moral decay were a kind of bioluminescence, and as if the murk of mass corruption were their element. The only thing the film leaves out of its gloomy and hilarious vision of contemporary life is an image of the consumer of news, the vampiric presence that haunts every scene yet never once emerges from behind the ratings to show its face—and it gradually dawns on the viewer that we ourselves are the spectral beholder who is so weirdly absent from the story: by drawing us in with its atmosphere, and then implicating us, the movie makes us see.

With a conclusion that's so generalized as to verge on cliché ("the works reflect the interests of those who created them and the times in which they were produced"), with a conception of society as a congeries of believers in various myths about themselves ("history cannot be isolated from a culture's master stories"), and with a lack of any aesthetic framework beyond an unexamined social realism ("uncover the truth and serve the public interest"), Matthew C. Ehrlich and Joe Saltzman's groundbreaking survey *Heroes and Scoundrels* lays the foundation for the academic study of the artistic representation of journalists in popular culture, a study that proves unequal to the task of interpreting such artworks as *Nightcrawler* or *Bel Ami,* not to mention more challenging ones, like Antonio Tabucchi's 1997 novel *The Missing Head of Damasceno Monteiro*—pieces, in short, whose meaning resides elsewhere than in whatever usefulness might be fabricated on their behalf: a meaning which evaporates when reduced

to a diagram of its orientation vis-à-vis "society."

Beginning from the premise that "complex portrayals [...] are comparatively rare," the authors identify a pervasive contrast between, on the one hand, depictions of "official" journalists ("altruistic professionals," "pillars of the community," and "upstanding decent members of society") and, on the other hand, depictions of "outlaw" journalists ("ambulance chasers," "scummy lowlifes," and "scruffy bohemians"), linking this apparent difference of opinion among artists to a conflict internal to the business of reportage which has been brought on by a trend toward professionalization in a post-global media industry.

Praiseworthy though *Heroes and Scoundrels* is in its concentration on the interpretation of images, other scholars will have to decide to what degree a single glaring omission renders the book's method irrelevant from the outset: the consolidation of news outlets in the control of fewer and fewer corporations during the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first—Gannett, to take only a minor example, owns over a hundred local daily papers and more than a thousand weeklies: and this is to say nothing of the very few conglomerates that dominate the market. The censorship implicit in this uniformity of perspective is antidemocratic insofar as American corporations enjoy the legal status of persons whose governance is nevertheless inaccessible except to stakeholders. In all but a few truly independent news organs, top-down control of content is the rule in our time. The authors of *Heroes and Scoundrels* note these conditions incidentally while dealing with the disagreement between *60 Minutes* producers Lowell Bergman (Al Pacino) and Mike Wallace (Christopher Plummer) over the airing of testimony by Brown & Williamson whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand (Russell Crowe) in Michael Mann's 1999 film *The Insider,* but the lack of viewpoints dwelling off of the narrow spectrum of opinions acceptable to advertisers is a function of the corporate model of modern news production and is an efficient cause of the proliferation of bloggers, freelance journalists, and independent news outlets today.

Although *Heroes and Scoundrels* ventures no position as to the nature of American society itself, and although it overlooks the potential of the image of the journalist in pop culture to be a metaphor for the human condition, the book's uncritical proximity to its subject matter is its strength: this study takes stock of art that "provides insights into journalism's self-image at different historical moments while simultaneously pointing to contradictions within that self-

image." *Heroes and Scoundrels* will provide scholars in this nascent microfield with a set of tools and a list of sources.

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FALL 2016