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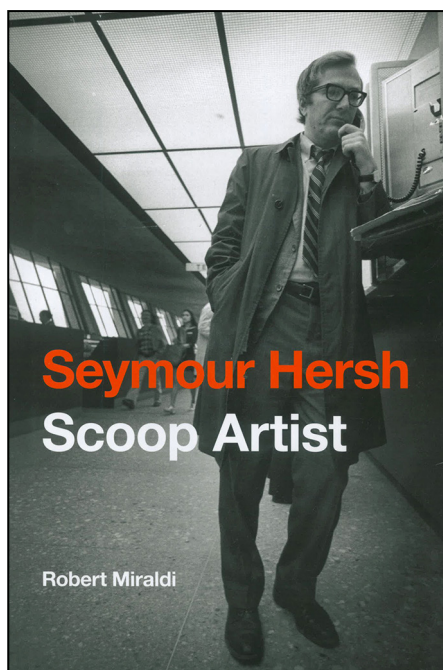
Seymour Hersh—behind the man and the muckraker myths

Seymour Hersh: Scoop Artist, by Robert Miraldi. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2013, 415pp. ISBN 978-1-61234-475-1

AFTER winning acclaim for his depiction of yellow press icon Charles Edward Russell, award-winning journalist and academic Robert Miraldi examines the legacy of another mythical investigative reporter and obsessive ‘muckraker’. His biography of the chameleon-like and elusive Seymour Hersh employs the same formidable forensic skills his subject is renowned for, but to dig into the one topic Hersh is genuinely uncomfortable discussing.

From his initial coverage of My Lai through to his work on Abu Grahib, Hersh’s career has seen him reach the highest pinnacles of journalism, while also causing the kind of controversy and polarisation which would have destroyed the reputations of lesser mortals.

Yet Miraldi not only admirably copes with his refusal to directly discuss the details of his craft, he also



overcomes his general reluctance to be interviewed at all. Embarking on a meticulous attempt to assemble the story behind the stories which helped define the administrations of those Hersh remains implacably opposed to as well as those he admired, *Scoop Artist* isn’t so much a profile of the contrarian reporter, but a production analysis of his process and journalistic practice.

This not only confronts the distressing subject matter at the centre of much of his reportage, it also exposes the disturbing professional flaws and personal weaknesses in the reporter himself.

Following stints with *Chicago Tribune*’s City News Bureau and Associated Press, Hersh was catapulted into the spotlight after securing an interview with Lieutenant William ‘Rusty’ Calley

while the indicted officer was stationed at Fort Benning.

Like many of the other misconceptions surrounding his reporting, Hersh's exclusive wasn't because he was the first to break the story about what happened in Quang Ngai province in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive. After receiving a tip-off from an anti-war activist about the charges Calley faced, it was his gumshoe persistence and, at times, lack of concern at impersonating an officer that allowed him to eventually ingratiate himself with a man who would go on to be convicted of personally shooting Vietnamese children.

The ethics of the methods he used to pursue Calley are rightly overshadowed by the resulting furore. Without Hersh's dogged persistence and willingness to act on information provided by individuals who hoped the resulting publicity would compromise America's involvement in South East Asia, the Army's initial press release might have been ignored by everyone except a few minor outlets.

However, his 1969 exposé also contained elements which would become trademarks of his subsequent career; and a far cry from at least some of the requirements he initially encountered as a cub reporter.

Hersh never explains precisely what Calley told him over bourbon and steaks and what he was able to cull from other sources. He didn't travel to Vietnam until 1971 and unlike other reporters, failed to interview the survivors of the massacre at Son Mỹ.

The kudos and monetary rewards

he received as his coverage began to be picked up nationally, especially by the likes of *The New York Times*, allowed him to create history as well as report it.

However, Miraldi never stoops to character assassination and like 'King Sy' at his best, lets the information he's gathered through countless interviews and a comprehensive dissection of Hersh's prolific writing speak for itself.

Although your feelings about the ultimate scoop artist will be shaped by how closely you identify with his compulsive challenging of official narratives, Miraldi's triumphs mean it will be impossible to discuss the man and the myths surrounding him without referring to this text.