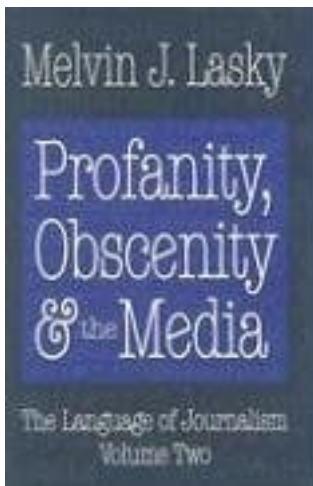


The Language of Journalism



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This is the second volume of Melvin Lasky's *The Language of Journalism*, praised as a "brilliant" and "original" study in communications and contemporary language, and as "a joy to read." It broke ground in focusing on the comparative styles and prejudices of mainstream American and British newspapers, and in its trenchant analysis of their systematic debasement in the face of obligatory platitudes and compulsory euphemisms. Lasky's subtle and richly detailed text documents the possibly terminal crisis affecting honest, thoughtful, and independent journalism in the Western world. It extends the research in his first volume, and deepens the interpretation. It also adds the personal touch of both wit and anecdote expressed by an experienced international journalist and historian. The central chapters on the "F-word" carry the public emergence of the infamous "expletive deleted" beyond the conventional lexicographer's approach. Lasky's pages on the use of formerly forbidden language is a triumph of sinuous semantics. Here, in incisive analysis, is the tortuous struggle of a once Puritanized literary culture writhing to break free of censorship and self-censorship. Lasky critically evaluates the historic effort of the avant-garde of "dirty

realism" to find a path towards what he calls "a usable profanity." In the meantime, newspaper style books become comic texts, as asterisks take over from square brackets and millions of readers purse their lips and indulge in "participatory obscenity." In dealing fully with the phenomenon of profanity, the new book adds another dimension to Lasky's thesis on mass culture's trivialization of real social and political phenomena. It underscores as well our society's embrace of banality, in standardizing politically correct jargon, slang, patois, pidgin, and various other "grunts and growls." The reader of the first volume will find here a wholly new range of references to illuminate the detail of what our newspapers have been publishing, and how the alert and sophisticated reader can make sense of the realities they purport to represent.

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