

# Book Review: Ellen Tanner Marsh

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*Beslan: Shattered Innocence*  
by Lynn Milburn Lansford

As reviewed by *New York Times* best selling author Ellen Tanner Marsh

Lynn Milburn Lansford is one of the rarest of rarities: a journalist who is also a moralist. (She is not, I must clarify, an opinion journalist; those are indeed common and frequently engage in moral discourse. Ann Coulter, Maureen Dowd and William F. Buckley are moralists, and so is Michael Moore.) Lansford's highly interesting book *Beslan: Shattered Innocence* is, on the contrary, reportage, and you're not going to find much morality here.

The subject at hand is the terrorist attack at a school in Beslan, North-Ossetia-Alania, Russia, on September 1, 2004. In telling this tragic tale, Lansford makes use of all the standard techniques of reportage journalism: a straightforward recounting of what happened; interviews with participants; accurate background, and a concluding wrap-up on the lives of significant players. She follows the Joycean (and journalism school) dictum of keeping herself, as narrator, in the background while she lets others tell what happened, including several eyewitness accounts recounted in their searing words, not hers.

But having done that, Lansford tells us, her readers, how we are supposed to respond, thereby creating a book not so much about the horrors of terrorism than about the necessity and healing power of love. "Terrorism and torture are not new," Lansford says. But "once we believe that we are all one, and not separate from each other, acts of hate and torture will not be possible ... We are all the same, except in our thinking, and that is where the change must be made."

Ultimately, then, Lansford does not belong to the objective school of journalism but rather comes across as a journalist who also understands the obligation of a *writer*. It's obvious that *Beslan: Shattered Innocence* will be controversial to many, but Lansford means for it to be so. Once she gets her readers asking (as indeed they will) how love could possibly be more objectionable than terrorism, than they will begin to "get it." Ultimately the journalist wants readers to see it, and the writer wants reader to get it. *Beslan: Shattered Innocence* is about getting it, and that's what sets Lansford apart.