



# The BIOGRAPHER'S *craft*

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
FOR WRITERS & READERS OF BIOGRAPHY

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## Authors Weigh in on Amazon/Hachette Battle



VS.



By now, authors and readers around the world know about the conflict between online retailing behemoth Amazon and Hachette Book Group, part of the French-based publishing conglomerate Lagardere. (Hachette's U.S. imprints include Little, Brown and Grand Central Publishing.) The dispute, not surprisingly, revolves around money: Amazon wants to set the terms for how Hachette's ebooks are priced, and when the publisher balked, Amazon began making life difficult for Hachette—and its authors. Customers could no longer preorder Hachette titles, and

## We Want You!

The Plutarch Committee, which annually chooses the finalists for BIO's Plutarch Award for best biography, needs one more member. If you'd like to help out, please [email BIO president Brian Jay Jones](#).

when those books were available, Amazon sometimes delayed shipment by several weeks. The company also sometimes refused to discount the books, as it usually does.

As the battle has dragged on through the summer, Amazon has tried to win the support of Hachette authors by offering to give its share of ebook sales to the authors—if Hachette did the same. The publisher rejected the idea, and some in the media saw this as Amazon’s way of trying to divide the writers and their publisher.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported in early June that few authors were willing to publicly speak out against Amazon, afraid they might get on the company’s bad side. But that has changed, dramatically, as Douglas Preston has circulated a letter condemning Amazon’s practices, and hundreds of authors have signed it under the collective name of Authors United. The letter will be published on August 10 as a full-page ad in the *New York Times*.

[In an interview with the FutureBook blog](#) at *The Bookseller*, Preston said, “We’re not against Amazon. And we’re not for Hachette at all. We’re really trying not to take sides. We’re just asking Amazon to resolve its issues with Hachette without affecting authors, without dragging us into it.”

The list of authors who signed includes more than a dozen BIO members, including President Brian Jay Jones, board members Kate Buford, Amanda Foreman, and Will Swift, and several members of the advisory council. *TBC* asked several of them to share their thoughts on why they signed.

**Betsy Connor Bowen:** “Like a schoolyard bully, [Amazon] flexes its brawn and plays favorites, all at the expense of the very community that made it the world’s largest store. Pricing for readers, not publishers; better terms for preorder, discounts and delivery for compliant publishers and their authors; pitting writers against publishers by offering them a higher share of ebook revenues. All while claiming that publishers don’t “understand” readers’ want to pay lower prices for ebooks?... I’m very glad that a reader can hit “Add to Cart” for my preorder book

## From the Editor

A biographer I know was asked, “Are you a non-profit?” He had a ready reply: “I am a non-profit; I don’t make any money!”

Of course, he was joking—I think. But for most biographers, most authors, making money is a challenge. While *TBC* sometimes looks at the marketing side of the craft, we don’t specifically talk money too much. This issue, though, we explore one of the big economic stories in the book world: the power of Amazon, as it’s playing out in its feud with the publisher Hachette. More specifically, we take a look at the letter author Douglas Preston crafted to show the displeasure of writers of all stripes with the conflict.

Next month, we’ll return to money issues as BIO member Jeffrey Marks examines some of the ways to fund research, certainly a relevant issue in the day of shrinking advances

now on Amazon. I write to connect with readers. To communicate.... But if I'd published with Hachette and that couldn't happen, I would be very angry, and I am equally angry seeing it happen to other writers. How could Amazon not understand its actions weaken the very culture that put it where it is?"

**Kate Buford:** "The 2014 summer of the Amazon-Hachette stand-off may mark an even larger seismic shift in book publishing—and, by extension, biography. In case you missed them, here are three recent analyses that gave this biographer pause: [a letter from Richard Russo](#) to members of the Authors Guild; [a lengthy piece](#) on the front page of the Sunday *New York Times* Business Section; and a truly "scary" (my agent's word to describe the publishing climate) [piece on print media](#), also in the *Times*, by that paper's trenchant media reporter, David Carr. They lay out a problematic future, which means an even greater need for organizations such as BIO to advocate for our craft."

**Amanda Foreman** (via the Internet): "Amazon is blackmailing Hachette and blacklisting authors. Frankly, Amazon should be indicted on RICO charges. This is a dangerous and disgusting abuse of power that involves mafia-like behavior against individuals and the public interest."

**Brian Jay Jones:** "This is a mingling of business and politics, as everyone throws elbows for position—which means that the entire affair is an absolute mess. My hope, in signing the letter, was that we could encourage everyone to start TALKING about things going forward, without Amazon rushing into this bizarre pre-emptive, arbitrary, hostage-taking, hold-our-breath-until-we-turn-blue strategy that it's been calling 'negotiation.' It's a conversation that's worth having and it appears, at least, to be one that's finally happening. But I don't think anyone is going to start declaring victory just yet, or even for quite some time."

**Carl Rollyson:** "I am by no means anti-Amazon in the matter. I just think it was wrong to punish authors in a dispute between Amazon and a publisher. In many ways, Amazon has been good for publishing and for authors, if not always so

day of shrinking advances.

Back to this issue: We're pleased to mark the return of Australia/New Zealand correspondent Todd Nicholls, as he contributes his first piece since his serious auto accident last fall. And much to my surprise, we're referencing Weird Al in what's supposed to be a serious epublication. I blame it on the heat.

Finally, a correction from last issue: In News and Notes, I wrote that Natascha Scott-Stokes's Chilean boarding house/vacation rental was going to be featured in the *Bible of South American Travel*. Except there is no such book. Natascha wrote, "It is certainly the bible of South American travel, but that is not its name. It is in fact the *South American Handbook*. Currently in its 87th edition, it is the 'longest-running travel guide in the English language' published by the British publisher Footprint Books." I'll be sure to pick up a copy before I start the South American travels I've longed dreamed about—if I can ever afford them

good for the big five publishers. I should also declare an interest: I have published books with Amazon.”

**Charles J. Shields:** “What I’d like to see is support from readers by buying their books from Barnes & Noble, independent bookshops, barnesandnoble.com, used bookshops, and Costco instead of Amazon. That would take away some of Amazon’s leverage and keep the publishing industry—from author to editor to bookstore—diversified and healthy.”

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## Lives on Screen: Many Biographies Serve as Source Material for New Biopics

“Biopics used to be a mix of entertainment, education, and guilt-free voyeurism—a peek behind the curtain at people who touched our lives in some way. Now, they’re a contradictory mix of hagiography and revisionism, lionizing their subjects while somehow managing to diminish them in comparison to the products of their imaginations.”

That verdict on recent biographical films came from [Wired](#) earlier this year, and it’s debatable whether it’s a fair assessment. Biopics of old engaged in a fair amount of hagiography, and sometimes a little revisionism is called for. But with *Wired*’s words as food for thought, here’s a far-from-complete look at: biopics and biographical documentaries out now or soon to be released; recently announced biographical projects; and some biopics facing criticism—or even lawsuits—from people not happy with the films.

can ever afford them.

Yours,

Michael Burgan

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### Sold to Publishers

Catherine Reef

*Florence Nightingale*

sold to Clarion

George W. Bush

Untitled biography of

George H. W. Bush

sold to Crown

by Robert Barnett at

Williams & Connolly

Lisa Hilton

*Elizabeth: Renaissance Prince*

sold to Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

by Jessica Purdue at The Orion

Publishing Group

Karen Stabiner

*Generation Chef*

(Jonah Miller)

sold to Avery

by Eric Lupfer at

William Morris Endeavor



Chadwick Boseman is garnering praise for his portrayal of the Godfather of Soul, James Brown.

Laurent is the subject of two films this summer. The first released in the United States is *Yves Saint Laurent*, an authorized look at the designer's early career. The second, *Saint Laurent*, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May. It looks at Saint Laurent's career during the 1960s and 1970s, when he emerged as a leading designer and regular nightclubber in both Paris and New York.

*American Masters*, the biography series that airs on PBS, has several new programs coming over the next few months. On August 29, photographer Dorothea Lange is featured. On September 23, the series explores the lives of 19

## Released or Soon-to-be Released

*Life Itself*, a documentary on the life of Roger Ebert, hit the screens this summer and is winning strong reviews. The film, based on Ebert's memoir, tracks his long career as an influential movie critic and chronicles the end of his long battle with the cancer that killed him.

Also recently released was *Get On Up*, an unvarnished look at the life of James Brown. co-produced by Mick Jagger.

Fashion designer Yves Saint

Larry Loftis

*Into the Lion's Mouth: The True Story of Dusko Popov, WWII's Most Daring Spy*

sold to Berkley

by Don Fehr at Trident Media Group

James Kunetka

*The General and the Genius: Leslie Groves, Robert Oppenheimer and the Unlikely Partnership that Built the Atomic Bomb*

sold to Regnery History

by Jim Hornfischer at Hornfischer Literary Management (NA)

Shane White

*The Prince of Darkness: Wall Street's First Black Millionaire (Jeremiah G. Hamilton)*

sold to Palgrave

by Wendy Strothman of The Strothman Agency

Vanessa Siddle Walker

*Hidden Provocateurs: How Horace E. Tate and Black Educators Waged a Forgotten War for Civil Rights*

sold to New Press

by Janell Walden Agyeman at Marie Brown & Associates

well-known Baby Boomers in “The Boomer List.” Bing Crosby gets the *Masters* treatment on December 26. Also from PBS this fall is Ken Burns’s *The Roosevelts: An Intimate Portrait*, which will look at the three most prominent members of that political family: Theodore, Franklin, and Eleanor. The first of the show’s seven episodes debuts on September 14.

Andrew Hodges’s biography *Alan Turing: The Enigma* provided the source material for *The Imitation*, with Benedict Cumberbatch playing the famous code breaker and computer scientist. The movie focuses on Turing’s war years at Bletchley Park and will be released in November.

Another scientist gets the biopic treatment in *Theory of Everything*, a look at Stephen Hawking’s life from his college days to the onset of his ALS. The film is based in part on the memoir of his first wife, Jane Hawking, and is also scheduled for a November release.

The recent passing of Louis Zamperini has renewed interest in *Unbroken*, Laura Hillenbrand’s 2010 biography of the Olympic runner and World War II prisoner of war, and it should give the film version of the book a boost, too. The movie was directed by Angelina Jolie and is slated to open in U.S. theaters this Christmas.

J.R.R. Tolkien is the subject of competing biopics. The first, *Tolkien*, will be out this fall, while the second, *Tolkien and Lewis*, will come out next Easter. The latter explores the relationship between the author of *The Hobbit* and his fellow writer, C.S. Lewis.

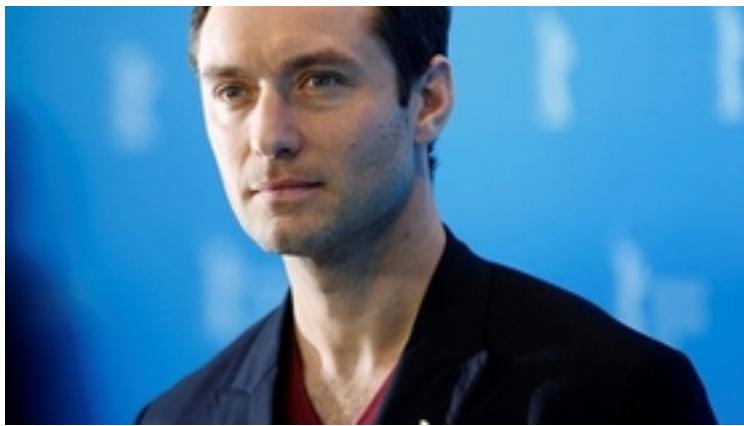


## In Stores

*The Blue Box: Three Lives in Letters*  
by Sallie Bingham  
(Sarabande)

*Alice Paul: Claiming Power*  
by J. D. Zahniser  
(Oxford University Press)

*Elephant Company: The Inspiring Story  
of an Unlikely Hero and the Animals  
Who Helped Him Save Lives  
in World War II*  
by Vicki Croke



Jude Law, a late addition to the cast of *Genius*, will play novelist Thomas Wolfe.

### **Announced or Filming**

Biographies by A. Scott Berg have become hot commodities in Hollywood. Three of them have been optioned or are already being turned into films. The first to arrive, most likely next year, will be *Genius*, based on Berg's *Max Perkins: Editor of Genius*. Oscar winner Colin Firth plays the famed editor, and the cast also includes such A-list stars as Nicole Kidman and Jude Law.

This year, Paramount Television announced that screenwriter Dustin Lance Black, who won an Oscar for the biopic *Milk*, will adapt Berg's biography of Charles A. Lindbergh. Leonardo DiCaprio is one of the producers of that project.

DiCaprio seems to be keen on the lives of political figures, as he and Berg are teaming up again for a big-screen adaptation of *Wilson*. DiCaprio plans to play the presidential title role, just as he does with another biopic he's connected to, on the life of Theodore Roosevelt. Early reports said the movie will be based on Edmund Morris's *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt*, and that DiCaprio would like his frequent collaborator, Martin Scorsese, to direct.

These days, it seems the key to getting your biography optioned in Hollywood

(Random House)

*Louis van Gaal: The Biography*  
by Maarten Meijer  
(Ebury Press)

*Joss Whedon: The Biography*  
by Amy Pascale  
(Chicago Review Press)

*The Invisible Bridge: The Fall of Nixon  
and the Rise of Reagan*  
by Rick Perlstein  
(Simon & Schuster)

*Julian Hawthorne: The Life of a  
Prodigal Son*  
by Gary Scharnhorst  
(University of Illinois)

*Blazing Star: The Life and Times of  
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*  
by Alexander Larman  
(Head of Zeus)

*A War of Words: The Man Who Talked  
4000 Japanese into Surrender*  
by Hamish McDonald  
(Oxford University Press)

*Susan Sontag: A Biography*  
by Daniel Schreiber

is to write about a political figure. Some of the recently announced (or rumored) political subjects in biographical projects and the books they're based on include:

- A look at the early political career of Winston Churchill, based on *Young Titan*, by Michael Shelden
- A miniseries on Catherine the Great, based on Robert K. Massie's *Catherine the Great: Portrait of a Woman*
- The friendship of Theodore Roosevelt and William McKinley, as depicted in *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, & the Golden Age of Journalism* by Doris Kearns Goodwin (the BIO Advisory Council member's newest book was purchased by Stephen Spielberg's DreamWorks even before it was published)

A play, not a book, serves as the source for another political biopic in the works. Spielberg is said to be ready to direct a film adaptation of *All the Way*, the Tony-Award winning drama that featured Bryan Cranston as Lyndon B. Johnson. The *Breaking Bad* star will reprise his role for the HBO film.

Moving away from political figures, those in sports, entertainment and other realms are also about to become the subject of biopics, with biographies again serving as the source material. Some of the projects in the works include:

- A TV miniseries about Ted Williams, based on *The Kid: The Immortal Life of Ted Williams* by BIO member Ben Bradlee Jr.
- A long-delayed film about Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, based on *The Man Who Knew Infinity: A Life of the Genius Ramanujan* by Robert Kanigel
- A biopic of John D. Rockefeller based on Ron Chernow's *Titan: The Life*

by Daniel Sankovitz,  
translated by David Dollenmayer  
(Northwestern University Press)

*Mona Lisa: A Life Discovered*  
by Dianne Hales  
(Simon & Schuster)

*Robert the Bruce: King of the Scots*  
by Michael Penman  
(Yale University Press)

*The Life and Career of David Beckham:  
Football Legend, Cultural Icon*  
by Tracey Savell Reavis  
(Rowman & Littlefield)

*Augustus: First Emperor of Rome*  
by Adrian Goldsworthy  
(Yale University Press)

*Edgar Allan Poe:  
The Fever Called Living*  
by Paul Collins  
(New Harvest)

*Harold and Jack: The Remarkable  
Friendship of Prime Minister Macmillan  
and President Kennedy*  
by Christopher Sandford  
(Prometheus)

*of John D. Rockefeller*

- An HBO movie about Bessie Smith, based in part on *Bessie* by Chris Albertson
- A look at the relationship between Kim Philby and two of his close friends, based on Ben Macintyre's *A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal*
- The life of Thomas-Alexandre Dumas, based on BIO member Tom Reiss's *The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal, and the Real Count of Monte Cristo*

## Biopic Problems

Angry family members and others have raised concerns about several biopics recently released or in the works. A film about Jimi Hendrix, *All by My Side*, drew the ire of his former girlfriend, Kathy Etchingham, as the movie falsely claims that the guitarist beat her. Charles R. Cross, who wrote a Hendrix book called *Room Full of Mirrors: A Biography of Jimi Hendrix*, also disputed the allegation, based on the hundreds of interviews he did while researching his book. The *Guardian* wrote, "Etchingham claims that when she heard the film was being made, she offered her unpaid cooperation but instead received 'a horrible letter back threatening me with legal action under their First Amendment rights to say what they like about me.'" The film was written and directed by John Ridley, who won the 2014 Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay for *12 Years a Slave*.

With two other films, the problems started even before filming began. Hank Williams III voiced his displeasure with the choice of British actor Tom Hiddleston to play his grandfather in *I Saw The Light*. The younger Williams thought an

*Blood Aces: The Wild Ride of Benny Binion, the Texas Gangster Who Created Vegas Poker*  
by Doug J. Swanson  
(Viking)

*The Youngs: The Brothers Who Built AC/DC*  
by Jesse Fink  
(St. Martin's Press)

*Jasper Tudor: The Man Who Made the Tudor Dynasty*  
by Terry Breverton  
(Amberley)

*Harry: A Biography*  
by Marcia Moody  
(Michael O'Mara)

*The First Eagles: The Fearless American Aces Who Flew with the RAF in World War I*  
by Gavin Mortimer  
Zenith Press

*Tove Jansson: Work and Love*  
by Tuula Karjalainen  
(Penguin Global)

*John Singer Sargent and His Muse:*

American actor should have been given the role.

Finally, Richard Pryor Jr. has asked the courts to stop production of a biopic about his father. The film is being directed by Lee Daniels, who does have the cooperation of Pryor's widow—his son's stepmother—Jennifer Lee Pryor.

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## Kiwi Political Biography on the Rise

by **Todd Nicholls**

In New Zealand, political biographies lack the prestige or the tradition that they have in the United States, where they are almost an art form in their own right. Yet two recent New Zealand political biographies suggest that biography is becoming a more effective means of analyzing political figures in this country.

It is undoubtedly easier to research and write a political biography of a politician from yesteryear, especially if that politician has subsequently passed away—how many biographies have there been of Richard Nixon in the last 20 years, for example? David Grant benefits from the passing of time to capture the



JOHN KEY

PORTRAIT OF A PRIME MINISTER

JOHN RODGMAN



Just six years after he entered Parliament, Key was elected

*Painting Love and Loss*

by Karen Corsano and Daniel Williman  
(Rowman & Littlefield)

*The Man Who Killed Richard III*

by Susan Fern  
(Amberley)

*Cecily Neville: Mother of Kings*

by Amy Licence  
(Amberley)

*Robert Cantwell and the Literary Left:*

*A Northwest Writer Reworks*

*American Fiction*

by T.V. Reed

(University of Washington Press)

*Gods and Kings: The Rise and Fall of Alexander McQueen and John Galliano*

by Dana Thomas

(Penguin)

*Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*

by Jan Swafford

(Houghton Mifflin Harcourt)

*William Wells Brown: An African-American Life*

by Ezra Greenspan

(W.W. Norton & Company)

essence of former New Zealand Prime Minister prime minister of New Zealand. Norman Kirk in *The Mighty Totara: The Life and Times of Norman Kirk*.

Kirk was prime minister between 1972 and 1974 before dying in office. Leader of the Labour Party (equivalent to the American Democrats), Kirk was liberal on many social and moral issues, such as opposing New Zealand's sports teams competing in pre-democratic South Africa and French nuclear testing in the South Pacific. If not quite New Zealand's John F. Kennedy in importance, Kirk was a memorable national figure.

As with the deaths of some U.S. presidents and their impact on the country's citizens, it was Kirk's death that New Zealanders perhaps remember most, especially where they were when they first heard the sad news. In this regard, Kirk's career is a metaphor for a more innocent time and place in New Zealand, which should be the hallmark of any quality political biography. Forty years after Kirk's death, Grant is able to appropriately reflect on Kirk's life and achievements and separates the myth from the reality. In doing so, Grant does not lose Kirk's essential humanness. Readers of this political biography finish it having not only a better understanding of Kirk the politician, but also Kirk the man.

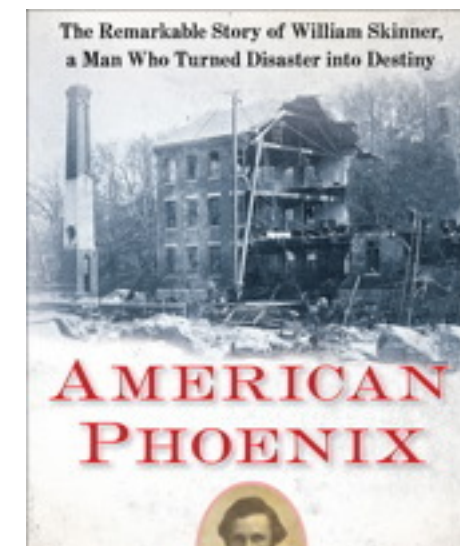
Journalist John Roughan chose a more contemporary subject for his recent political biography: current New Zealand Prime Minister John Key (who recently met with President Obama in the US). The timing of the release of *John Key, Portrait of a Prime Minister* is doubly bizarre in that it has been published about six months before a general election and neither at the start nor end of Key's tenure as prime minister (which began in 2008), as is more common with political biographies. Key's National Party is currently riding high in the polls and looks set for a third term in power.

*Bolano: A Biography*  
by Monica Maristain  
(Melville House)

*The Good Son*  
by Christopher Andersen  
(Gallery Books)

*Archbishop Justin Welby: Risk-taker  
and Reconciler*  
by Andrew Atherstone  
(Darton, Longman & Todd)

*Alone: The Triumph and Tragedy of  
John Curry Hardcover*  
by Bill Jones  
(Bloomsbury)



Roughan is adamant that the timing of the book's release will not have any bearing on the forthcoming election result, given Key's current popularity. That said, Roughan writes that Key "lives on the edge" more than Roughan thought he did, and Key only wanted the top job in New Zealand politics and would not settle for being your run-of-the-mill politician.

Unauthorized (although Key tellingly did appear at its launch), the biography has largely fallen under the public radar, although it has provided an interesting insight on Key the man and Key the national politician for New Zealand voters to ultimately evaluate.

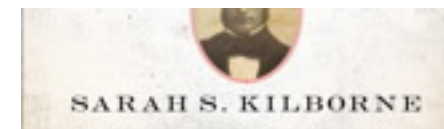
As well as being the Australia/New Zealand correspondence for BIO, Todd R. Nicholls is working on a PhD dissertation on New Zealand literary biography. He is also currently writing a book. He works as a criminal lawyer and as a writer/journalist.

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## The Biographer Next Door

**By Carl Rollyson**

The current controversy over Marja Mills's *The Mockingbird Next Door* is the stuff of novels. In fiction, the biographer is often the heavy, the snoop, a confidence man or woman worming his or her way into the biographical subject's life. In



**Paper**

*American Phoenix: The Remarkable Story of William Skinner, A Man Who Turned Disaster Into Destiny*

by Sarah S. Kilborne  
(Simon & Schuster)

*Pat and Dick: The Nixons, an Intimate Portrait of a Marriage*

by Will Swift  
(Threshold Editions)

*Under a Wild Sky: John James Audubon and the Making of*

*The Birds of America*  
by William Souder  
(Milkweed Editions)

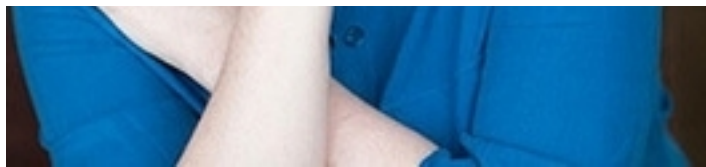
*William Golding: The Man Who Wrote*

*Lord of the Flies*  
by John Carey  
(Free Press)

*Hockey: Not Your Average Joe*

by Madonna King  
(University of Queensland Press)

the typical horror story about a biographfiend (to borrow James Joyce's term), the biographer is the aggressor and the subject a victim. At best, as in Henry James, the biographer has qualms about the machinations he performs in order to get those letters.



Mills lived next to Lee and her sister for 18 months.

But what happens when the biographer is invited to intrude? Whatever else may be true or false about the Mockingbird saga, it seems Marja Mills did gain the confidence of at least one of the Lee sisters. For me as a professional biographer, this scenario raises some questions. What price biography? When you become your subject's next-door neighbor, in what sense do you remain independent? In interviews, Mills suggests she avoided certain issues and did not pry. In some instances, she took out passages that she thought the sisters might find objectionable. Such behavior is not shocking. Journalists learn they have to give a little to get, they hope, a lot. I've done it myself, but only on rare occasions when there was no other way to save all the good stuff I did not want to give up.

Sooner or later—and certainly after the book has been published—the biographer walks away, sometimes leaving the subject and the subject's friends disconcerted when they see themselves presented to the public in cold, hard print. This is not always the case, of course. I'm still on very good terms with both the Dana Andrews and Rebecca West families—but then, neither of those families tried to control what I wrote. Not so Michael Foot, with whom I lived off and on for three years. He became outraged when my portrait of his marriage did not comport with his own fond memory of it. I modified a few phrases to mollify him (he was not mollified), and then I decided to publish *my* biography of his wife, Jill

*The Man Who Was Norris: The Life of  
Gerald Hamilton*  
by Tom Cullen  
(Dedalus)

*Huston Smith: Wisdomkeeper*  
by Dana Sawyer  
(Fons Vitae)

*John Mullan: The Tumultuous Life of a  
Western Road Builder*  
by Keith C. Petersen  
(Washington State University Press)

*The Spy Who Changed The World*  
by Mike Rossiter  
(Headline Book Publishing)

*The Assassination of the Archduke:  
Sarajevo 1914 and the Romance That  
Changed the World*  
by Greg King and Sue Woolmans  
(St. Martin's Griffin)

*The Eagle of Toledo: The Life and Times  
of Federico Bahamontes, the Tour's  
Greatest Climber*  
by Alasdair Fotheringham  
(Aurum Press)

*A Biography of Paul Berg : The*

Craigie, and be damned.

What makes me uneasy about Mills is that she professes surprise at what has happened to her when, in fact, with someone as tetchy as Harper Lee, the end result was bound to be nasty even if the process was pleasant. The biographer becomes the heavy in the subject's mind because the biographer has taken charge, providing, for example, alternative readings of Harper Lee that Harper Lee could not countenance unless she wished to relinquish what Harper Lee has spent a lifetime constructing. Biography to such subjects is an affront to their *amour propre*. Mills could do all of us biographers a service if she would simply admit that bitter truth. Don't act surprised. Biographers, of all people, need to level with themselves and their subjects. To do otherwise is to perpetuate a kind of plaintive fiction in which we all wonder, how did it go wrong?

Bio board member Carl Rollyson is currently finishing a biography of Walter Brennan and doing research for a biography of William Faulkner.



## Member Interview

# Six Questions with James McGrath Morris

**What is your current project and what stage is it at?**

I am putting the final touches on *Eye on the Struggle: Ethel Payne, The First Lady of the Black Press* that Amistad, an imprint of

*Recombinant DNA Controversy*

*Revisited*

by Errol C. Friedberg

(World Scientific Publishing Company)

*William Wallace: The Man and the Myth*

by Chris Brown

(The History Press)

*Apollinaire and the Great War, 1914-18*

by David Hunter

(Peter Owen Publishers)

*Laura Robson: The Biography*

by Tina Campanella

(John Blake)

*American Gangster Revisited: The True*

*Story of Frank Lucas*

by Ron Chepesiuk

(Strategic Media Books)

*William J. Seymour and the Origins of Global Pentecostalism: A Biography and*

*Documentary History*

by Gastón Espinosa

(Duke University Press)

*The Girl Who Loved Camellias: The Life and Legend of Marie Duplessis*

by Julie Kavanagh

(Vintage)

Along with finishing up his Payne biography and starting a new book, Morris writes a column on the changing world of publishing and reading for the *Santa Fe New Mexican*.

is why I so loved doing *The Rose Man of Sing Sing*. Unfortunately it is hard to get support to write a biography of lesser-known folks. Yes, it sounds like I am avoiding answering the question. To make matters worse, my answer is two not one person: Will and Ariel Durant.

### **What's your favorite biography/who is your favorite biographer?**

*The Power Broker* by Robert Caro probably remains my favorite biography; a close second is *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* by E.P. Thompson.

As for my favorite biographer I am going to rule out naming anyone alive and limit my choice to those who have come before us. Of those, I would select W.A. Swanberg, who died in 1992. He wrote engaging accounts of the lives of William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer, Theodore Dreiser, Norman Thomas, and others. His biography of Thomas was a masterpiece.

It was Swanberg's work that first got me interested in biography, so when I got a contract to write a biography of Pulitzer, I was confronted with the notion of competing with the man whose work had mentored me. After my book came out, Jonathan Yardley of *The Washington Post* wrote, "There have been other

HarperCollins, will publish in February, and I am working on my next book, scheduled to be published in 2017 by Da Capo. It is called *The Ambulance Drivers: Hemingway and Dos Passos—Literary Lives in War and Peace*.

### **Which person would you most like to write about?**

This is a tough question. My favorite subject is one who has not been written about, which

*Blues All Day Long:  
The Jimmy Rogers Story*  
by Wayne Everett Goins  
(University of Illinois Press)

*Women's Rights and the French  
Revolution: A Biography  
of Olympe de Gouges*  
by Sophie Mousset  
(Transaction Publishers)

*Oscar Romero: Love Must Win Out*  
by Kevin Clarke  
(Liturgical Press)

*William Alexander Percy: The Curious  
Life of a Mississippi Planter  
and Sexual Freethinker*  
by Benjamin E. Wise  
(University of North Carolina Press)

*Alfred Nobel: A Biography*  
by Kenne Fant,  
translated by Marianne Ruuth  
(Arcade Publishing)

*Mr. and Mrs. Madison's War:  
America's First Couple and  
the War of 1812*  
by Hugh Howard

Jonathan Lurie of *The Washington Post*, wrote, “There have been quite a few biographies of Pulitzer, most notably W.A. Swanberg’s published in 1967, but James McGrath Morris’s is the best.” I felt badly at first, but then I realized that Swanberg—if he were the kind of writer I imagined he was—might actually be happy that one who had been influenced by his work earned such an accolade.

### **What was your most frustrating moment as a biographer?**

When I wrote *The Rose Man of Sing Sing*, I could find no records nor even photographs, but only the barest information about Nellie Chapin, the wife of the book’s subject, the notorious newspaper editor Charles Chapin. As she was central to the story (he eventually murders her) I felt I had let her and my readers down.

### **Most satisfying?**

Finding the lost memoirs of Joseph Pulitzer’s brother in Paris. You can read the story of my “Indiana Jones” moment [here](#).

### **One research/marketing/attitudinal tip to share?**

I have found that one piece of advice I give myself often resonates with other writers. Depending on the published work to provide happiness, success, or contentment is a mistake. Rather, it is in the work itself that one should look for the reward from our craft. Getting up each day and being paid to write is truly a blessing that few are given. Savor it and worry less about sales or acclaim. They pale in comparison to the true reward found in the act of creating a literary work.

---

## **Shorts**

### **Media Outlets Publish “Best of Half**



(Bloomsbury Press)

*John Wilkes Booth: Day-By-Day*

by Arthur F. Loux

(McFarland)

*Dennis Hopper: The Wild Ride of a*

*Hollywood Rebel*

by Peter L. Winkler

(Barricade Books)

*Sabbath Bloody Sabbath*

by Joel McIver

(Omnibus Press)

*Joseph Goebbels*

by Curt Riess

(Fonthill Media)

*Hanna Schygulla*

by Ulrike Sieglöhr

(British Film Institute)

*Thomas Cromwell*

by J. Patrick Coby

(Amberley)

*Rediscovering Jacob Riis: Exposure*

*Journalism and Photography in*

*Turn-of-the-Century New York*

by Bonnie Yochelson

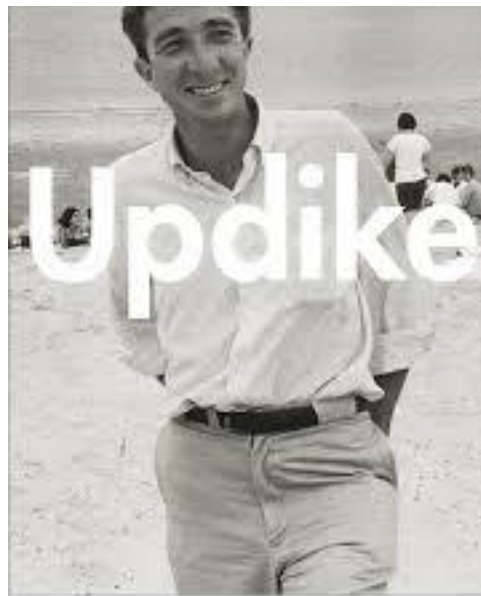
## Year” Lists

Last month, Amazon and several media outlets, including the *Guardian*, the Huffington Post, and Flavorwire, announced their take on the best books “so far” for 2014. *TBC* is not sure if this is a new or growing trend, but it perhaps reflects the popularity of “best of” lists with both readers and editors.

Topping [Amazon’s half-year list](#) is Adam Begley’s *Updike*, beating out an abundance of novels. On the electronic side, Amazon’s best Kindle Singles so far included former BIO President James McGrath Morris’s *Revolution by Murder*. [Flavorwire](#) had a top-ten list strictly for nonfiction, and two group biographies made the cut: *Hotel Florida: Truth, Love, and Death in the Spanish Civil War* by BIO member Amanda Vaill, and *Five Came Back: A Story of Hollywood and the Second World War* by Mark Harris. [The Daily Beast](#) offered biography lovers their own list of the best biographies so far. Coming in at number one once again was Begley’s work on John Updike.

### Authors and Others Can Use Publishing Executive to Stay Informed

BIO vice president Cathy Curtis shared a source of information for writers of all stripes who want to stay on top of trends in both print and digital publishing. Publishing Executive produces a magazine—available in both print and electronic formats—a number of blogs, and a free e-newsletter called *Publishing Business Today*. To check out a sample issue, go [here](#).



Begley's biography of John Updike tops two half-year "best of" lists.

and Daniel Czitrom  
(University of Chicago Press)

*Elizabeth Woodville: A Life*  
by David MacGibbon  
(Amberley)

*Turia: A Roman Woman’s Civil War*  
by Josiah Osgood  
(Oxford University Press)

*The Golden Dragon: Alfred the Great  
and His Times*  
by Alf J. Mapp Jr.  
(M. Evans & Company)

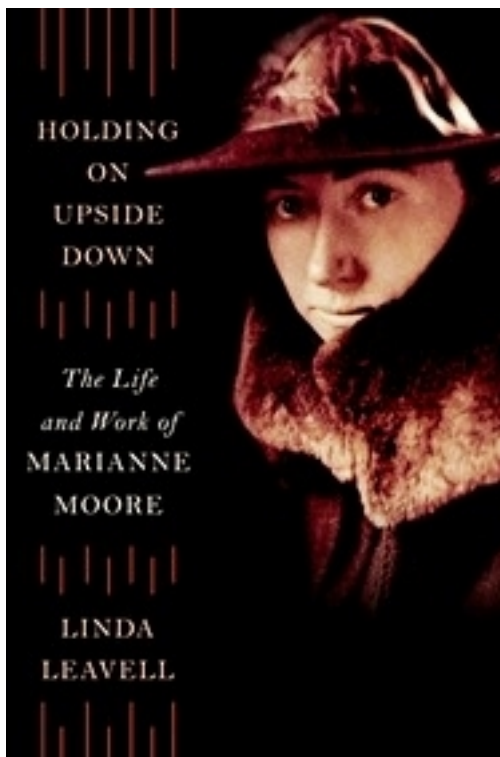
*Stirling Moss:  
The Authorised Biography*  
by Robert Edwards  
(Phoenix)

*Jean Galbraith: Writer in a Valley*  
by Meredith Fletcher  
(Monash University Publishing)

*The Mysterious Voodoo Queen, Marie  
Laveaux: A Study of Powerful  
Female Leadership in  
Nineteenth Century New Orleans*  
by Ina J. Fandrich (Routledge)

## Romantic Studies Group Issues Call for Papers

The British Association for Romantic Studies (BARS) recently issued a call for papers for its 2015 conference, "Romantic Imprints," which will be held at Cardiff University in Wales next July. The theme is "broadly understood to include the various literary, cultural, historical and political manifestations of Romantic print culture across Europe, the Americas and the rest of the world." BARS includes biographies of Romantic-era figures as a possible topic for discussion. For more information about the conference and submission requirements, go [here](#).



Leavell's biography was also a finalist for the 2013 National Book Critics Circle Award for

## Prizes

### **PEN Award**

BIO member Linda Leavell has claimed another prize for her *Holding On Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore*, winning the PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography. In May, Leavell won BIO's second annual Plutarch Award, as chosen by other biographers. In their citation, the PEN judges said, "For over two decades, Linda Leavell mined elusive veins rich with treasure. Now she has surfaced with a gem polished to brilliance that is a precious addition to literary biography." The award comes with a \$5,000 prize.

### **National Biography Award**

*The Man Who Built the National Football League: Joe F. Carr*  
by Chris Willis  
(Rowman & Littlefield)

*Secret Lives of the Tsars: Three Centuries of Autocracy, Debauchery, Betrayal, Murder, and Madness from Romanov Russia*  
by Michael Farquhar  
(Random House)

*Freya Stark*  
by Caroline Moorehead  
(Allison & Busby)

*FDR and Lucy: Lovers and Friends*  
by Resa Willis  
(Routledge)

*The Lives of Erich Fromm: Love's Prophet*  
by Lawrence J. Friedman  
(Columbia University Press)

*A Grip on the Mane of Life: An Authorized Biography of Earl V. Shaffer*  
by David Donaldson and Maurice J. Forrester  
(Appalachian Trail Museum)

Biography.

#### National Biography Award

Alison Alexander has won Australia's 2014 National Biography Award for *The Ambitions of Jane Franklin: Victorian Lady Adventurer*. The honor comes with a \$25,000 prize. To be considered for the National Biography Award, the subject of the work must be an Australian or have made a significant contribution to Australia. Other subjects may be considered if the author is an Australian citizen or permanent resident and the work provides a particularly Australian perspective of the subject. The award is administered and presented by the State Library of New South Wales.

#### Kirkus Announces New Literary Prizes

This spring, *Kirkus Reviews* announced the creation of the Kirkus Prize to honor outstanding writing by authors whose books have earned the Kirkus Star in the categories of fiction, nonfiction and young readers' literature. The prize in each category, to be given annually, is \$50,000. All books that earn the Kirkus Star with publication dates between October 1, 2013, and September 30, 2014, are automatically nominated for the Prize. Marc Winkelman, president and publisher of Kirkus Media, says, "Since relaunching *Kirkus Reviews* in 2010, the company has enjoyed tremendous growth. Everyone at Kirkus feels a deep responsibility to our readers and the publishing industry; this prize is a symbol of that commitment." Panels of three highly regarded judges, composed of a writer, a bookseller or librarian, and a Kirkus critic, will select the Kirkus Prize finalists and winners. Six finalists in each category will be announced on September 30, 2014. The three winners of the 2014 Kirkus Prizes will be announced at a special ceremony in Austin, Texas, on October 23.



#### The President's Letter

Dear Bio Members,  
At the moment, we're watching two high profile conflicts unfold in the world of biography, one involving Harper Lee, the other Norman Rockwell, each of which involves questions of the biographer's interpretation and intent. We shouldn't be surprised;



## The Writer's Life

### **Digital Resources Play Important Role at U.S. Libraries**

The American Library Association and several other participating sponsors recently announced the results of their Digital Inclusion Survey. Conducted in fall 2013, the survey shows the role public libraries play in offering local residents access to the Internet and ebook resources. The survey found that 76 percent of libraries offer ebooks and 39 percent let users check out ereaders. The popularity of the digital media comes as libraries face budget restriction. Almost 60 percent of libraries had flat or decreased budgets in 2012, while they also experienced an increased demand for technology-related services.

#### [Digital Inclusion Survey](#)

*Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination, and the journey. They are home.*

—Anna Quindlen

### **Would You Want Your School Evaluations Published?**

To answer that titular question: maybe not, especially if your instructor said you “wrote indifferently.” That was the assessment of Charlotte Brontë by an unnamed teacher or official at the Clergy Daughters School, which Brontë and her sisters attended during the 1820s. The report goes on to say that the future author “knows nothing of grammar, geography, history, or accomplishments.” To be fair, Brontë was only 8 years old at the time. Her younger sister Emily fared slightly

controversy in biography is as old as Plutarch’s *Lives*. It is, however, rare to see these controversies make it to the front page.

Sometimes as biographers, we can’t win for losing. If, in telling your tale, you expose the dark underbelly of a previously pristine subject, you’re accused of being mean-spirited, a gossip, or smearing your subject in the name of selling books. On the other hand, if you discover and confirm that your subject was actually a good person, good parent, or good spouse, you’re accused of whitewashing, covering up, or writing hagiography.

*Expectations* is a perilous trap we all have to run—for every subject we want to write about has its fans, detractors, groupies, and enemies, all of whom are convinced their version of events is the One True and Accurate Tale. There are those, for

better, as the record states that she “reads very prettily.” Following up on this story, which was first published at Slate, the *Guardian* unearthed some educational assessment of other writers. P.G. Wodehouse was told he had “the most distorted ideas about wit and humor,” and a headmaster told Robert Graves, “Remember that your best friend is the wastepaper basket.”

[“A School Progress Report for the Brontë Sisters”](#)

[“School Reports on Writers Deliver Very Bad Reviews”](#)

*Writers do not merely reflect and interpret life, they inform and shape life.*

—E. B. White

### **Making a Fuss over “Word Crimes”**

Did you ever imagine you’d be getting grammatical instruction from song-parody master Weird Al Yankovic? Neither did *TBC*, and Weird Al’s turn as an English maven would have escaped us if we hadn’t seen that several scholarly blogs reported on the popularity of his “Word Crimes” video. A take off on Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines,” the parody looks at some of the common grammatical and usage mistakes that pop up on the Internet and elsewhere and derides them as crimes. The scholarly reviews included [Lauren Squires’s assessment](#) of what linguists think the song gets wrong, and [Lucy Ferriss’s take](#) on why the song is so popular (about 14 million YouTube views as we go to press). Among other points, Squires said the song’s message “that the view of ‘grammar’ as ‘you must learn the rules or else be ostracized’ just makes grammar no fun at all!” Ferriss wrote that the popularity of the video reflects the view of people who roll their eyes at “a social lunch when the menu misspells the French or misuses a contraction; or as the server departs on a note of ‘Just ask Karen and I if you need anything.’” *TBC*

example, who are convinced that the beloved children’s entertainer Fred Rogers was also a highly decorated sniper in Vietnam. It’s a compelling tale of a dark side that’s too good to be true—and is.

Yet, chances are good that if someone were to write a Fred Rogers bio that left out this untrue tale, they’d be accused of a cover-up. It’s discouraging when readers are disappointed when their idols *don’t* disappoint them.

On the other hand, sometimes they *do* disappoint—and biographers have to brace themselves for criticism when they shatter old narratives. In the 1980s, for example, Kitty Kelley was accused of a smear campaign when she exposed and detailed Frank Sinatra’s mob connections. Today, those connections are practically taken for granted, all part of Sinatra’s roguish, tough-guy mystique. Another biographer, David Michaelis,

assumes that readers have their own pet peeves when it comes to word crimes;

[feel free to send them along.](#)

[“Word Crimes”](#)

*Let that first sentence be as stupid as it wishes.*

—Jacques Barzun

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## **Obituaries**

### **Isabel de Madariaga**

Isabel de Madariaga, an expert in Russian and Soviet studies and a biographer, died June 16 in London. She was 94.

De Madariaga spoke several languages fluently and during World War II, she monitored enemy radio broadcasts. She began her studies of Russian language and history before the war and continued after, earning a PhD in 1959. She taught at several universities in England, including the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. De Madariaga’s first major work was *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*, which came after twenty years of research on that empress’s reign. That book was followed by a shorter biography of Catherine. De Madariaga’s last book, *Ivan the Terrible*, was published in 2005.

### **Roland Hill**

Roland Hill, a British journalist who wrote two biographies, died in On June 21. He was 93.

Born in Germany to Jewish parents who had converted to Christianity, Hill and his family moved to Austria after the rise of Adolph Hitler. In Vienna, Hill became a

found the family of Charles Schulz rabidly disavowing his well-received biography of the *Peanuts* creator, claiming he had misinterpreted correspondence or had asked leading questions during interviews. Many *Peanuts* fans, however, hardly blinked; of *course* Schulz was slightly damaged. Heck, how could the creator of the anxious, insecure Charlie Brown *not* be?

None of this is to say that biographers *don’t* get it wrong from time to time. Some biographies are written with agendas in mind, axes to grind, and scores to settle (indeed, one of my favorite biographies is Albert Goldman’s *The Lives of John Lennon* because it’s such a train wreck of bad intentions). Some get it wrong on purpose, while others have genuinely misunderstood or misinterpreted. What’s the case with our two current controversies, then? It’s

journalist while in high school to help earn money for the family. After several more moves, Hill ended up in England at the onset of World War II and for a time was interned as an enemy alien. After his release, he volunteered for military service and took part in the D-Day invasion. After the war, Hill worked as a journalist in England, serving as a foreign correspondent for a German and an Austrian newspaper. He wrote his first biography in German, about Margaret Thatcher, which appeared in 1988. Hill published his second biography, *Lord Acton*, in English in 2000. The *Daily Telegraph* called it “an extraordinarily good biography.”

### **P.N. Furbank**

Literary biographer P.N. Furbank died June 27 in London. He was 94.

After serving in the British military during World War II, Furbank began teaching at Cambridge University in 1947. The next year he published his first book, about the Victorian novelist Samuel Butler. A stutter led Furbank to leave academia and take jobs as an editor and then a librarian. In 1966, he published a biography of Italo Svevo. Three years later, Furbank began what would become his most acclaimed work, a two-volume biography of E.M. Forster, whom he had gotten to know while he was teaching and Forster was living at the university. The books on Forster appeared in 1977 and 1978, and several years later the *New York Times* called the set “A superb model of biographical art.” Forster’s later books included a biography of Diderot and *A Political Biography of Daniel Defoe*, co-written by W.R. Owens.

### **Andrew Mango**

Andrew Mango, who wrote several books on his native Turkey, died July 7 in London. He was 89.

Born in Istanbul, Mango spoke several languages fluently and served as a

hard to tell. At the moment, the most responsible approach is to continue to watch, read, listen and learn—and maybe manage our expectations. Which, of course, is always easier said than done.

### **Brian**

Brian Jay Jones

**BIO President**

## **The Biographer's Craft**

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Michael Burgan

### **Consulting Editor**

James McGrath Morris

### **Copy Editor**

Kay Bird

### **Correspondents**

*United Kingdom*

Andrew Lownie

*Netherlands*

Hans Benders

translator for the British government during World War II. After the war, he studied in London and then worked for many years at the BBC. In his retirement, he wrote several books about Turkey and its history, including the biography *Ataturk: The Founder of Modern Turkey* (1999). The book is still considered the most authoritative study of the Turkish leader.

## Curt Gentry

Curt Gentry, co-author of several popular books and a biographer of J. Edgar Hoover, died July 10 in San Francisco. He was 83.

Serving in the Air Force during the Korean War, Gentry wrote for *Stars and Stripes*. During the early 1960s, he wrote several books about California history, then in 1970 he co-authored a book about the Francis Gary Powers U-2 incident with Powers. Gentry's big break came when he co-wrote *Helter Skelter*, about the Manson family murders, with Manson prosecutor Vincent Bugliosi. The money Gentry made from that best-seller helped finance the 15 years of research he did for his biography of Hoover, which was widely acclaimed. The research included reviewing 100,000 pages of previously classified government documents. *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* won a PEN award for the best nonfiction book of 1991. It was Gentry's last book, though he started several other projects, including a biography of John Steinbeck.

## James MacGregor Burns

James MacGregor Burns, one of the leading historians and political scientists in the United States for more than 50 years, died July 15 in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He was 95.

After college, Burns worked for a time as a congressional aide in Washington D.C., then served as a combat historian for the Army. After the war, he earned his PhD. In 1956, Burns published the first of several biographies of U.S. political

Hans Renders

*India*

Ashok R. Chandran

*Australia/New Zealand*

Todd Nicholls

*United States*

Sandra Abrams  
(Washington, D.C.)

Sandra Kimberley Hall  
(Hawaii)

Laura L. Hoopes  
(Los Angeles)

Pat McNeese  
(Washington, D.C.)

Dona Munker  
(New York)

Alex Szerlip  
(San Francisco)

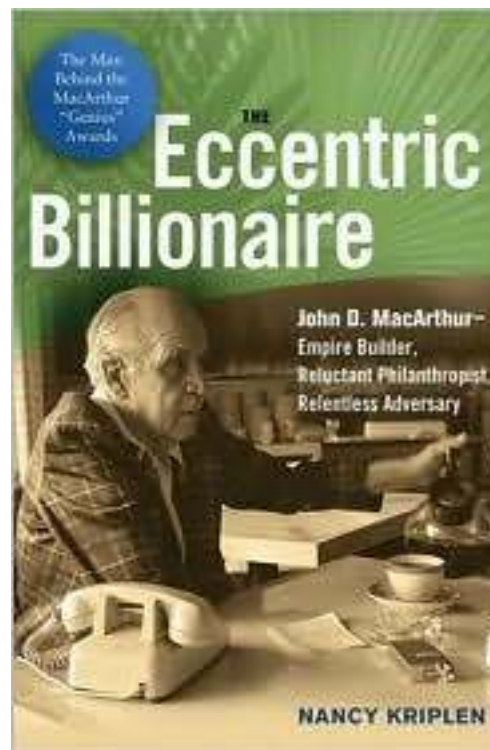
To contact any of our correspondents,  
click [here](#).

figures, *Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox*. The book covered Franklin D. Roosevelt's life through his first two terms as president. Burns returned to FDR as a subject in 1970, with *Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom*, which examined the president's role during World War II. The book won both a National Book Award and a Pulitzer. Burns's other books included biographies of John F. and Edward Kennedy. For the JFK book, Burns, a liberal Democrat, had open access to Kennedy, his staff, and his records. The result, the *New York Times* reported, was not "the hagiography the Kennedy family and presidential campaign had anticipated," though it was still mostly positive. With Susan Dunn, Burns later co-wrote biographies of George Washington and a collective biography of FDR, Theodore Roosevelt, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

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## News and Notes

**Nancy Kriplen** has been asked to open the new season of the English-Speaking Union, Indianapolis Branch, on September 28 by speaking about her biography, *The Eccentric Billionaire: John D. MacArthur, Empire Builder, Reluctant Philanthropist, Relentless Adversary*. She told us, "The timing is serendipitous. The newest batch of MacArthur "genius awards" are usually announced in late September or early October. They were the idea of MacArthur's attorney and his son, who were both on the foundation board. John



MacArthur was a world-class tightwad, so it is ironic that his name has entered the national vocabulary as a one-word descriptor for one of America's most generous philanthropic awards." While researching his Walter

Brennan biography in *Enterprise*, Oregon, **Carl Rollyson** gave a talk on his subject and was subsequently [profiled by the local media](#) in an article that also touched on Brennan's time as a resident there. In June, **Andrew Lownie** spoke at the Getting Published event at the University of Warwick, on "The Value of a Literary Agent." In September, new member **Scott S. Smith** will release *Extraordinary People: Real Life Lessons on What It Takes to Achieve Success*, a collection of 2000- to 3000-word profiles of famous people past and present, focusing on how their attitudes and actions helped them ultimately succeed. You can find out more about this and Scott's other work at [his website](#). **Bill Dedman** regularly informs curious readers via email about all things *Empty Mansions*, the biography of Huguette Clark he co-authored. Recent news includes: the book was back on the *New York Times* bestseller list and was on the *Los Angeles Times* list for a 22nd week. Also, *Empty Mansions* was published in the UK last month and is ready for sale in Australia and New Zealand. Answering last month's call for New and Notes tidbits, **Kelly M. McDonald** wrote this: "My summer so far? Think of it as 'taking care of business.' My research—[for a project] called *Two Teens in the Time of Austen* because one of my diarists married James Edward Austen (Jane Austen's nephew)—depends on uncovering even *more* letters and diaries. In a three-week-long research trip, I snapped digital photos of hundreds of letters, several diaries, and met a dozen people I've corresponded with over the past few years. I'm pooped!" On September 11, **Kristie Miller** will be speaking in Rome, Georgia, as part of a celebration of the life and legacy of Woodrow Wilson's first wife, Ellen Axson

The awards bearing MacArthur's name are worth more than \$600,000.

Wilson, who was born 100 years ago in August. The first and second Mrs. Wilsons were the subject of Kristie's *Ellen & Edith: Woodrow Wilson's First Ladies*. **Dana Greene's** *Denise Levertov: A Poet's Life* will be issued in paperback in September from the University of Illinois Press. **Patricia Daly-Lipe** wrote us, "My first biography and sixth book, *Patriot Priest: The Story of Monsignor William A. Hemmick, The Vatican's First American Canon*, is now out." The subject was her great uncle, who was ordained in 1911 and interacted with some notable movers and shakers of modern times, including several popes, Marshall Foch, and F. Scott Fitzgerald (who was once his student). Our apologies to **Vladimir Alexandrov**, who wrote us some time ago with this news but that we inadvertently left out of the last issue: His biography of Frederick Bruce Thomas, *The Black Russian*, came out in paper with Grove Press this spring. It won the Yale MacMillan Center Gustav Ranis International Book Prize, an in-house prize where he teaches. The book is also now under contract with a Moscow publisher for a Russian translation. Finally, a musical cabaret version is in the works with Moscow 57, a NYC-based hospitality and entertainment company and restaurant, with original music composed by Ethan Fein and lyrics by Vladimir. About the last project he notes, "This is proving to be great fun and a bigger musical version may be down the road as well." **Miriam Pawel's** *The Crusades of Cesar Chavez* made the Daily Beast's list of best biographies so far for 2014. **Catherine Reef** recently won rave reviews for *Frida & Diego: Art, Love, Life* from the *School Library Journal* and *Reading Today*, the magazine of the International Reading Association. You'll also see her name at the top of this month's Sold to Publishers section for her new book on Florence Nightingale. **Sallie Bingham's** new book, listed in this month's In Stores section, is a family history that looks at three generations of women through the letters they wrote. Topping the list of this month's new paperbacks is **Sarah Kilborne**, with her biography of U.S. silk baron William

Skinner. Also out in paperback this month is **Will Swift**'s *Pat and Dick: The Nixons, an Intimate Portrait of a Marriage*. Will also recently published a piece at [the Daily Caller](#) on how Nixon's daughters tried to protect him during the Watergate crisis.

[Send us your news!](#)

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## Amanuensis

**Amanuensis**: A person whose employment is to write what another dictates, or to copy what another has written: Source: *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913).

I have always been averse to theorizing about the art or craft of biography. Like Disraeli's biographer, Lord Blake, who offers the cautionary analogy of the biographical centipede unsure of her next step because of too much cerebration, I have made it my practice to let the facts find the theory. A preoccupation with theory has been a defensive response by academic biographers in this country, I submit, to the condescension of traditional humanists and social scientists pervading higher education for many years.

The truth of this observation was conceded a few years ago by David Nasaw, as he introduced a roundtable discussion of biography for *The American Historical Review*. He opined that, in the spirit of Leon Edel,

"biography remains the [history] profession's unloved stepchild, occasionally but grudgingly let in the door, more often shut outside with the riffraff." Ten years ago, most history departments still discouraged dissertations tethered to biography. Biography had lost its purchase in deconstructionist English departments, where the meaning of the text trumped the intent of the author (whose death Roland Barthes had announced). The new social sciences regarded the study of the individual as of limited value in the scheme of understanding institutional forces. The university—certainly the research university—was not the place for a biographer to make a name for himself. [\[more\]](#)

David Levering Lewis, "The Autobiography of Biography"

We love our generals and we love our presidents and, yes, we should learn about them. But history wasn't written strictly by them. There are legions of people—particularly women—who never held office and never led an army, at least not literally, but they had such an impact in the way we live our lives now. I hope that people will take a look around and educate themselves not just about Isabella Beecher Hooker. I hope a young biographer comes out and debunks everything I wrote. There are an awful lot of these kinds of people who are out there whose stories are waiting to be told. [\[more\]](#)

Susan Campbell, quoted in "Isabella Beecher Hooker: The

Forgotten Suffragette of the 19th Century”

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