



The BIOGRAPHER'S *craft*

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FOR WRITERS & READERS OF BIOGRAPHY

July 2014 | Volume 9 | Number 5

Picture of a Life: Philip Short Explores the Biographer's Craft

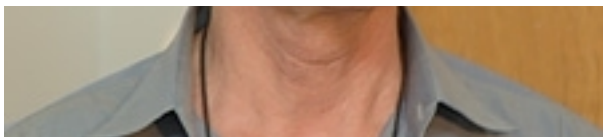


More than four decades ago, while working as a freelance journalist in Malawi, Philip Short received a letter from Penguin: Would he be interested in writing a biography of Malawian president Hastings Banda, for the publisher's series Political Giants of the 20th Century? Short readily agreed,



From the Editor

Someone is already handicapping the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for



As a newspaper journalist and BBC correspondent, Short reported from Moscow, China, and Washington D.C.

fall and in April in the United States. With all his biographies, and with his next project on Russian leader Vladimir Putin, Short has chosen to focus on figures outside the Anglo-American sphere. *TBC* interviewed Short to get his perspective on what challenges that poses, and his general views of the craft of biography.

For Short, researching and writing the life story of foreign figures came out of his experience working as a reporter for the BBC. He said of his time as a journalist, “What fired me was getting to grips with another culture, with other ways of thinking, and of conveying to people at home what I thought of as ‘a particle of truth’ about a different society, which was not the same as the truth that most of my compatriots understood. That experience... has certainly influenced my approach to biography.”

Short added that he admires biographers who can write about their own country’s leaders, such as Charles Moore on Margaret Thatcher and Robert Caro on Lyndon Johnson. “I wouldn’t do it myself,” he said. “When writer, subject, and readers are all from the same country, it’s a totally different exercise. The dimension of foreignness—of otherness—is missing.”

With two of his books—*Mao: A Life* and *Pol Pot: Anatomy of a Nightmare*—Short not only dealt with foreign leaders, but also ones vilified for their atrocious acts. Does dealing with such horrific subjects require any special distancing or raise other concerns? First, for Short, “writing about terrible things...is never

adding now, “I suspect they had no idea that I was then 23 years old!”

Since that auspicious start, Short has a made his mark writing biographies of world leaders. His most recent book, *Mitterand: A Study in Ambiguity*, was published in the UK last

biography or autobiography? I was taken aback when I saw [a post at Biographile](#) weighing the chances of Hillary Clinton’s *Hard Choices* copping that honor next year. One, it’s a little early for that, no? Two, I have a bias toward wanting the honor to go to a biography, not a memoir. And three, as member Steve Weinberg explains in this issue, trying to figure out which books get nominated for—and win—prizes is an inexact science, to say the least, so rolling out possible titles now seems really farfetched.

As you’ll see, this issue has another piece by a BIO member—Will Swift—along with an interview with Philip Short and the usual features. And we have an abundance of items in News and Notes; thanks to everyone who answered my call for tidbits. I hope most of you glossed over the typos, as I obviously did before sending my email.

What you won’t see this month is the roundup of biographies on film that I promised would be in this issue. (Well, maybe it really

fun.” But he also feels biographers and others need to closely examine the terms used to describe such men as Mao and Pol Pot and their actions. For instance, he backs away from the expression *mass murderer*, because “the term ‘murder’ is reserved for deliberate voluntary killing. In both China and Cambodia, most of those who died perished from starvation (the Great Leap Forward in China: upwards of 30 million dead) or starvation, overwork, and illness (Cambodia).

“I’m not in any sense trying to attenuate what happened. The Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia was absolutely ghastly. I can’t think of anywhere—not even North Korea—which was worse.... But it was *not* a genocide—and to speak of genocide, as many American academics and jurists do... is to trade on the appalling suffering of those who died without being honest about its specificity.

“The first duty of a biographer or historian is to call things by their right names. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge created the first (and only) slave state of modern times. It was done—naturally enough—with the best of motives: to establish an egalitarian heaven-on-earth. And it was hell-on-earth. It was *uniquely* awful. And it’s crucial, if you are writing about events of extraordinary horror, to establish why they were unique and why they happened as they did. I confess I am exercised by sloppy writing and sloppy thinking about atrocities. One has a debt to the victims to tell it as it is....”

Working with foreign sources can be a challenge for a biographers not fluent in their subject’s native language. For Pol Pot, Short said, he advertised for a Khmer



Publisher's Weekly called Short's book on Mao an "epic biography."

wasn't a promise. More of a hope...). But this month I give my solemn oath that the August issue will look at some biographies, both old and new, that have recently served as the source for feature films already in the can or preparing for production. I'll also highlight several notable biographical documentaries that have been or will be making the rounds. Anyone who would like to add to the issue with a short piece on recently released or upcoming biographical films they enjoyed or are anticipating, [please let me know](#).

Looking farther down the road, our preview of fall biographies will run in the September issue. I promise. Until then, enjoy the summer.

Yours,

Michael Burgan

Sold to Publishers

Frank McLynn
Genghis Khan

translator in the *Phnom Penh Post*. For Vietnamese texts, he found a student from Hanoi at a university in France. With Mao, Short encountered a flood of information that appeared for the first time during the two decades after the leader's death. He used a number of Chinese translators, then began the process of choosing what to include and what to leave out.

Turning to college students as translators has been useful and satisfying, Short said. "My experience is that, for a student, to help research a book is often an exciting window onto a new world, and if you really cooperate and work together, it can be very rewarding for both sides."

Having worked extensively as both a journalist and a scholar, and having won praise for balancing the concerns of each field in his work, what distinction does Short see between the two? There is the obvious one of producing information for immediate consumption versus taking years to write a book. But there is also a question of distance: journalists must be close to their topics, while biographers should strive for some distance.

Some biographers, though, are too distant. Short is not fond of biographies of world leaders written by academics. He said, "Academics generally prefer dealing with themes—which can be connected to concepts and theories—rather than the messy way in which human beings—whether political leaders or anyone else—conduct their lives. There are honorable exceptions... but on the whole, academic biographies tend to be weak on the texture of life, the cussed (and inconveniently eccentric) humanity of their protagonists."

Creating the texture of life, for Short, is crucial for the biographer. "My own view of biography is that it should read like a novel, with the pace and drama and unexpected twists and turns that a good novel contains, but—and the *but* needs to be underlined three times—every line must be demonstrably true, grounded in archival, documentary or interview sources.

sold to Da Capo
by Jane Kirby at
Random House Group UK

Harlow Giles Unger
Untitled biography of Henry Clay
sold to Da Capo

Simon Read
Winston Churchill Reporting
sold to Da Capo
by Roger Williams at New England
Publishing Associates

Scott Greenberger
Untitled biography of Chester A.
Arthur
sold to Da Capo
by Victoria Skurnick at Levine
Greenberg Literary Agency

Juan Sanchez with Axel Gylden
The Hidden Life of Fidel Castro
sold to St. Martin's
by Kirsten Neuhaus at Foundry
Literary + Media, on behalf of Michel
Lafon

Vanya Bellinger
The Other Clausewitz
(Marie von Clausewitz)
sold to Oxford University Press

“I abhor so-called ‘faction,’ in which the writer pretends to know what is going through his subject’s mind. If he’s making that up, why should the reader believe anything else he says? To me, biography is exactly what it says: *graphos* (a picture or story) of *bios* (a life). It relies on journalism—contemporary newspapers tell us what people knew at the time, the concerns of the day, the color and context; on scholarship—the ability to stand back and reflect; and on academic analysis to provide a wider view. All three play their part. But in the final analysis, biography is a writer’s craft.”

Reflecting on his own work and his writerly aspirations, Short said, “Of all the reviews I have had, the one which pleased me most was in the highbrow French daily, *Le Monde*, which, commenting on my book on Mao, wrote, with an air of incredulity: ‘*Mais c’est de la littérature!*’ (‘But this is literature!’) Yes, that is what it is supposed to be. It doesn’t often work out that way, but just occasionally, we get lucky.”

Time will tell if luck—and, of course, skill—lead to more high praise for Short’s upcoming biography of Vladimir Putin. Short said, “I find him by far the most interesting world leader operating today—very different from most of his peers and, above all, profoundly Russian.

“As recent events have shown, Russia is a country, straddling Europe and Asia, of which the West in general and America in particular have tragically little understanding.... It’s not a bad moment to look at the story of the Russian leader and at the problems (many of them of our own making) of which he has become the symbol—problems that the US administration has no idea how to deal with and that promise to remain with us for a very long time to come. But don’t hold your breath. Like my previous books, it will take five or six years to see the light of day.”

SOLO TO OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Michael Feeney Callan
With a Love Like That
(The Beatles’ wives and girlfriends)
sold to Hachette Books
by Dan Strone at Trident Media Group

Steve Fraser
Untitled biography of John Jacob Astor
sold to Basic

Eva Dillon
Dillon and Polyakov: Two Spies, Two Families on Opposite Sides of the Cold War
sold to Harper
by Laura Yorke at
the Carol Mann Agency

Jacqueline Jones
Untitled biography of Lucy Parsons
sold to Basic
by Geri Thoma at Writers House

John Ferling
The Holy Cause of Liberty: Jefferson, Monroe, Paine and the Battle to Save the American Revolution
sold to Bloomsbury
by Geri Thoma at Writers House

The Best Book May Not Win: Winner and Losers at Awards Time

By Steve Weinberg

We biographers covet awards for our books, as do novelists and poets and essayists and journalists from all media. After all, writers tend to receive little recognition and less cash.

My advice is not exactly to forget about awards, but something similar—relax, because most of us will never win and many of the “best” biographies, however that is measured, will not receive the prize recognition they deserve.

Michael Burgan asked me to write about awards partly because I have judged so many book, newspaper, magazine, and broadcast competitions. I have even received a few awards amidst my publication of eight books, although no awards that receive the most publicity—the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle medal.



Kerrie Hollihan

Untitled work describing the World War
I experiences of 14 not-yet famous
young men and women
sold to Chicago Review Press
by Jeff Ourvan at Jennifer Lyons
Literary Agency

Barnes Carr

*Operation Whisper: The Capture of
Master Spies Morris and Lona Cohen*
sold to ForeEdge
by Don Fehr at Trident Media Group

Josh Levin

The Queen
(Linda Taylor)
sold to 37 Ink

by Alia Hanna Habib at McCormick &
Williams Literary Agency

John Bruning

*Indestructible: How a Pilot's Quest to
Rescue His Family Changed the Course
of the Pacific War*
(Pappy Gunn)

sold to Hachette Books
by Jim Hornfischer at Hornfischer
Literary Management

Duncan McNab



And the winner is....

I am here to say that choosing the winner from hundreds or thousands of candidates in a given year is a crapshoot, an exercise in “It all depends....” It depends on which other books have been entered, the political log rolling (not always, but sometimes), and the reading preferences of the judges who happen to have been chosen that year. (I concede that although I enter judging with an open mind, I’d much rather read Robert Caro’s next volume on the life of Lyndon Baines Johnson than a biography of a long-ago member of the Belgian royal family.)

Please do not think me cynical about awards for biographies; just realistic. Perhaps my attitude has been colored by serving as a judge (nine years for the National Book Critics Circle, one year for BIO, one year for the Alicia Patterson Fellowships, at least a dozen years for Investigative Reporters & Editors, lots of years for the City and Regional Magazine Association, etc.) and usually ending up in the minority.

Judges disagree, often heatedly. Forget about logic or consistency among different awards competitions. Already during a thread on my Facebook page, I noted the anomaly of BIO member Megan Marshall winning the Pulitzer Prize this

Public Enemy Number One
(Joaquin “Shorty” Guzman)
sold to ForeEdge
by Sam Hiyate at The Rights Factory

Graciela Mochkofsky
The Prophet of the Andes
(Segundo Villanueva)
sold to Knopf
by David Halpern at
The Robbins Office

Hilary Hallett
*The Syren Within: Elinor Glyn and the
Invention of Glamour*
sold to Liveright
by Tina Bennett at
William Morris Endeavor

Meryl Gordon
Untitled biography of Bunny Mellon
sold to Grand Central
by Gail Hochman at
Brandt & Hochman

Alexandra Chasin
*Anslinger Nation: A Documentary
History of Harry J. Anslinger and
Prohibitionist Drug Policy*
sold to the University of Chicago Press
by Malaga Baldi

year for her life of Margaret Fuller, yet not even making the top ten list of BIO award nominees. Does that signify something amiss with the BIO judges or the Pulitzer judges? No. It simply serves as an anecdote to prove my thesis of “It all depends....” Marshall’s Pulitzer victory means other superb biographies did not win. And Marshall’s exclusion from the BIO list means a different worthy biography did win.

To come close to closing on a positive note: Although I am weary some years of being in the voting minority, I can recall only a couple of times when I believed the actual winner qualified as “unworthy.” I am pleased to report that neither of those times occurred while judging biographies.

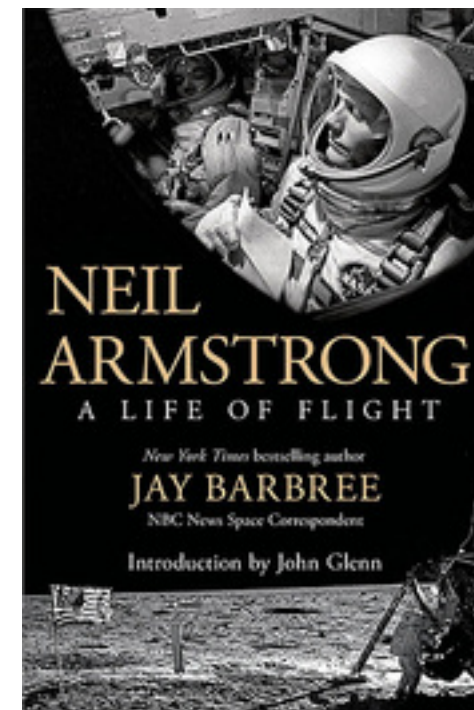
As for me the biographer, I have stopped entering my books (and magazine features) in awards competitions unless there is a cash prize. I am not counting my winnings yet.

Steve Weinberg’s ninth book will be a biography of Garry Trudeau, under contract at St. Martin’s Press.

Living Through Book Block and Loss

By Will Swift

After five years of working on *Pat and Dick*, my biography of the Nixon marriage, I became addicted to my life with them. Suffering from a mild touch of Stockholm syndrome, I fell in love with Pat Nixon and grew to appreciate surprising aspects



In Stores

Neil Armstrong: A Life of Flight
by Jay Barbree
(Thomas Dunne Books)

The Greatest Comeback: How Richard Nixon Rose from the Dead to Create America's New Majority
by Patrick J. Buchanan
(Crown)

Michelangelo: A Life in Six Masterpieces
by Miles J. Unger
(Simon & Schuster)

of Richard Nixon's ambitious, persevering and self-defeating character. Combining my skills as a biographer, historian, and marital therapist gave me a deeply satisfying feeling of flow and mastery, which I am reluctant to relinquish.

For weeks before the launch day (January 7, 2014), I was glued to Google, to my Gmail account, and, of course, to the ratings on Amazon.com. It was hard not to look at my computer whenever I was not seeing patients, doing radio interviews or writing PR materials. I spent a relatively happy January and February making television appearances, supervising the Internet marketing staff I had hired, posting on Facebook, writing pieces for online sites like Politico.com and magazines like *Parade*, savoring a gorgeous launch party at Anne Heller's apartment, and reading many stellar and some oddly mixed favorable reviews. I held the Nixons close.

The month of March is often hard on me. The onset of allergies, which rile up my body, is accompanied by turmoil in my psyche—shucking off winter without yet having the warmth of spring. This year, the relentlessly cold and snowy March was particularly difficult. I was beset by a more subtle and perplexing phenomenon; the angst of withdrawal from marriage to the Nixons was twined by an inability to settle on a new project—a challenging phenomenon I call book block.



I dreaded weekend days because they left me more time to experience my sudden “single” status. My partner was busy on weekends writing a cookbook. Evenings were

Robert Morris's Folly: The Architectural and Financial Failures of an American Founder

by Ryan K. Smith
(Yale University Press)

The Search for Anne Perry: The Hidden Life of a Bestselling Crime Writer

by Joanne Drayton
(Arcade Publishing)

Fierce Patriot: The Tangled Lives of William Tecumseh Sherman

by Robert L. O'Connell
(Random House)

Maeve Binchy: The Biography

by Piers Dudgeon
(Thomas Dunne Books)

Joe and Marilyn

by C. David Heymann
(Atria/Emily Bestler Books)

A Joyous Revolt: Toni Cade Bambara, Writer and Activist

by Linda Holmes
(Praeger)

Debussy

by Eric Frederick Jensen
(Oxford University Press)

Elvis Has Left the Building: The Day the

Breaking up is never easy.

Scrabble or Words with Friends provided only brief and meager relief from my apathy and agitation. I checked my email thirty times a day, hooked on the hope that my publicist or some astute reader would send me another opportunity to go on television, a ravishing new review, or a stimulating and lucrative speaking opportunity. Even though I continued to give book talks, I was slowly losing Pat and Dick.

And no new book idea appealed. When I thought of topics with some slight promise (Bobby and Ethel or presidential couples after the White House), my body, after twelve years of writing books and conducting two psychotherapy practices, felt heavy, and it said, “No.” I felt a suffocating pressure in my chest. Oddly, for a liberal Democrat, I was still yoked to the Nixons, not about to cheat on them, and exhausted by my efforts to enliven them and launch them. I yearned for better sales, more widespread appreciation for my retouching of their lives—anything that would buy me more time with them.

I love being owned by a book. The structure of writing and researching helps me bind all the underlying anxiety about how changeable and uncontrollable life is. And because the book was not soaring up the best-seller charts, I was reminded anew how limited my control over events is. I could hear my father’s voice saying, “Hurry up and find a project.” Cover over that stress!

Then one day, a simple truth dawned on me. “I don’t have to write another book.” I might, but there is no necessity. Fortunately, my work as a psychologist pays my bills. I began to see how much the book launch process had deepened my connection to ego and external acknowledgement. Writing about other people’s

filled with the many pleasant distractions of dinner parties. Intensely restless, I found that

King Died
by Dylan Jones
(Overlook)

Jon Stewart: A Biography
by Michael Blitz
(Greenwood Press)

Elihu Yale: Merchant, Collector & Patron
by Diana Scarisbrick and Benjamin Zucker
(Thames & Hudson)

Collaborators for Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln and Owen Lovejoy
by William F. Moore and Jane Ann Moore
(University of Illinois Press)

The Nixon Defense: What He Knew and When He Knew It
by John W. Dean
(Viking)

A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal
by Ben Macintyre
(Crown)

Robert De Niro: Anatomy of an Actor
by Glenn Kenny
(Phaidon Press)

Tom Cruise: Anatomy of an Actor

lives helped me avoid being more fully present in my own life.

The first sign of spring in my soul was a small spark of desire to begin re-expressing my creativity. This urge was in direct conflict with another half of me that begged for rest. I needed a small project that my body would not reject. Deciding to join several speakers' agencies on a non-exclusive basis soothed some of my angst. Preparing summaries of five speaking topics (great presidential leaders, our most misunderstood presidential marriage, the legacies of our presidents and first ladies, decreasing stress and increasing well-being, handling the challenges of writing) felt engaging while the thought of writing book chapters and footnotes made me shudder. Am I tricking myself into a book?

As April turned into May, I made a few simple, wise, and healing discoveries that might apply to any loss, not simply a biographical one:

- I don't have to fix my restlessness; I can experience it as an interesting phenomenon.
- An unstructured day that appears to stretch interminably ahead can be broken down into small moments.
- I don't have to lunge at the first new project that pops into my head. Writing, publishing and relinquishing my last biography have changed me. I can take my time shedding that skin and discovering what the newest version of me needs to flourish: how I can find meaning, engagement and mastery.
- Trusting my process (my internal chaos and confusion) leads me in surprising directions. Already I have renewed my interest in public speaking, meditating, and have shocked myself by joining a gym.
- I can learn a remarkable new skill: doing nothing.
- Silence can be transformative for a man of many words.

by Amy NICHOLSON
(Phaidon Press)

Dave Hickson: The Cannonball Kid
by Dave Hickson
(deCoubertin Books)

Clinton, Inc.: The Audacious Rebuilding of a Political Machine
by Daniel Halper
(Broadside Books)

Arnold Schoenberg
by Charles Rosen
(Princeton University Press)

Oscar Wilde's Scandalous Summer
by Antony Edmonds
(Amberley)

In Plain Sight: The Life and Lies of Jimmy Savile
by Dan Davies
(Quercus Publishing)

Dirty Bertie: An English King Made in France
by Stephen Clarke
(Random House UK)

The Intel Trinity: How Robert Noyce, Gordon Moore, and Andy Grove Built the World's Most Important Company
by Michael S. Malone
(HarperBusiness)

- Embracing my feelings of emptiness might lead me to greater wisdom—always one of my highest ideals.
- I can be happy not knowing. This one is challenging for a psychologist.
- Once you get the hang of it, letting go is more liberating than bewildering.

Maybe I don't need the Nixons as much as they needed me.

Update: As of the end of June, Will Swift is now happily and lightly dating another project, which he could not conjure up while recovering from book loss. He thanks Stacy Schiff for her wonderful edits on this piece.

Will Swift is a BIO board member. You can see the Facebook page for *Pat and Dick* [here](#).



Along with co-author Martin J. Sherwin

Member Interview

Six Questions with Kai Bird

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

The Good Spy was published on May 20, and I've been so busy with this book launch that I have yet to land on a new project. Fortunately, the book has been widely reviewed in the daily *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles*

Mrs. Tsenhor: A Female Entrepreneur in Ancient Egypt
by Koenraad Donker van Heel
(The American University in Cairo Press)

The Other Solzhenitsyn: Telling the Truth about a Misunderstood Writer and Thinker
by Daniel J. Mahoney
(St. Augustine's Press)

The Last Victorians: A Daring Reassessment of Four Twentieth Century Eccentrics
by W. Sydney Robinson
(Biteback)

'Red Ellen' Wilkinson: Her Ideas, Movements and World
by Matt Perry
(Manchester University Press)

John Key: Portrait of a Prime Minister
by John Roughan
(Penguin Group)

The Defiant Life of Vera Figner: Surviving the Russian Revolution
by Lynne Ann Hartnett
(Indiana University Press)

Bouts of Mania: Ali, Frazier, and Foreman—and an America

Along with co-author Martin J. Sherwin, Bird won a Pulitzer Prize for *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*.

Times, and regional papers like the *Kansas City Star*, the *Seattle Times*, and the *Dallas Morning Herald*. I've also been interviewed by Robert

Siegel on *All Things Considered* and by Wolf Blitzer on his *CNN Situation Room*—and I made an appearance on the *Charlie Rose Show*. *The Good Spy* contains some startling revelations about the CIA, so it has garnered some news stories as well. But I think the real interest in the book is just that everyone loves a spy story. But this one is a true spy story, a biography of a CIA clandestine officer. I say it is a spy story with a thousand footnotes.

I'm not sure what to do next. I've always wanted to write a White House biography of some president, if only because I could then call myself a "presidential historian." But that means a big project that would take more than five years. So I hesitate.

Which person would you most like to write about?

I have always been interested in the life story of Hillel Kook, aka Peter Bergson (1915-2001). Bergson is virtually unknown, even among Jewish-American readers. Bergson was an Irgun Zionist sent to New York in 1940—and later in WWII he publicized the Holocaust and thus helped to rescue tens of thousands of European Jews through the creation of the War Refugee Board in early 1944. So people know Oscar Schindler rescued Jews, but Bergson remains unknown, partly because he was very controversial at the time, and partly because of his political career in post-1948 Israel. He insisted that Israeli national identity be defined in secular terms, by Hebrew language and culture. Though elected to the first Knesset, he became a political pariah and eventually returned to New York, where

on the Ropes
by Richard Hoffer
(Da Capo Press)

Surviving Hitler: The Unlikely True Story of an SS Soldier and a Jewish Woman
by O. Hakan Palm
(Deseret Books)

Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts
by James Anderson Winn
(Oxford University Press)

Gentlemen Bootleggers: The True Story of Templeton Rye, Prohibition, and a Small Town in Cahoots
by Bryce T. Bauer
(Chicago Review Press)

South Carolina Fire-Eater: The Life of Laurence Massillon Keitt, 1824-1864
by Holt Merchant
(University of South Carolina Press)

Lure of the Mountains: The Life of Bentley Beetham, 1924 Everest Expedition Mountaineer
by Michael D. Lowes
(Vertebrate Publishing)

Emperor of Liberty: Thomas Jefferson's Foreign Policy
by Francis D. Cogliano
(Yale University Press)

he made a fortune on Wall Street. The problem for the biographer is that is a great story—but unknown and obscure.

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

Thomas Powers's biography of Richard Helms, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets*, inspired me to write *The Good Spy*. That was my model. But I also admire presidential biographers Robert Caro and Robert Dallek. And just to be contrarian, I think Edmund Morris's biography, *Dutch*, is certainly the most interesting take on Ronald Reagan.

What was your most frustrating moment as a biographer? Most satisfying?

When I first started work on a biography of John J. McCloy, I published an "Author's Query" in the *New York Times Book Review*. Two weeks later, McCloy published his own letter in the *Review*, disavowing me. It took two years before he agreed to a face-to-face meeting—and even then he specified, "No notes." This incident underscores the difficulty of writing about a living person. For a variety of reasons, this first biography was published after a full decade—but I was enormously gratified that *The Chairman* won front-page reviews in the *New York Times Book Review*, the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* and the *Washington Post*, all on the same Sunday!

One research/marketing/attitudinal tip to share?

Write 300 words a day—and then go to the gym.

Shorts

Digitizing Books Gets Judicial OK—in Some Circumstances

Stalin's American Spy: Noel Field, Allen Dulles and the East European Show-Trials

by Tony Sharp
(Hurst)

John Calvin as Sixteenth-Century Prophet

by Jon Balsarak
(Oxford University Press)

Tudors Versus Stewarts: The Fatal Inheritance of Mary, Queen of Scots

by Linda Porter
(St. Martin's)

The Search for Anne Perry: The Hidden Life of a Bestselling Crime Writer

by Joanne Drayton
(Arcade)

Factory Man: How One Furniture Maker Battled Offshoring, Stayed Local—and Helped Save an American Town

by Beth Macy
(Little, Brown)

The Mockingbird Next Door: Life with Harper Lee

by Marja Mills
(Penguin Press)

The Fantastic Laboratory of Dr. Weigl: How Two Brave Scientists Battled Typhus and Sabotaged the Nazis

In a lawsuit brought by the Authors Guild, several other organizations, and individual authors—including BIO Advisory Council member T.J. Stiles—the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the HathiTrust Digital Library on the issue of digitizing copyrighted material. HathiTrust was created by a consortium of research universities to house digital copies of the print books in their collections, and it welcomed other universities to add digital copies of their holdings. HathiTrust does not grant complete access to copyrighted work unless the holder of the copyright has granted permission or if the end users have certified disabilities that prevent them from effectively reading printed material. The Authors Guild and the other plaintiffs argued that HathiTrust and several of its founding schools were guilty of copyright infringement. In rejecting that argument, the Appeals Court found that, given the ways HathiTrust was using the content, the digitizing was covered under the fair use doctrine. Stiles, reacting to the decision, told *TBC* that the plaintiffs are still considering their legal options. He said, “The answer to the bigger question waits for another day: Can a corporation such as Google use these books—including my books—for its own profit, while I don’t see a cent?” At its website, the Authors Guild said it “remains committed to the notion that the digital revolution cannot come at the cost of authors’ rights to preserve writing as a livelihood.” You can read the decision [here](#).

University Tries to Keep Cursive Alive

Biographers know that reading some sources’ handwritten notes can be a daunting task if the writers’



by Arthur Allen
(W. W. Norton)

Double Agent: The First Hero of World War II and How the FBI Outwitted and Destroyed a Nazi Spy Ring

by Peter Duffy
(Scribner)

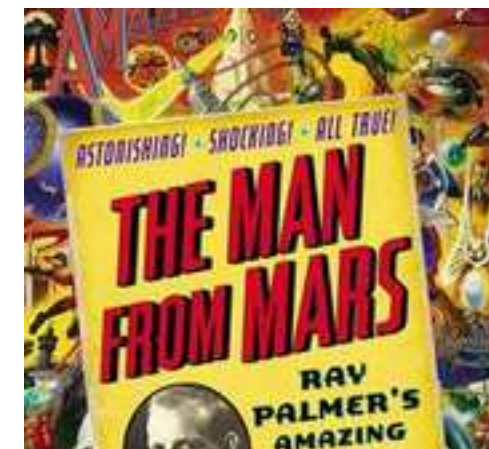
Unreasonable Men: Theodore Roosevelt and the Republican Rebels Who Created

Progressive Politics
by Michael Wolraich
(Macmillan)

Makers of Modern Asia
edited by Ramachandra Guha
(Belknap/Harvard University Press)

Rufus: The Life of the Canadian Journalist Who Interviewed Hitler

By Colin Castle
(Granville Island Publishing)



penmanship left something to be desired. But for future historians and biographers, reading cursive at all could prove challenging, shutting



Will cursive go the way of the quill?

off a valuable avenue of research. The problem struck Valerie Hotchkiss when a student told her she couldn't read a perfectly legible primary source because she didn't "do" cursive. In an article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Hotchkiss, the director of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, noted that many public schools no longer teach cursive, leading to the student's comment. The solution, at least at Illinois: Camp Cursive, which will teach 8- to 11-year-olds how to read and write in cursive. Hotchkiss wrote that a research library might not be the most obvious place to hold a kids' summer camp on cursive, but the learning process has to start somewhere. "If our educational system produces another generation of students unable to read cursive, miles of archival documents and literary papers will go unread and unstudied."

["Cursive Is an Endangered Species"](#)

Skip the Self-Help Book, Read a Biography

Psychologist and career coach Marty Nemko has written self-help books, but he says people might be better off reading a good biography instead. In a blog post for *Psychology Today*, Nemko included reading biographies as one of several alternatives for improving one's life, rather than picking up another self-help book. He wrote, "A biography can be both instructive and inspiring." Among the "modern classics" he highlighted were *The Bully Pulpit* by Doris Kearns Goodwin,



Paper

The Man from Mars: Ray Palmer's Amazing Pulp Journey
by Fred Nadis
(Penguin)

Wyatt Earp: A Vigilante Life
by Andrew C. Isenberg
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Butch Cassidy: Beyond the Grave
by W.C. Jameson
(Taylor Trade)

Rowan's Rule
by Rupert Shortt
(Hodder & Stoughton)

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

Glorious Misadventures: Nikolai Rezanov and the Dream of a Russian America

The Last Lion by William Manchester, *Eleanor Roosevelt* by J. William Youngs, *Coretta Scott* by Ntozake Shange, and *Thomas Jefferson* by Jon Meacham. Nemko told *TBC*, “Humankind is moved to behavior by stories, human stories, because they’re concrete and don’t feel preachy. And because people about whom biographies are written have accomplished more than people we probably will ever get to know well, their stories are both more credible, and the keys to their success and lessons from their failures may be more powerful and presented with more nuance than we’d find in a how-to writer such as me.”

[“Stop with the Self-Help Books Already!”](#)

Prizes

Carnegie Medal for Excellence

BIO Advisory Council member Doris Kearns

Goodwin won the Andrew Carnegie Medal for Excellence in Nonfiction for *The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism*. The medal comes with a \$5,000 prize. Andrew Carnegie Medals for Excellence in Fiction and



Goodwin, a noted presidential historian, learned this year that William Howard Taft and Franklin Roosevelt are her distant cousins.

by Owen Matthews
(Bloomsbury)

Robert Pierpoint: A Life at CBS News
by Tony Silvia
(McFarland)

Neymar: The Making of the World's Greatest New Number 10
by Luca Caioli
(Icon Books)

Sir Edward Watkin 1819-1901: The Last of the Railway Kings
by John Neville Greaves
(Melrose Books)

Tom Candiotti: A Life of Knuckleballs
by K. P. Wee
(McFarland)

Nijinsky
by Lucy Moore
(Profile Books)



Nonfiction were established in 2012 to recognize the best fiction and nonfiction books for adult readers published in the United States the previous year. A committee of librarians chooses the winners, which are announced at the annual American Library Association conference. A grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York funds the medals to honor Andrew Carnegie's commitment to books and learning.

PEN Awards

BIO members Linda Leavell and Megan Marshall are in the running for this year's PEN/Jacqueline Bograd Weld Award for Biography. Leavell's *Holding on Upside Down: The Life and Work of Marianne Moore* has already claimed this year's Plutarch Award, while Marshall's *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life* won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography. The other finalists for the PEN award, which comes with a \$5,000 prize, are:

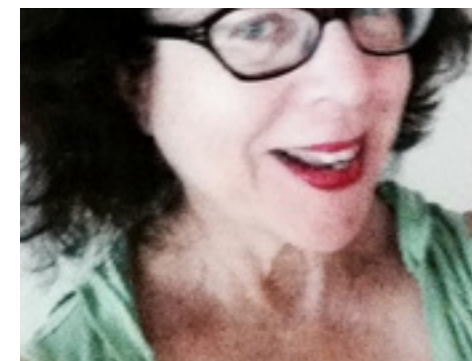
- *Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East* by Scott Anderson
- *American Mirror: The Life and Art of Norman Rockwell* by Deborah Solomon
- *A Life of Barbara Stanwyck: Steel-True 1907-1940* by Victoria Wilson.

Also, among the finalists for PEN/ESPN Award for Literary Sports Writing is Gary M. Pomerantz for *Their Life's Work* , a group biography of the championship Pittsburgh Steelers teams of the 1970s.

Category winners and career achievement awardees will be announced July 30.

Longford Prize

Charles Moore won the Elizabeth Longford Prize for Historical Biography for *Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Volume One: Not For Turning* .



A Letter from the Vice President

All Biography is Autobiography. Discuss.

At the BIO conference in May, I had an all-too-brief exchange with Natalie Dykstra—author of *Clover Adams: A Gilded and Heartbreaking Life* —after moderating the panel “The Dark Side: Addressing the Unsavory Elements of a Subject's Life.” We talked about why someone would want to write about a subject whose life contains more shadow than light.

Since then, I've been thinking about the notion that “all biography is autobiography.”* I'm

The prize is one of several awarded each year by the Society of Authors, a trade union that has represented UK writers of all genres for more than a century. Elizabeth Longford was a journalist and historian whose books included biographies of the Duke of Wellington, Winston Churchill, and Queen Victoria. The prize bearing her name is worth £5,000 (\$8,557).

NYPL Fellowships

BIO member Anne Heller took time from her research at the fabled Allen Room (for authors with book contracts) at the New York Public Library to pass along some information about fellowships the library offers to out-of-town writers. Here's a brief look at these programs, along with links for more information.

Short-Term Research Fellowships – These fellowships support visiting scholars from outside the New York metropolitan area engaged in graduate-level, post-doctoral, and independent research. Individuals needing to conduct on-site research in the library's special collections to support projects in the humanities, including but not limited to art history, cultural studies, history, literature, performing arts and photography are welcome to apply. These fellowships aim to assist researchers gain access to collection material not readily available elsewhere.

Schomburg Center Scholars-in-Residence Program – The program allows recipients to spend six months in residence with access to resources at the Schomburg Center and other centers of the New York Public Library. The program encourages research and writing on black history and culture, facilitates interaction among participating scholars, and provides widespread dissemination of findings through lectures, publications, and colloquia and seminars. It encompasses projects in African, Afro-American, and Afro-Caribbean history and

wondering whether the extent to which a biographer is motivated to seek out subjects whose lives were filled with conflict, self-destruction, or skullduggery may reflect the author's own personal history or worldview.

Is it true that authors with sunny personalities gravitate toward subjects with relatively harmonious lives? Do authors with more jaundiced dispositions and difficult lives prefer subjects who undercut their achievements with notable episodes of negative behavior?

In the introduction to his book *American Sketches: Great Leaders, Creative Thinkers, and Heroes of a Hurricane*, Walter Isaacson wrote that his daughter views one of his biographical subjects—the polymath Benjamin Franklin, “a consummate networker with a techie curiosity”—as “an idealized version” of her father.

Albert Einstein, another of

encompasses projects in African, Afro-American, and Afro-Caribbean history and culture.

[Martin Duberman Visiting Scholars](#) – Under this program, the library provides stipends for up to two scholars. The stipends support travel to New York City and related expenses to do research in the library’s LGBT history collections. The program is limited to emerging scholars—those without permanent academic appointments—or those who are unaffiliated with an academic institution.

[The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History Fellowships in American Civilization](#) – The Gilder Lehrman Institute offers these fellowships for scholars to work in four historical archives in New York City, including the New York Public Library.



The Writer's Life

Self-publishing? Think Germany

Germany may be a new Mecca for authors looking to self-publish ebooks, even if they’re written in English.

That’s the claim of Leonie Langer, who just happens to work for a Berlin-based company with an epubublishing platform. Among Langer’s arguments for considering the German market:

- Germany has more than 40 million fluent English speakers, and they enjoy reading English-language books both in translation and their original language.
- Germany is already a leading international market for print books published in the United States.

Isaacson's subjects, was a hero to the author's father and a kindred soul: “a kindly, Jewish, distracted, humanistic engineer with a reverence for science.” But how does Henry Kissinger fit in? “That's easy,” Isaacson’s daughter said. “You were writing about your dark side.” (His life of Steve Jobs hadn’t been published yet, but “techie curiosity” surely served once again as the link.)

So, what about your own biographies? Can you trace a clear link between your own preoccupations and temperament to those of your subjects? Or do you go out of your way to choose individuals with whom you seem to have nothing in common?

If you would like to weigh in, [please email me](#) and we’ll post your opinions in an upcoming issue of *TBC*.

Cathy

Cathy Curtis

- Self-publishing is booming in Germany.
- Germans love books set in the United States and United Kingdom.
- Amazon does not have a stranglehold on the German ebook market, as it does elsewhere.

[“6 Reasons Why English Writers Should Self-publish in Germany”](#)

The writing life isn't just filled with predictable uncertainties but with the awareness that we are always starting over again.

—Dani Shapiro

Crowdfunding Comes to Publishing

Thanks to such websites as Kickstarter and Indiegogo, the notion of any artist or entrepreneur seeking money online from strangers is commonplace. Now, crowdfunding comes to publishing via the Spanish company Pentian. At its website, authors upload their books to find backers. When a book finds enough backers to be published, the backers and the author divide the royalties 50/40, respectively, with Pentian taking a 10 percent cut. Pentian publishes both print and electronic versions of the books, and the ebooks are available internationally through such outlets as Amazon, Apple, and Kobo. Given the company's Spanish roots and its recent introduction to the English-speaking world, it's probably not surprising that the top books currently listed at Pentian's website are in Spanish. But co-founder Enrique Parrilla is confident the platform will take off in the United States and beyond. Authors will get an extra marketing boost from their backers, who have a vested interest in a book's success. And writers have complete control over content. In an interview with the website Publishing Perspective, Parrilla said, "Traditional publishing is a dying corpse of oligarchic protectionism" and his

BIO Vice President

*Ralph Waldo Emerson was actually not referring to biographers when he said those words, at a memorial in 1860 for abolitionist Theodore Parker. Rather, Emerson meant that whatever people say about themselves "comes to be known and believed."

The Biographer's Craft

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Some books seem like a key to unfamiliar rooms in one's own castle.

—Franz Kafka

Obituaries

Mary Soames

Lady Mary Soames, the youngest child of Winston Churchill and a prize-winning biographer, died May 31 in London. She was 91.

Born Mary Spencer-Churchill, Soames spent time by her father's side as he carried out his duties as prime minister during World War II. She remained close to British government and its leaders through her marriage to Christopher Soames, who served as a minister for several Conservative prime ministers and as a diplomat. As a writer, Mary Soames wrote about her life and her family. Her first book, a biography of her mother Clementine, won a Wolfson History Prize in 1979. Soames released a revised version of the book in 2002. Her other biographical works were *The Profligate Duke: George Spencer Churchill, Fifth Duke of Marlborough and His Duchess*, and a look at her father's life as a painter.

Martha Rutledge

Martha Rutledge, who for almost 50 years held a variety of positions with the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)*, died in late May. She was 77.

Rutledge came from a prominent family with deep roots in Australia. She

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

studied history in college and for a time was a tutor in the subject at Australian National University. In 1967, she began working for the *ADB*. Her positions there included researcher, fact checker, and editor. She also wrote 177 entries for the dictionary, focusing on 19th century subjects, which included some of her relatives and their friends. Other subjects for Rutledge included artists and entertainers.

News and Notes

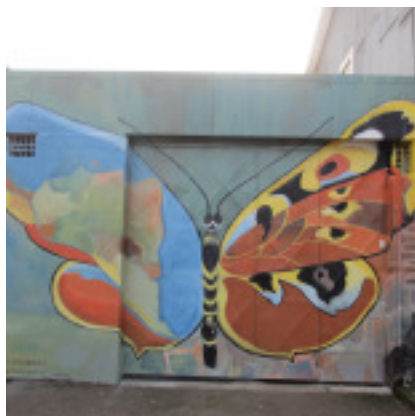
Linda Simon's history of the circus, *The Greatest Shows on Earth*, will be published in September. While not a biography, she assured us that "there are people in it!" **William Souder** is happy to report that after being out of print for a couple of years, his *Under a Wild Sky: John James Audubon and the Making of the Birds of America* will be re-issued in August by Milkweed Editions. It was originally published by North Point Press in 2004 and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. **Kate Stewart** won the 2014 Justin Winsor Prize from the American Library Association for her essay on the work of librarian Ruth Rappaport, her current subject, in the Vietnam War. Kate will also be presenting a paper about Rappaport at the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) conference in Lyon in August and taking a side trip to Zurich to research Rappaport's time there as a teenage Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany in 1939. **Linda Leavell**'s *Holding on Upside Down:*



Simon's book looks at circuses from the 18th century up to today's Big Apple Circus.

The Life and Work of Marianne Moore was a finalist for the inaugural Pegasus Award for Poetry Criticism, presented by the Poetry Foundation. **Tom Nolan** has nearly completed his work as editor for the Library of America volume *Ross Macdonald: Four Novels of the 1950s*, to be published in 2015 (Macdonald's centenary year). Tom, who published a biography of the crime novelist in 1999, also co-edited (with Suzanne Marrs) *Meanwhile There Are Letters: The Correspondence of Eudora Welty and Ross Macdonald*, due out next year from Arcade. **Adam Henig**, author of *Alex Haley's Roots: An Author's Odyssey*, recently published [an article in Medium](#) about his serendipitous adventure while researching his subject and [one on the dilemmas of dealing with book bloggers from a biographer's perspective](#) in *Portland Book Review*. **Robert Lacey** is working on a biography of Eileen Ford and the history of modern fashion modeling, to be published next year by HarperCollins. **Gretchen Woelfle** wrote that she "survived the heat and sleaze of Las Vegas" while attending last month's American Library Association conference, where she signed books for two of her publishers, Boyds Mills/Calkins Creek and Lerner/Carolrhoda. **Jill Amadio** was also at the conference, where she talked with Jane Fonda for an article, chatted with two former Mafia mobsters who were signing their ghost-written memoirs, and signed copies of her own book, the just-released crime novel *Digging Too Deep*. Jill is also co-authoring an autobiography of an international triathlete who had a massive, almost-fatal stroke during an Ironman triathlon race. He was 33 and not expected to live. Doctors and others call it an amazing, dramatic story, and he is now racing again. **Linda Lear** wrote to tell us, "I've had an unexpectedly productive spring with happy outcomes." In April *Nature* published her essay on Beatrix Potter's science, ["A Scientist's Eye"](#) (requires subscription to access), and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* ran [an op-ed she wrote](#) commemorating the 50th anniversary of Rachel Carson's death. Then, in June, Dover Press published a new

edition of Paul Brooks' *Speaking for Nature*, for which Linda contributed the Foreword.



A new mural adorns a wall at Quinta Escondida.

In non-literary news, the boarding house and vacation rental in Chile that **Natascha Scott-Stokes** runs, the Quinta Escondida, will be listed in the *Bible of South American Travel* when the new edition is published towards the end of this year. You can learn more about Quinta Escondida [here](#).

Jon Krampner has put together the proposal for his fourth book, *Profiles in Courage: The Bush Edition*, subtitled *12 Who Stood Against the Worst President in American History (So Far)*. It's a series of biographical profiles, organized on an issue-by-issue basis (Joe Wilson on the Iraq War,

FBI agent Colleen Rowley on 9/11, etc.) of whistleblowers and dissidents during the Bush Administration. Jon wrote us, "I'm starting to look for an agent now, so if anyone wants to make any helpful suggestions, I'm all ears." **Ray E.**

Boomhower's *John Bartlow Martin: A Voice for Those from Below*, will be published by Indiana University Press in spring/summer 2015. Martin was a reporter, diplomat, speechwriter, and, Ray noted, one of only a few freelance writers in the country during the 1940s and '50s able to support himself from his work. Martin's efforts as a speechwriter and political adviser included stints with Adlai Stevenson, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Robert F. Kennedy, and George McGovern. **Laura Claridge**, now editing her biography of publisher Blanche Knopf, is giving a talk at the Norman Rockwell Museum this month called, "The Art of Interpretation." It's her response to readers confused about the

differences between her 2001 biography of Norman Rockwell and Deborah Solomon's current version. **Carl Rollyson** took time from his travels in Mississippi, where he had been researching a biography of William Faulkner, to share the news that his young adult biography of Marie Curie is now available as a Kindle ebook. Carl also will be spending time in Oregon, where he will conduct his first interviews with family members of his current subject, Walter Brennan. Carl wrote, "This all came about because of a chance meeting at the Philadelphia Athenaeum, where I was speaking about Amy Lowell. An audience member asked me about my next project, and I mentioned the Brennan biography. 'Oh, I have a friend who knows the family,' he said. That friend turned out to be the foot in the door, if you will pardon the expression. The rest, as they say, is history." We're passing along this note from **Oline Eaton** that originally appeared on the BIO Facebook Page: "Dear BIO friends, I'm trying to collect some empirical data on the 1960s from American women 60+ (apologies to men, non-Americans and American women under 60!). If you fit that criteria and have 5 minutes to spare, your responses to this teeny tiny survey would be especially helpful." You can access the survey [here](#). **Ruth Franklin** is working on her biography of Shirley Jackson while on a residency at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. **Kimberly Hamlin**'s first book, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women's Rights in Gilded Age America*, was published in May by the University of Chicago Press. **Robert K. Landers** recently reviewed Fred Kaplan's *John Quincy Adams* for the *Wall Street Journal*; you can read the review [here](#). In its pre-Independence Day edition of "Walter Scott's Personality Parade," *Parade* cited **Marc Leepson**'s recent biography of Francis Scott Key in its answer to the question, "Was the author of the 'Star-Spangled Banner' a one-hit wonder?" *Parade* said yes, and quoted Marc's statement that Key was "possibly tone deaf." Marc also [wrote an article on Key for Parade's website](#), and a [guest blog for Bio](#).

Marc was busy on July 4, as he did three live radio interviews. A taped interview aired that day on NPR's *Here and Now*. **Charlotte Jacobs** will be spending a month at the Djerassi Resident Artists Program to work on the edits for her biography of Jonas Salk. She wrote, "I consider that both fun and exciting!"

[Send us your news!](#)

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 written biographies of Harold Robbins, the Titanic survivors and Sylvia Plath. In each case I am driven by a simple desire to know more about my subject. As Richard Holmes has said, "Biography, like love, begins in passionate curiosity." During the course of my research I feel so close to my subjects that I often dream about them.

I'll never forget the first time [Patricia] Highsmith appeared to me in my sleep. I wandered into a house full of shadows to see the writer sitting at the kitchen table. As she looked up at me through the curtain of her hair I noticed that her skin was an unsettling shade of green. I told her about my plan to write her biography and she nodded in agreement. No doubt it was

wish fulfilment, but I think she would have been happy with my book.

Highsmith was dead by the time I started to research her life. But what would happen if a biographer wanted to write about a person who was not only alive, but resistant to a biography? I took this as the starting point for my novel *The Lying Tongue*, a psychological thriller about the relationship between an aspiring biographer, Adam Woods, and his reluctant subject, a reclusive novelist called Gordon Crace. It imagines the biographer as psychopath whose only motivation is the exposure of secrets. Anything that stands in Adam's way—including rival biographers—is swiftly disposed of. [[more](#)]

Andrew Wilson, "Sylvia Plath Stalked My Dreams"

I know I made many mistakes, but I had to write regardless of what people might say about it or critics might think about it. I wanted to capture the feel of Coltrane, who he was, what his music sounded like, what the times felt like—I wanted to use whatever mode of writing was necessary to capture that feeling. I wanted the book to palpitate, to move and feel, to have blood running through it. To be Coltrane, as much as a book can be somebody.

I was concerned about how white people would feel about it. I thought it might offend them. Some of the things—the anger, the bitterness of the black experience—

were expressed in a tough manner. But I decided I wasn't going to change anything. I just let it be out there like it was.

The audience I developed in my mind's eye was an audience of black children, as though I was talking to my own children. Something about writing for children imposed an absolute truth in my effort. I thought that was the best way for me to put the truth out there without any compromise. [[more](#)]

C.O. Simpkins, quoted in "An Absolute Truth: On Writing a Life of Coltrane" by Sam Stephenson



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