

Michael Holroyd

Writer - fiction/non-fiction

Michael Holroyd was born in 1935, and educated at Eton and the Maidenhead Public Library. His biographies of Hugh Kingsmill, Lytton Strachey, Augustus John and Bernard Shaw have established him as one of the most influential biographers of modern times. He was awarded the CBE in 1989 and was knighted in 2007.



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Publications

Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
A DOG'S LIFE 2014 MacLehose Press	<p>Eustace is undisputed patriarch of the Farquhar family. That is, he would be if everyone stopped mumbling, let him get on with his shaving and find his way downstairs.</p> <p>It's not Henry's fault that he snores and that his marriage has collapsed. Or that he failed to get into the cricket team. But he has made up for it and is now a faster motorist than ever he was bowler. He is a good father too and one day, when he wakes up from day-dreaming, his son Kenneth will thank him.</p> <p>It is good that Anne sleeps with a whistle in her mouth - how else could she terrify the burglars? As for Mathilda she would love to like her mother, but prefers going for long walks with the dog.</p> <p>But what will happen to them all if the dog dies?</p> <p>A devastating postscript follows the story. Placing this eccentric family in isolation after two world wars and at the beginning of our aggressive financial culture, it turns comedy into tragedy. This novel brings a very personal addition to the biographer's remarkable career.</p>

Publication Details	Notes
BASIL STREET BLUES 2000 UK: Little, Brown & Co; US: Norton	What happens when the eminent biographer of George Bernard Shaw, Lytton Strachey and Augustus John turns his skills on himself? Part detective story, part family saga, and a unique literary event, BASIL STREET BLUES pieces together the complicated, enigmatic, scandalous and contradictory fragments of Michael Holroyd's own history.

Non-Fiction

Publication Details Notes

FACT AND FICTION: A BOOK OF STORYTELLING 2018 Bloomsbury	A captivating collection of pieces about the art of narration by Britain's finest biographer, Michael Holroyd. In <i>Facts and Fiction</i> , Michael Holroyd reflects on the eccentricities of the art of writing about others. With characteristic playfulness and guilefulness, he considers the ways in which lives can be written about (and painted), with all the subtle differences of design and intention that this entails. From Rudyard Kipling to forgetfulness, the glories of Mary Norton's <i>Borrowers</i> books to fellow biographers like Richard Holmes and Alexander Masters, Holroyd tackles an eclectic range of topics. He discusses his life at the mercy of subjects who have led him all over the world - and often into other people's families uninvited. With wit, warmth and humour, he reflects on the unlikely ways he arrives at his subjects, and how the process of building their narratives is often a disturbing experience: so consuming that, when completed, he feels as if he has had a holiday from himself. <i>Facts and Fiction</i> questions what we can know about ourselves and each other, and most importantly, how we can know it. It is a unique insight into the mind of a master.
THE GOOD BOHEMIAN: THE LETTERS OF IDA JOHN 2017 Bloomsbury	Captivatingly fresh and intimate letters from Augustus John's first wife, Ida, reveal the untold story of married life with one of the great artists of the last century. Ida's letters - to friends, to family and to Augustus - reveal a young woman of passion, intensity and wit. They tell of the scandal she brought on the Nettleship family and its consequences; of hurt and betrayal as the marriage evolved into a three-way affair when Augustus fell in love with another woman, Dorelia; of Ida's remarkable acceptance of Dorelia, their pregnancies and shared domesticity; of self-doubt, happiness and despair; and of finding the strength and courage to compromise and navigate her unorthodox marriage.

Publication Details Notes

ON WHEELS 2012 UK: Chatto & Windus	<p>Weaving together memoir and anecdote with historical example, in ON WHEELS renowned author Michael Holroyd traces his relationship with cars and driving throughout a lifetime of biography.</p> <p>For Michael, learning to drive is no easy matter: his driving lessons acquire a military precision in learning how to get in and out of the car in the correct fashion. His biographical subject George Bernard Shaw was no less enthusiastic - he continued to drive with reckless gusto into his eightieth year; for Vita Sackville-West her car was a boudoir, a venue for romantic assignations and getaways; and for Augustus John and his family, an opportunity to whizz at great speed through picturesque villages, car piled high with bohemian friends, whilst the poor car stuttered along in first gear. Wry, thoughtful and very funny, ON WHEELS is an elegy to the glamour of the car - and more; in these five delightful essays Michael Holroyd finds new and surprising ways to understand the past and challenge our view of the future.</p>
A BOOK OF SECRETS 2010 UK: Chatto & Windus; US: FSG; Spanish: Siruela	<p>On a hill above the Italian village of Ravello stands the Villa Cimbrone - a place of fantasy and make-believe. The characters that move through Michael Holroyd's new book are destined never to meet - they lived through different eras and in different countries. Yet the Villa Cimbrone unites them all.</p> <p>A BOOK OF SECRETS is a treasure-trove of hidden lives, uncelebrated achievements and family mysteries. Michael Holroyd peers into dusty corners to bring a company of unknown women into the light. Their lives are fluid and vulnerable - they play the roles of mistress, fiancée, or muse - and always somehow illegitimate. From Alice Keppel, the mistress of both the second Lord Grimthorpe (owner of the Villa Cimbrone) and the Prince of Wales, to Eve Fairfax, Lord Grimthorpe's abandoned fiancée and sometime muse of Auguste Rodin, and finally the novelist Violet Trefusis, the lover of Vita Sackville-West in one of the most scandalous love affairs of the early twentieth-century, these women are always on the periphery of the respectable world.</p> <p>Also on the periphery is the elusive biographer, Michael Holroyd, who turns the spotlight upon himself as part of his investigations into the art of biography. Taking the reader on a journey of discovery from Ravello to Paris, from Kirkstall Grange in Yorkshire to Vita Sackville-West's home at Knole, A BOOK OF SECRETS lucidly gives voice to fragile human connections.</p>

Publication Details Notes

<p>A STRANGE EVENTFUL HISTORY: ELLEN TERRY AND HENRY IRVING 2008 UK: Chatto & Windus; US: Farrar, Straus & Giroux</p>	<p>Michael Holroyd's book about the encounter of two great theatrical characters is his first major biography since his three-volume study of George Bernard Shaw. It follows Ellen Terry and Henry Irving, the supreme stars of late Victorian and Edwardian theatre and two of the first international celebrities, through their early lives, their relationship, their careers, and their children. Michael Holroyd describes it as 'the saga of two extraordinary families and two theatrical dynasties, covering over a hundred years... a time of the novel of sensation, a period of risque musical halls and riotous farces, of psychological thrillers and blood-and-thunder melodramas... a book that will reflect all these excesses and could be described as a sensational group biography based on the extravagant tragedies and romantic comedies that spilled over from these places of entertainment into people's emotional lives... of all my non-fiction books probably the most varied and ambitious.' A STRANGE EVENTFUL HISTORY was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Biography in 2009.</p>
<p>MOSAIC 2005 UK: Little Brown, US: Norton; AUDIO UK: Isis (unabridged) UK: Time Warner</p>	<p>In 1999 Michael Holroyd published BASIL STREET BLUES, in which the attentions of a biographer were turned towards something personal - his own family. MOSAIC represents the continuation of that story into Holroyd's adult life. And a remarkable story it is. Among other discoveries there is the fact of his Swedish grandmother being the mistress of the French anarchist writer Jacques Prevert, and a letter from Margaret Forster about the beauty of his mother that leads to an account of a decade-long affair.</p> <p>A love story, a detective story, a book of secrets, MOSAIC is both a beautifully written journey into a forest of family trees and a fascinating insight into the workings of genealogy. Funny, touching and wry, it shows the strange interconnectedness of our family lives, and how other people's stories, however eccentric or extreme, are often very like our own.</p>
<p>LYTTON STRACHEY BY HIMSELF 2005 UK: Abacus; Spanish(in Chile): Ediciones UDP</p>	<p>While researching his landmark biography of Lytton Strachey, Michael Holroyd had access to the fascinating Strachey archives. From this source he collected all Strachey's diaries and memoirs, which in this volume form an intermittent but not disconnected autobiography.</p> <p>From the childhood diaries to the introspective and often anguished records of late adolescence, an intimate self-portrait emerges, valuable for its own sake but also for the light it sheds on the most gifted members of the Bloomsbury Group</p> <p>In addition to the diaries are two autobiographical essays and a journal written months before Strachey's death.</p>

Publication Details Notes

WORKS ON PAPER Michael Holroyd opens this collection of essays with a startling attack on 2002 biography, which is answered by two essays on the ethics and values of non-fiction writing. He then goes on to examine the work of several contemporary biographers, the place of biography in fiction and of fiction in biography, and the revelations of some extravagant autobiographers, from Osbert Sitwell to Quentin Crisp - to which he adds some adventures of his own.

UK: Little, Brown; US: Counterpoint

WORKS ON PAPER ends with a series of satires, celebrations, apologias and polemics which throw light not only on Michael Holroyd's progress as a biographer, but also on his record as an embattled campaigner in the field of literary politics.
