



Boston Authors Club

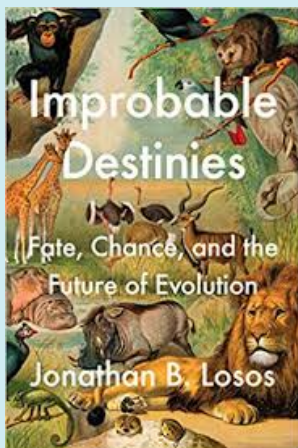
January 2019 News & Events

To join BAC or to renew your BAC Membership for 2019
[CLICK HERE](#)

In This Issue

- **Featured Author: Jonathan Losos: Improbable Destinies**
- **Yesteryear at the BAC: A Translator Lives on in the Archives**
- **Authors/Authors: 2019 Member News**

FEATURED AUTHOR



Jonathan B. Losos is the William H Danforth Distinguished Professor at the University of Washington in St. Louis, where he also leads the Living Earth Collaborative. Losos previously served as the Lehner Professor for the Study of Latin America, professor of organismic and evolutionary biology, and curator in herpetology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. He is a leading international expert on the biodiversity of species and winner of this year's Julia Ward Howe Prize for nonfiction for **Improbable Destinies: Fate, Chance, and the Future of Evolution**.

*Q: Congratulations on winning the Julia Ward Howe prize for nonfiction this year. In **Improbable Destinies**, you managed to turn the latest experimental methodologies in evolutionary biology into a page turner for the general reader. What inspired you to write a popular book on this topic?*

I've always enjoyed writing for a general audience, and I think it is important that scientists present their work to the public. I've spent several decades conducting research on the topics discussed in my book—I wanted to try to present that work, why it's interesting and important, to a broader audience than just my scientific colleagues. Plus, I was looking for a new challenge. Having written a number of magazine articles, I naively thought that an entire book was just a super-long magazine article. I quickly learned that was not the case.



Q: In addition to wonderful descriptions of your own field research, you recount the experimental work of

multiple scientists and research labs. Were there any surprises or unexpected twists as you talked to other scientists about their findings?

The biggest surprises were how much fun it was to learn the back story of my colleagues' research and then try to tell those stories, and how willing my colleagues were to spend a lot of time answering questions. I felt that I became a historian of science, and really enjoyed it. People, some old friends, some I'd never met, were extremely generous in devoting so much effort to respond to seemingly endless inquiries from me.

*Q: How did you decide which projects to feature in **Improbable Destinies**?*

Some of the projects were obvious because they are classics, such as the Long Term Evolution Experiment on *E. coli* or the guppy color experiments in Trinidads. Others were ongoing projects that I knew about, such as the mouse project in Nebraska. And some of them I learned about during the course of researching the book. There were some projects that I would have liked to have included, but they were too difficult to explain or their results too ambiguous. And, sadly, one big project was greatly reduced in coverage during revisions.

Q: There are so many ways that writing an academic work for a scientific audience is different from writing for the general reader. Was it a challenge for you to make the shift?

Yes. I was lucky in that the material was, I think, inherently interesting. But, still, I had to present it in a way that kept the reader engaged. To me, one of the biggest challenges was keeping it simple and straightforward. As a good scientist, my tendency was to make a point, then want to provide three caveats, and the responses to those caveats. But that would have put readers to sleep. I had to find a way to simplify, without leaving out important points; in other words, knowing when I could omit points or present them briefly enough to not interrupt the narrative. And, finally, there was the issue of jargon. I tried so hard not to use technical terms, and then was so surprised when I got back the first draft from my editor with so many words circled in red—they'd become so much part of my vocabulary, I didn't even realize they were jargon.

Q: Have you received any memorable feedback from your readers or from book talks you have given?

My favorite comment, which I'm pleased to have received a number of times, came from people who know me and said they could hear my voice as they read. I took that as a great compliment.

Q: Are you thinking about a new book project? If so, could you give us an idea what your topic will be?

Yes, I'm one page into my next book, which is on the science of cats. That is, how researchers are using the same methods they use to study elephants, lions, and lizards to understand the mysteries of the housecat.

Interview by MJ Cronin



authors!
AUTHORS!

News About BAC Authors

The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month. Please send news about upcoming events, awards, and new books to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com by 1/28/19 for publication in the February newsletter.

Julie Dobrow's new book, *After Emily: The Untold Tale of the Women Who Introduced Emily Dickinson to the World*, has



Eric Jay Dolin will be speaking about his most recent book, *Black Flags, Blue Waters: The Epic History of America's Most Notorious Pirates* at the following locations in January:

Littleton Lyceum Speaker Series

Friday, January 18, 2019
7:30 PM
Littleton High School Auditorium
56 King Street
Littleton, MA

A Revolutionary Harbor Lecture/Black Flags, Blue Waters

Monday, January 28, 2019
5:45 to 7 PM
Atlantic Wharf
280 Congress Street
Boston, MA 02210
Sponsored by the National Park Service and Boston Now

been named a semi-finalist for the PEN Bograd Weld award for biography.

Julie Dobrow is speaking about *After Emily* at the **Boston Athenaeum on January 8 at noon** and at **Porter Square Books on January 16 at 7 p.m.**



Patricia Striar Rohner won first prize for her short story, *A Day In Crown Heights*, in the spring writing contest sponsored by **Nowhere** travel magazine

Yesteryear at the BAC by Scott Guthery

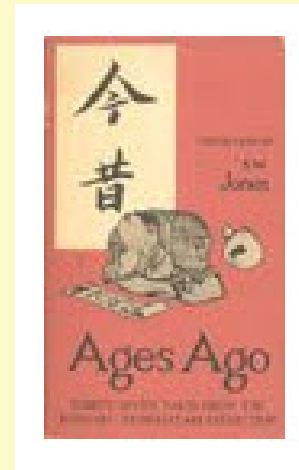
Found in the Archives: SUSAN WILBUR JONES

The shortest entry in Notable Boston Authors: Members of the Boston Authors Club 1900--1966 is for Susan Wilbur Jones.

Here's the entire entry: Susan Wilbur Jones (Mrs. Llewellyn Jones) of 12 Trail St., Cambridge, Mass. is the author of Ages Ago, Thirty-seven tales from the Konjaku Monogatari Collection.

A mere 25 words.

Ages Ago was published in 1959 by Harvard University Press and originally sold for \$4.



Contemporary reviews of *Ages Ago* were, to not put too fine a point on it, uncomplimentary. Translating literary works is, it might be said, just looking for trouble. Nonetheless, according to WorldCat, *Ages Ago* is held by 447 libraries worldwide. The book is available used on Amazon for \$3.80. New copies are on Abe Books for around \$50. **But who is Susan Wilbur Jones?**

It turns out the archive of her papers --- five boxes spanning exactly 1.88 linear feet --- are in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The finding aid for the collection is available online and it provides a wealth of information about Ms. Jones. (With who knows how much additional information waiting to be discovered in the archive boxes.)

It is my perception that two sources of high-quality resources that are often overlooked in doing biographical or bibliographic research are auction catalogs and library archival finding aids. Auction

houses, of course, want to fluff up what's on the block as much as possible but are constrained by the laws of fraudulent misrepresentation. Libraries want to tout their resources and, not incidentally, show off their archival astuteness. Both sources have incentive to say much but at the same time stay in the middle of the factual fairway.

From Yale's finding guide to the Susan Wilbur Jones papers (WA MSS S-2350, to be exact) we learn that Ms. Jones reviewed books for the Chicago Evening Post, was the assistant literary editor of Poetry, and literary editor for Child Life and for the Chicagoan. She received a masters degree in Slavic Languages from Radcliffe in 1944 and subsequently translated Gudzy's *History of Early Russian Literature* and Romanov's *Russia in Manchuria* before switching to Japanese translation in the 1950's.

To give credit where it is ever due but rarely given, the ten-page finding guide for the Susan Wilbur Jones archive was written by Diana M. Smith and Kathleen Burns. It was first published in October of 2006 and was revised in February of 2010. If you ever feel your literary efforts aren't getting the credit they are due, reflect on the authors of finding guides and auction catalogs.

There is also a small archive of Susan Wilbur Jones papers ---11 items, 0.010 cu. ft. --- at the University of New Hampshire. There's no finding guide.

REMINDER Your BAC Membership for 2019

Full membership dues are \$50 annually and Associate memberships are \$25 annually for the calendar year. You can join and renew online by [clicking here](#). If you would rather pay by check, please make your check out to Boston Authors Club and mail it to the following address:

**Nancy Tupper Ling
Boston Authors Club
1600 Providence Highway #247
Walpole MA 02081**

| BOSTON AUTHORS CLUB | bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com |

STAY CONNECTED



Boston Authors Club