



*Boston Authors Club*

## March 2022 Newsletter

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### Welcome BAC Board Members

At the first meeting of 2022, the BAC board elected two new members. Please join in welcoming Lisa LaBanca Rogers and Sara Stanton to the board.



**Lisa Rogers'** career path has included being a news reporter and an elementary school library teacher, as well as an author. She majored in English Literature at The College of William and Mary in Virginia, earned a Master's in English Literature from Boston College, and a Master's of Library Science from Southern Connecticut State University. Her picture book biography, *16 Words: William Carlos Williams and "The Red Wheelbarrow,"* received BAC's Julia Ward Howe Award.



**Sara Stanton** is the agency assistant at Storm Literary Agency as well as an aspiring author. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing with a focus in Children's/YA Literature and a minor in Spanish from Lesley University. During her undergrad years, Sara also worked as an intern for the BAC.



## Julia Ward Howe Awards

# Not Judging a Book By Its Cover

## How the Julia Ward Howe Reading Committees Make Their Assessments

Reading is now underway for the 2021 Julia Ward Howe prizes. The BAC awards prizes to the winners in fiction, non-fiction, poetry and young readers categories. Because we find so many wonderful and worthy books, we also often name finalists or runners-up in each category.

But it's not easy to judge among books, some of which are submitted by the authors, themselves, and some by their agents, publicists or publishers. Sometimes there are different types of books submitted within a genre, such as both picture books and YA books in the young readers category; or biography, memoir, history or scientific discussion in the non-fiction category. So how do they do it, select a winner among so many good books? I asked each of the current reading committee chairs what they look for in assessing the winners.

Maureen Riordan, chair of the young readers committee, agreed that it can be challenging. "The Young Reader Committee encompasses both fiction and nonfiction material ranging from board books to young adult novels and everything in between," she said. Scott Guthery, chair of the non-fiction group, added that regardless of topic, his group considers "...the originality and depth of the research that underpins the work as well as the ability of the author to make the results of this research accessible, informative, and, equally important, enjoyable to read. Akin to high diving competitions, extra points are given for successfully handling complex subject matter."

The quality of the writing is an important criterion for all four committees. Missy-Marie Montgomery, chair of the poetry committee, suggested that there are a number of questions her group asks about each book of poetry: "Does this book have something new and important to say? Does it make me feel something strongly? Does the language surprise me? Do I learn something? Does the book reward multiple readings? Do I find something new each time I read?"

Maureen Riordan said her group looks for "Excellent, engaging, and distinctive use of language." Scott Guthery stated that the Julia Ward Howe prize honors "how well a story is told, not...the story itself." And in the fiction category, we look for writing that's original, characters who are well-crafted and settings that are well-described, and the occasional sentence that is just so beautiful you have to read it again. The young readers committee is also looking at excellence in artistic technique; the non-fiction committee, "...where appropriate...at enlightening illustrations, maps, diagrams, charts, graphs, detailed examples, and explained mathematics."

Each committee has multiple readers reading books that are considered prize contenders and writing up reviews. Decisions are usually arrived at by consensus. On the fiction committee I've found that consensus is usually surprisingly easy to come by. For the poetry group, Missy-Marie Montgomery stated that when a clear winner does not easily rise to the top, the group goes back to review their choices very carefully again "and meet as many times as it takes to come up with a clear winner."

And ultimately, each committee is also looking to assess what a reader's experience with a particular book is likely to be. Maureen Riordan attested that for her group, "Our leading criteria centers on whether young people would enjoy the book and be engaged by the story and/or illustrations." For the poetry group, Missy-Marie Montgomery suggested the single most important question is ultimately, "Did this volume of poems give us something to think about, and does it linger in the brain long after?"

For Scott Guthery and the non-fiction group, "Upon finishing, the reader should put the book down thinking that the time spent reading it was well spent, and walk away with a confident conversational understanding of the book's context and topic." And with regard to fiction, we hope to select a book that provides a transformative experience for the reader: since so many of us turn to fiction as a form of enlightenment and sometimes escapism, is it a novel or short story collection that can really take us away from the world we're in and transport us to someone else's?

By Julie Dobrow  
BAC President

Please send news by March 30 about

## BOOK LAUNCH ON MARCH 5

Everyone is invited to the in-person Book Launch for Lisa Roger's new book, *Discover Her Art* on March 5, 2022 at 11AM at Wellesley Books, Wellesley MA

## Yesteryear at the BAC: From Rumors to Vices

Today, all you have to do to join the Boston Authors Club is send in your membership fee, but it wasn't always that way. When the club was founded there was a Committee on Admissions chaired by Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson (pictured here) and that committee would rigorously examine the literary oeuvre of individuals petitioning to join the club.



As you might imagine, the rejection of a petition could create a grumpy author and foment ill will in a circle of friends. Perhaps harder to envision in our over-saturated media era is that in the club's early years, tidbits of news about the BAC and its members could all too easily spill into the gossip columns of the day, even in newspapers far removed from Boston.

The national tabloids didn't hesitate to take a few shots at the Boston Authors Club and its Brahmins when any unfavorable news about the club surfaced. The rumor that the club had folded shortly after its founding was reported widely as "The Boston Authors' club has been disbanded owing to the fact that some of the 'authors' were of such a kind that 'a real literary pacemaker could have stampeded the bunch.' And this from Boston!"

But the rumor was robustly refuted. An article in the *Sun and New York Press* of February 10, 1900, leads off with "Helen M. Winslow, Secretary of the Boston Authors' Club, sends us good news. The club is not dead." Survival, however, did not ensure more favorable press coverage. After describing the admissions process, the article goes on to note that "Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson...is supposed to have bathed his soul in philosophical calm while translating Epictetus. ... and with him on the committee is Judge Robert Grant ... the recognized head of the sanitary underwear school of literature." The article also names the other members of the "hanging committee" as: Mary E. Wilkins, Mrs. Alice Freeman Palmer, and Mr. Edward H. Clement.

Needless to say, when squabbles broke out, some committee members headed for the mattresses. In the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (which your correspondent faithfully delivered door-to-door for a number of years) of February 19, 1900, it is noted that "Mary Wilkins, the authoress, now says she is not one of the committee which will examine all candidates for membership in the Boston Authors' Club. Her only connection with the club has been to allow the use of her name and to attend a dinner in its interest." Earlier in a Chicago newspaper of April 17, 1887, we find "Dr. Holmes, Professor Lowell, Mr. Howells, and Mr. Aldrich all deny any knowledge of the Boston Author's Club."

The officers of the club, it must be said, maintained their good humor throughout. The *Free Press* of Southern Pines, NC, reported on August 15, 1902, "Mrs. Howe is fond of a joke, and it was when presiding over the dinner of the Boston Authors' Club last winter that she introduced the first speaker, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, in the following way: "I will now call upon my much respected and highly valued vice." "Mrs. Howe's virtues speak for themselves," was Colonel Higginson's ready response, "it is only on rare occasions that she parades a vice."

By Scott Guthery

## International Women's Writing Guild – Boston Conference

Join the International Women's Writing Guild for its summer conference at Endicott College in Beverly, Massachusetts.

The Guild's 43<sup>rd</sup> annual conference includes workshops featuring fiction, nonfiction, poetry, memoir and screenwriting—as well as a high-energy youth program for rising artists in our global community. Workshops range from three to five days in length, spanning fiction, poetry, memoir, creative nonfiction, screenwriting, playwriting, writing as performance, multi-genre, and mixed media. For more information, visit

[www.iwwg.org](http://www.iwwg.org)



***Become a member for 2022!***

***Membership dues are \$50 annually for the calendar year. You can join and renew online at [bostonauthorsclub.org](http://bostonauthorsclub.org) or 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:***

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