



Boston Authors Club

May 2024 News

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Arnon Z. Shorr, a screenwriter, filmmaker, and author, crafts adventures and thrillers where heroes discover deep personal truths when they face the extraordinary. Growing up as a Hebrew-speaking Israeli in suburban Massachusetts, Shorr developed a fascination with the peculiar—stories where encounters with the strange help us realize who we really are. His work includes acclaimed films, screenplays, comic books, and the graphic novel "José and the Pirate Captain Toledano," which is based on his Jewish pirate film. Shorr is a 2024 JWI Screenwriters Lab Fellow and a 2024-25 PJ Library Sephardic Stories Initiative Fellow.



Q: Your email signature describes you as a Filmmaker|Screenwriter|Author. Which came first in your professional career?

A: I was bitten by the film bug when I was ten years old, right here in Massachusetts. In middle school, high school, and college (also local – Brandeis University), I made short films with whoever was willing to help. For many of those early projects, I was the screenwriter, too. I never thought of myself as a writer, but I wanted content to direct, and I didn't know other screenwriters.

Fast-forward to Los Angeles, many years later. A producer who felt my writing was strong encouraged me to explore it more professionally. My kids were very young at the time, and the prospect of shifting my professional focus away from the rigors of physical production was appealing. I wrote several feature screenplays and then refined them until they began to win recognition on the screenwriting contest circuit. Today, two of those screenplays are in active development, on their way to becoming feature films.

Q: As an example, *José and The Pirate Captain Toledano* started as a short film. Could you describe the process of turning that film into your graphic novel for young readers?

A: All the while, I continued to make short films. One of those, “The Pirate Captain Toledano,” ended up transforming my career once again. That swashbuckler – about Jewish pirates in the 16th-century Caribbean – delighted audiences and won awards at 50 film festivals around the globe. At Q&As at the festival screenings, the first question from every audience was, “How can we get more of this story?” At the time (and still today), Hollywood was reluctant to consider Jewish stories, especially big-budget spectacles like my pirate film. So, I explored other storytelling avenues. At the time, I had friends who worked in comics, so I asked for their guidance. One of them, Joshua Edelglass (also of Massachusetts!) offered to partner with me to bring “Toledano” to life as a graphic novel. We eventually landed a book deal... and I had to teach myself how to write in a new medium!

Q: How did your career evolve into balancing your creative work in all three areas?

A: A few years went by, *José and The Pirate Captain Toledano* sold well, and I found myself writing more comics and getting more works published.

It wasn't until after all of this that I remembered something from deep in my childhood. Long before my interest in movies, I wrote stories for fun. Mostly, they just sat on my computer. Sometimes I'd share them with friends. It certainly never crossed my mind when I was a kid that writing stories and books could be (part of) my career. But although I came to books quite late, the impulse to weave a yarn seems to have been present in me from the beginning.

Now, when I meet people, and they ask me what I do, I tell them, “I make stuff up for a living.” I directed a new short film this past November (“The Unburdened” – still in post-production) and am eagerly anticipating the production of two of my feature screenplays. Also in November, I self-published a one-off comic, *Brother's Keeper*, which tells my grandfather's war story from Israel's 1948 War of Independence. Later this year, my comic book adventure series, *Ben Mortara and the Thieves of the Golden Table*, should come out as a collected graphic novel. I just submitted my first attempt at a prose novel (*Wayfarers* – based on an unproduced screenplay of mine) to an editor for review.

Q: What advice would you give to authors who are interested in exploring opportunities in screenwriting?

A: I'm sometimes asked about what it takes to pivot from one medium to another. For me, the most important consideration was the medium itself. When I wrote *Toledano*, I paid particular attention to the physicality of the comic book page. When I adapted an old screenplay into a novel (*Wayfarers*), I found it required me to be much more descriptive than I was used to from the much more technical and collaborative screenwriting or comics writing. Every storytelling medium works in a different way to convey its story to an audience.

Q: What's next on your creative timeline?

A: What's next for me? I'm currently working on a new feature screenplay and a graphic novel – both under deadlines for separate creative writing fellowships. And after that, who knows? Increasingly, I find that the stories find me, especially when I'm not looking for them. Want to follow my journey as I blunder along? Join me at www.arnonshorr.com, or on the social media accounts where I'm most active: www.instagram.com/arnonshorr or www.facebook.com/arnonshorr. Happy writing!

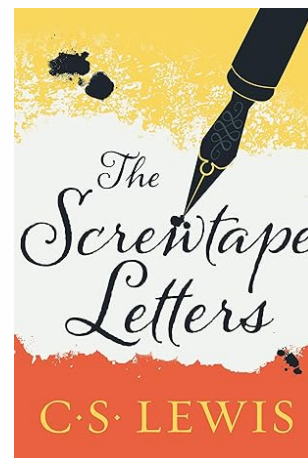
Interview by Mary J. Cronin

Reading Right Now

Kirsti Call is an award-winning author who co-hosts the Picture Book Look Podcast and hosts the Coaching for Creatives podcast as a therapist-trained life coach. She's a critique ninja for 12x12, a blogger for Writers' Rumpus, and she's judged the Cybils Award for fiction picture books since 2015. Kirsti is the author of Mootilda's Bad Mood (Little Bee), Cow Says Meow (Clarion), Cold Turkey (Little Brown), The Big Screen (Little Simon), and Smarty Ants (Capstone, 2023). Kirsti has an MSW from Boston College and is represented by Charlotte Wenger at Prospect Agency.

Q: What motivated you to pick up this title?

I have a dear friend who, by age 74, had never read any C.S. Lewis books. We decided to start a two-person book discussion of *The Screwtape Letters* on Marco Polo. (I love keeping in touch with people over Marco Polo by sending videos back and forth!)



Each chapter is a short letter from one devil to his nephew devil about how to tempt his human assignment. It's filled with fascinating philosophy and psychology (which I find particularly interesting as a

therapist). I'm really enjoying learning from my friend's perspective.

Q: Would you recommend it to friends?

I would definitely recommend *The Screwtape Letters*. It's one of my favorite C.S. Lewis books! All of his books are well worth reading. It's short yet packed with wisdom and thought-provoking insights on human nature.

President's Note: Pride of Place



During the pandemic, when all of us were forced to socialize or work online, and news organizations took to interviewing people on Zoom, a whole cottage industry of consultants who'd help to pick and organize books for a background sprung up. Medical experts were pictured with heavy tomes lined up in the back of themselves, presumably reassuring us that the advice they were offering in those first very uncertain days was backed by peer-reviewed studies. Political experts stacked their shelves with presidential biographies; cultural commentators filled their backgrounds with curated fiction and non-fiction and easily recognizable covers or spines that suggested, "I'm well-read." Everyone, it seemed, had a large bookshelf they were only too eager to display.

Today you can still see a lot of TV experts with well-stacked and well-sourced shelves. You can also Google "book organization" and find Martha Stewart offering tips, or specialists who counsel you to organize books alphabetically or topically, and even would-be aesthetic mentors suggesting that the optimal way to organize your books is by the color of their covers.

I've actually thought about this question of book organization quite a lot. I've never counted how many books are in our house, and I probably don't want to. We're definitely well into four digits, though.

There are books in every room of our home. I've tried to organize them mostly by their topic and make sure that they're housed where they are most likely to be used. So, apart from the obvious (cookbooks in the kitchen), I have my collection of biographies in my study, along with all of the books about whatever topic I'm researching and writing about at the present time. All of my fiction is splayed out in the built-in bookshelves that line one of the hallways and are organized by the author; all of my short story collections are in my bedroom. My husband's professional books are in his study, and all of our travel books are in a separate room upstairs. My books from college and graduate school are collected together in one room of the house. My children's rooms each house many of the books we urged them to purchase during college ("don't skimp on buying books; you're building up a collection!" we told them) – but their collections still somehow live in our house, still.

All of the books I inherited from my father – his prized first editions of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Cather, Mari Sandoz, and other authors whom he read and most admired – are housed downstairs in bookshelves that were built for him by one of his patients. I'm acutely aware of the 80 boxes of books of his that are still sitting in a local storage facility, waiting for my brothers and me to go through them. I don't know where they will all ultimately reside. All I know for certain is that those that end up in my house will surely have pride of place.

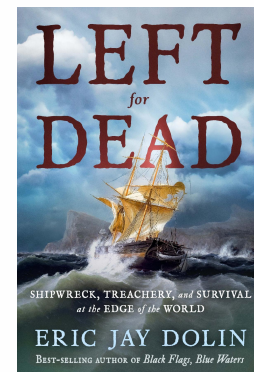
Julie Dobrow
BAC President

Spring Book Launches

Eric Jay Dolin's new book -- *Left for Dead: Shipwreck, Treachery, and Survival at the Edge of the World* (Liveright) -- will be published on May 7. It is a story about three ships converging on the Falkland Islands during the War of 1812 and the intentional marooning of five men (three British and two Americans) who survive on the barren, windswept, and inhospitable islands for a year and a half.

The *Publishers Weekly* starred review observes, "This stunning account of shifting fortunes is riven with tension on every page, as Dolin provides detailed descriptions of bickering and backstabbing, tricky nautical maneuvers, and desperate survival techniques. It's an edge-of-your-seat adventure." To see where Eric is speaking for the book launch,

Please visit <https://www.ericjaydolin.com/events>.



William Wells Newell: A Reputation Reconsidered

"The most striking thing about the reputation of William Wells Newell, as we think of it today, is its abrupt decline..."

So begins a reminiscence in the *Journal of the Folklore Institute* about an early member of the Boston Authors Club, who was the founder of a competing organization, the American Folklore Society, and original editor of its competing publication, the *Journal of American Folklore*.

William Wells Newell (1839-1907) graduated from Harvard Divinity School and, for a short while, was the assistant to Edward Everett Hale at South Congregational Church. Life in the cloth evidently didn't suit him, so he tutored at Harvard for a while and then moved to New York, where he started and ran a small and successful private school.

Newell's interests shifted to writing and travel, so he gave up teaching, moved back to Cambridge, and took up the life of what our historian emeritus refers to as a "private scholar." (Somehow, I don't recall this career opportunity being posted in my college's placement office.)

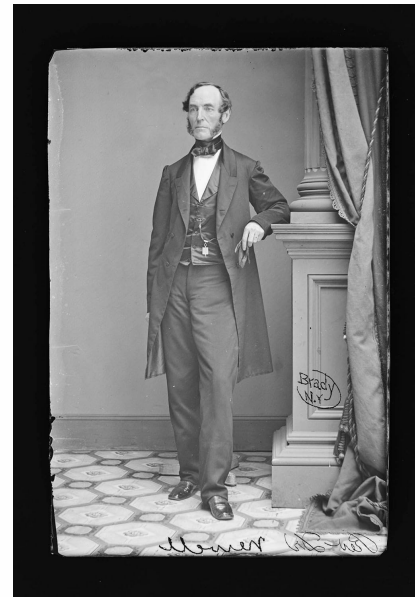
Beyond starting a society and a journal, it can be argued that Newell established folklore as a scholarly—-he would say scientific—-pursuit in the United States. A folktale picks up bits and pieces of the cultures through which it travels as if it were a tape recorder. These tapes can be rewound and replayed to gain insight into those cultures. In Newell's view, folklore studies were a specialty of anthropology, not literary criticism. As Newell's literary oeuvre testifies, he by no means denied the view of folktales as literature. Indeed, at the memorial service for Newell on March 10, 1907, Colonel T.W. Higginson, on behalf of the Boston Authors Club, was said to have noted that "Mr. Newell always had the literary instinct and the poetic spirit, and one almost wishes that he had devoted himself entirely to letters" and that "In the Authors Club he took part not only in the literary exercises and discussions, where his great knowledge and wide reading were of such value but was prominent in the social activities of the society, its outings, picnics..."

Newell had a particular interest in children's folktales. This interest is memorialized by the \$200 W.W. Newell Prize awarded annually by the Children's Folklore Section of the American Folklore Society for "best essay by students or emerging scholars on a topic in children's folklore." One of Newell's best-known works is *Games and Songs of American Children*, first published in 1883 by Harper & Brothers and still available on Amazon today.

The article from which the opening quotation was lifted concludes with the following: "If he magnified the uses of folkloric data, he did so only as a productive reaction against wild speculation, and if he championed science over *belles lettres*, he strove only to avoid the excesses of the literary essay, not its benefit."

I suspect that the abrupt decline in Newell's reputation referred to above should probably be taken in the context of the last century to mean a decline in the appreciation of Newell's contribution to folklore studies rather than a scandal of some sort.

By Scott Guthery



Events: Children's Biographies at MHS

The **New England Biography Series** is proud to convene a conversation with two well-known children's writers who focus on biographies of underrepresented groups.

Ray Anthony Shepard, whose award-winning books for teens include biographies of well-known and relatively unknown Black Americans, and **Heather Lang**, whose biographies for young readers focus on amazing but mostly unfamiliar women, will discuss their work, what biographies for children can do and why it's important to be writing for children in these times when some communities struggle over control of school curricula, public library holdings, and controversies about whether there are books that should be banned.

Massachusetts
Historical Society
Founded 1791

Hybrid event on Thursday, May
2, 5:00 PM - 6:15 PM EST
FEATURING BAC AUTHORS



TELLING THE UNTOLD STORIES FOR CHILDREN:
BIOGRAPHIES FOR KIDS & WHY THEY MATTER

This is a hybrid event. The in-person reception will begin at 4:15 pm. Click [here](#) to register online

authors!
AUTHORS!

The BAC newsletter is published the first week of every month except for the summer months. Please send news about your upcoming events, awards, and new books to bostonauthorsclub@gmail.com by May 22 for publication in the June edition.

Members are reminded that they are welcome to add an author profile to the [Boston Authors Club Gallery](#). This is an opportunity to promote your books and refer visitors to your website and your social media presence.

Your BAC Membership for 2024

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

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