

“Nobody’s Life” in the Land of the Deal

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

“If you can’t beat them, arrange to have them beaten.” – George Carlin

One of the strangest phenomena of recent years has been the glut of memoirs, autobiographies, and biographies of living people or those still warm in their graves. Rock stars, movie stars, military war criminals, glittering stars of every stripe – even prostitutes and corrupt politicians and shy real estate magnates – think their lives so interesting and important that they should be made into books and sold to a public that has an apparently insatiable appetite for gossip and peepholes into the lives of the rich and infamous.

Book publishers seem to agree with them. Recently they have awarded well-deserved book deals to some of our most important writers, wordsmiths of exquisite prose, today’s Hemingways and Martha Gelhorns, who will reveal truths we can’t live without. TV celebrity Megyn Kelly reportedly is receiving 3-10 million; comedian Amy Schumer, 9 million; Amanda Knox, the young American convicted and then acquitted by an Italian court of murdering her roommate, 4 million; Hillary Clinton and the Obamas, 8 million and up to 60 million respectively, despite having escaped convictions, since they were never tried for their war crimes. Whatever their deeds, or lack thereof, this disparate group, whose revelations are so eagerly awaited, share a common attribute.

What they have in common – aside from money, having appeared in the nation’s publications of record: People magazine, The National Enquirer or The New York Times, and attended parties on Martha’s Vineyard or in the Hamptons – is that they consider themselves, and are considered by their adoring publics, to be Somebodies. A Somebody is, if you didn’t know it, not a Nobody. What else, if anything, a Somebody is is very hard to say; you’d have to ask one. I’m sure you’d get an answer.

Does the name Narcissus ring a bell?

On the other hand, a Nobody is someone a Somebody thinks stupid enough to read the Somebody’s “life.” Who else but a Somebody would have the effrontery to put the boring, confessional details of his or her life between the covers of a book? Who else but a Somebody would confabulate in print even more than they did in life? And who else but a Nobody, wanting to be a Somebody, would read it? Who could bear to read page upon page of self-serving lies and fabrications except someone wishing to have the arrogance to do the same and make themselves look fascinating and virtuous.

Which brings me to the good news: I have just read a new book that brought a smile to my face and hope to my heart. Perhaps it is an omen of good things to come in book publishing; perhaps even a great shift in the quality of our cultural life. I note with pleasure that this book – *Nobody’s Life* (Prestige Press, 2017) – has already become an underground best seller in England and Schwenksville, Pennsylvania. Since so many of our television shows

come from those seedbeds of creativity, I surmise that this revolutionary book could have an enormous impact on our reading habits, not to say our collective ego.

Understandably so, *Nobody's Life* is written under a pen name, Shallow Bloke (henceforth referred to as SB). It's good to know Shallow Bloke has a sense of humor. Somebodies never do. A self-admitted Nobody, SB is naturally the adult child of parents who were Somebodies. Who would publish a Nobody unless that were so? A Nobody with parents who were Somebodies might still be a Nobody, but even such a fatal connection can open doors, not to say induce one to open one's wrists.

Which brings to mind the memorable opening lines of this non-life: "Call me Shallow Bloke. I'm a Nobody. Who are you? Are you a Nobody too?" This is the kind of opening that releases something in the reader. A hint of recognition perhaps, or maybe the sense that one is about to share in a dirty secret.

But don't get me wrong; this is no "Mommy Dearest." Far from it. SB is not out to get his parents, even though they got him good, as the saying has it. It's why, of course, he's a Nobody. He knows that, but being a Nobody, he doesn't have the nerve to get revenge or just walk away and not write this book, which, by the way, is dedicated "to Mommy and Daddy, who made me who I am, a Nobody."

The sad truth is SB would like to be a Somebody like them. This is obvious in the way he unconsciously emulates them by dropping names.

"When I was eighteen years old, I remember how Anna Freud would come to afternoon tea and we would play Chutes and Ladders....This was about the time Mommy and Daddy used to go bowling every Tuesday night with J Edgar Hoover and Uncle Allen....In those days we lived near Harvard Square, next door to Eddie Bernays, who would regale my parents over a bit of sherry about the way he fooled the stupid public in helping the CIA overthrow the Guatemalan government...."

In fact, it was by hearing his parents drop so many names that he realized his parents were Somebodies. They never came out and directly said, "Son, we are Somebodies and we would like you never to forget it." That would have been gauche. The name dropping was enough. SB is very forthright about this, but there is no rancor in his telling. Nor does he seem to harbor any resentment toward his parents for the way he learned he was a Nobody: they kept telling him.

One of the nicest features of *Nobody's Life* is the book jacket. Contrary to what you would expect, there is no author photograph on the back. In its place is a blank space. The reader is invited to send in the jacket with a photograph and have his photo superimposed for a small fee. I suppose they got this idea from the makers of Wheaties, who used to invite eaters to get themselves imprinted on "The Breakfast of Champions." But this is a far better deal, for books last longer than cereal, and in the extremely literate United States writers are esteemed far higher than athletes; that's why they earn on average 43 cents an hour.

For \$10 you can contradict Andy Warhol's dictum that we can all be famous for fifteen minutes. With your face staring out from *Nobody's Life* on a well-positioned bookcase, for as long as you want you can present yourself as the author of this non-life. But don't just take

it from me. Listen: "That's why a little hyperbole never hurts," advises Donald the Dealer-in-Chief. "People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration – and a very effective form of promotion."

So go for it. Buy *Nobody's Life*. Put your face on it. Make it your face book.

In that way, even if your parents aren't Somebodies, you can become an author-ized Somebody without writing a word, without even knowing how to write. Nobody would know the difference, and your ambition would be fulfilled. Without really joining them, you would beat all the Somebodies at their own game of having nothing to say but self-serving bullshit. As for a multi-million dollar contract, you know what George Carlin says about the American dream: "The reason they call it the American Dream is because you have to be asleep to believe it." So don't be greedy. That deal is not for you.

Being Somebody is the best revenge. Even if it involves a bit of "truthful hyperbole."

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