

# **Carl Rollyson**

**Professor of Journalism at Baruch College, The City University of New York**

Greater New York City Area, NY, US

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## **Description**

I have published biographies of Marilyn Monroe, Lillian Hellman, Martha Gellhorn, Norman Mailer, Rebeca West, Susan Sontag, and Jill Craigie. In September, University Press of Mississippi is publishing HOLLYWOOD ENIGMA: DANA ANDREWS and in February St. Martin's Press is publishing AMERICAN ISIS: THE LIFE AND ART OF SYLVIA PLATH. My speaking engagements for the next year include the National Arts Club in New York City, the George Bush Presidential Library in Houston, the Philadelphia Atheneum, Mary Washington University in Fredericksburg, VA, and media and bookstore appearances in St. Louis, Madison, Wisconsin, Denver, and Los Angeles. Click on "Meet Rebecca West (under "My Links") for a sample of my speaking style and "That Woman" for a promo for my play, produced in New York City and Amsterdam.

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## **Availability**

Keynote, Moderator, Panelist, Workshop, Host/MC, Author Appearance

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## **Industry Expertise**

Entertainment, Media - Online, Publishing, Performing Arts, Motion Pictures and Film

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## **Topics**

Marketing Quality Work

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## **Affiliations**

Biographers International Organization

Authors Guild

International Rebecca West Society, Baruch College, The City University of New York

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## **Sample Talks**

### **Adventures of an Outlaw: A Biographer at Work**

This is an informal talk about my career as a biographer, my problems dealing with biographies of living figures, my experiences with lawyers, and how I have been able to publish my books even when concerted efforts are made in the press to trash my work. This talk also addresses broader questions of how public figures are written about in the press and often how the press collaborates in creating a certain image of the public figure that biographers often have to challenge.

## **Alternatives to Traditional Publishing**

I have self-published over twenty books. I can talk knowledgeably about marketing titles, explain why I use self-publishing as part of a publishing programs that includes trade publishers, small presses, and university presses. My experience as a book reviewer for the WALL STREET JOURNAL, THE WASHINGTON POST, and THE NEW YORK SUN informs my understanding of the way books get noticed and reviewed. Included in my talk are several examples of the way I have used social media to promote my work.

## **The Making of Movie Stars and Icons**

My biographies focus on subjects who have transformed themselves into film stars and icons. In my book, FEMALE ICONS: FROM MARILYN MONROE TO SUSAN SONTAG, I anatomize the careers of writers and various artists who quite deliberately invent themselves--often creating stories and events, or embellishing actual experiences in order to create glamorous images of themselves. How these figures use the media, and the way the media collaborates in the creation of stars is also a feature of my talk.

## **Quality Work: Why It Must be Marketed**

Iâ€™m writing a biography of Amy Lowell (1874â€“1925). She constantly wrote to publishers, magazine editors, and critics. She called them and parked herself in their offices. She designed her own promotional material and advertisements. Imagine how she would have used her authorâ€™s website. That is what social media is, too: showing up. For Amy Lowell--and for me--imagining and creating an audience for oneâ€™s work is what writing is all about.

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## **Past Talks**

### **Alternatives to Traditional Publishing**

Biographers International Organization Annual Conference

### **Living Hell: Writing an Unauthorized Biography**

Third Annual Carole Klein Lecture

### **Dana Andrews: The Road from Rockdale to Hollywood**

Author appearance

### **Marilyn Monroe**

Legends of Hollywood Film Festival

### **Hollywood Enigma: Dana Andrews**

<http://politicalsciencejuniorfellows.wordpress.com/>

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## **Education**

University of Toronto

Ph.D English

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## **Accomplishments**

### **NEH Fellowship for College Teachers**

I have been awarded three of the highly competitive NEH fellowships. Two were for my biographies of Rebecca West and Amy Lowell (in progress). I was also awarded an NEH fellowship for a book about biography, published as *A HIGHER FORM OF CANNIBALISM? ADVENTURES IN THE ART AND POLITICS OF BIOGRAPHY*.

### **American Council of Learned Societies**

I was awarded a grant for my biography of the highly regarded journalist, Martha Gellhorn. The book was published in 1990 as *NOTHING EVER HAPPENS TO THE BRAVE: THE STORY OF MARTHA GELLHORN*.

### **American Philosophical Society grant**

I was awarded a grant for work on my biography of Lillian Hellman, published as *LILLIAN HELLMAN: HER LEGEND AND HER LEGACY* in 1988. Recently the *NEW YORK TIMES* singled out my book as the best biography of Hellman--quite a distinction since several biographies have been published since my book first appeared 25 years ago.

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## **Testimonials**

### **Patricia O'Toole**

"Carl Rollyson is to biography what Boswell was to Johnson: indispensable. An excellent biographer himself, Rollyson is also the finest critic of the art as well as a thoroughly delightful guide to the pleasures of reading biography and the perils of writing it."

### **John Heilpern**

"For anyone mad enough to write a biography, this witty, definitive book [*Biography: A User's Guide*] is absolutely essential reading. For anyone who merely loves reading biography, it's a smashing insider's guide. Mr. Rollyson is informed and passionate and fun about a subject he knows intimately. He's also unafraid to let his personal opinions show, thank goodness. In short, he's written a wonderfully entertaining biography about the art of biography."

### **Ann Waldron**

"Carl Rollyson knows more about biographies than anyone else in the world. His independent mind, his experience, and his voracious reading have equipped him to produce amazing insights into the reading -- and writing -- of biographies."

**Roger Lewis**

"With his high-powered and perceptive page-turners on Lillian Hellman, Rebecca West, Martha Gellhorn and Susan Sontag, Carl Rollyson has shown himself to be amongst the very first rank of contemporary biographical practitioners.

--Roger Lewis, author of *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* (book and Emmy and Golden Globe Award Winning HBO movie), *The Real Life of Laurence Olivier*, and *Anthony Burgess*

**Donna Rifkind**

Always the challenger, Hellman did her best to thwart all unsanctioned accounts of her life. She forbade her friends to talk to inquiring writers and destroyed many of her personal letters. Nonetheless, a half-dozen biographies have been published since her death. The best of them is Carl Rollyson's "Lillian Hellman: Her Legend and Her Legacy" (1988), a critical but astute portrait.

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