

My Sisters the Saints: A Spiritual Memoir

Colleen Carroll Campbell

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In this highly acclaimed and award-winning memoir, Colleen Carroll Campbell tells the story of her fifteen-year quest to understand the meaning of her life and identity in light of her Christian faith and contemporary feminism. Launched amid post-partying regrets in a Milwaukee dorm room, that search takes her from the baths of Lourdes and the ruins of Auschwitz to the Oval Office and the papal palace. Along the way, she wrestles with the quintessential dilemmas of her generation: confusion over the sexual chaos of the hookup culture, tension between her dueling desires for professional success and committed love, ambivalence about marriage and motherhood, and anguish at her father's descent into dementia and her own infertility.

Dissatisfied with pat answers from both secular feminists and their critics, she finds grace and inspiration from an unexpected source, spiritual friendship with six female saints: Teresa of Ávila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Faustina of Poland, Edith Stein of Germany, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Mary of Nazareth. Their lives and writings speak to her deepest longings, guide her through her most wrenching decisions, and lead her to rethink nearly everything she thought she knew about what it means to be a liberated woman.

My Sisters the Saints: A Spiritual Memoir Details

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From Reader Review **My Sisters the Saints: A Spiritual Memoir** for online ebook

Emily Davis says

Happy Wednesday.

I'm determined to catch up with book reviews that are WAY overdue. So here we go...

First up is *My Sisters the Saints* by Colleen Carroll Campbell. Published by Image Catholic Books.

Ms. Campbell is Courageous – She is in the public spotlight because of her past and present careers (EWTN for one). She shares so much of her experience with life lessons with falling away from faith (as so many of us do in college) and fertility and caring for an ailing parent, and that is courageous by itself. But to do it in an age where so many people review what is essentially her life, well, I think that is just braver than brave. It is a GOD THING! And I am so pleased that she wrote this awesome book.

Go to my blog for a link to the first chapter and the author bio: <https://ourhomemarysmantle.wordpress.com>....*My Sisters the Saints: A Spiritual Memoir*

This book is important. As Catholics, we are so blessed to have strong women role models in the Saints. For me, this is a timely and much-needed reminder that I am not alone; that I can do anything God sets before me; that I am strong and have other strong women to look up to. It is hard to remember that, but there really are Saints for every season in life, every situation. And I'm so happy that Ms. Campbell drew on some of my favorites for intercession and guidance. I mean – who can't learn from Mother Teresa and Our Blessed Mother Mary? I feel so blessed even writing this review.

I have an innate relationship with the book because I often use the Saints as guides and intercessors. I have had the privilege, this year, of teaching a Saint's class in our Homeschool Co-Op. On the first day I told the children that we all have the ability to become Saints. God used ordinary people to do extra-ordinary things. We just have to say YES!

Most of us have such intimate relationships with our Faith (ok, that seems redundant but there actually are people who don't... but we pray they come back to it), and I love that Ms. Campbell shows that you can wonder about faith-teachings and leave your faith on a back burner and come back to it when times get tough, and wonder why you ever left (my words, not hers). To me, this part of the book gave me hope – for so many who have turned their back on Catholicism or any religion, and will find their way back.

What a great man her father was. I love how she describes him as 'a man who devoted his career to defending the vulnerable – through advocacy for the mentally handicapped, ministry to the sick and dying, and support for Catholic families in crisis'. And her understanding that her father now 'felt that vulnerability from the inside'. One of his favorite saints was Saint Therese of Lisieux. When Ms. Campbell read Therese, she realized how alike her father and Saint Therese were. AND how similar her life had become to Saint Therese's life, as she watched her father endure Alzheimer's. To me, it is a great bond between the three of them. It makes me tear up writing about it. And it reminds me, how very blessed we are to witness God's presence in Ms. Campbell's father and in their lives together with Saint Therese. I am battling tears as I write this. It's very palpable for me.

I have read many reviews on this book. I feel for those who say things like, “well, this book is very Catholic, therefore I can not identify” or “I’m a man, so I couldn’t identify”. Sigh. To me, this book is about learning to make the best out of the life we are given. The Saints mentioned are real people, so even if you are not Catholic and don’t believe in their intercession, you could still see that they handled their situations with Grace and said Yes to God. Right? I hope and pray so.

I am not going to say it is an easy read for all. It’s a deeply personal book. But it is a fantastic read, in my opinion. I am sure I’ll pick it up again.

I give it two thumbs up. Five Stars. AND one really big THANK YOU to Colleen Carroll Campbell for writing this fantastic, life-lesson-filled book!

Further, “I received this book from Blogging for Books for this review.” I can assure you, received for free or not, this is an honest review.

My goal is to write a review every Wednesday. Pray for me. And look back Saturday for a review on Seeing Home. A must read, for all Yankees Fans, Baseball Fans and people who love an encouraging story of fortitude against the odds.

Blessings ALL!

Emily

Sarah says

Bottom line: GREAT BOOK.

This was truly a look inside, and dare I say there was even a plot? I loved how there was a story woven throughout, and that the stitches of the story were some of my favorite saints.

In no way does Campbell give in to the temptation just to tell us about the saints in a long “we could find that on Google” lecture. She does not reduce the saints to her own take on them, either.

In fact, within this book is some of the best writing I’ve seen and a style that captivated even me, an admitted non-biography/memoir-reader.

This is a book that documents an ongoing conversion in a way that I found engaging and thought-provoking. I caught myself marking passages and shaking my head.

I also found myself with tears running down my face. Campbell’s struggles with her own conversion and understanding, with her father’s declining health, and with her infertility were shared intimately in this book. It took some kind of courage to write the way she did throughout this book, and it was a light to me. After I finished the book, I wanted to email her words of encouragement, and I couldn’t help praying for her.

And isn’t that the beauty of a good book like this? It not only makes a stranger into someone we feel like we might know, it also brings us closer to some truths about ourselves. And, in the case of this book, it draws closer the communion of saints and the beauty of our Christianity.

Highly, highly recommended.

Beth says

I thought I was "led" to read this book because the description on the jacket sounded right up my alley: a woman trying to locate herself and her beliefs somewhere in contemporary feminism and in religious teaching, who looks at female Saints to gain insight into her own struggles. To say I was disappointed is an understatement. I was halfway through the book before I even realized that our ideologies were strikingly different, so I don't believe my dislike of the book has much of anything to do with differing political leanings or differing religious commitments, but I'll disclose that here just the same.

When I read a book wherein someone is searching or on a quest of this nature, I expect to find a narrator who is questioning, someone who is full of self-doubt, someone who isn't sure about anything but uncovers truths for herself as she goes. This author seems little changed throughout the book. In the beginning, though she's been partying, she seems to know that the answer for her is to return to a more devout involvement with Catholicism. While she gives lip service to wanting to be a career woman but also wants to be a wife and mother (a struggle many women can identify with), she is also critical, and frankly a little superior, in her judgment of the fast track women she is working with in the White House where she is a speechwriter for George W. Bush. It is, in fact, this judgment that I found most distasteful. Instead of looking inside herself--and perhaps she was, but I saw little evidence of it in this book--she seems to be always projecting outward at other people who aren't quite as devout as she is (e.g. the Asian woman with the blue-eyed baby at the fertility specialist's office, who Campbell clearly believes resorted to IVF treatment--a treatment forbidden her because of her Catholic faith--and it makes Campbell angry at the woman and the other women who are choosing IVF when they "shouldn't" be because it's against Catholic teaching and she believes some of them are raising these babies without fathers, etc.), and there is no attempt to see Christ in those people who are so different than she is. There is A LOT of judgement in this book, and I could never comfortably settle into it.

Though there is nothing wrong with the writing--she is, after all, an accomplished journalist and speechwriter with more chops than most of us have--there is something somewhat bloodless to it. I kept waiting to find a description or sentence that I would have to re-read for its artistry or marvel at its intent, but there are none. It's kind of plodding, and perhaps would have made a good, long article instead of a memoir.

My favorite sections were those on the saints, but mostly just because I'd be reminded of the histories of the saints I'd read before elsewhere. At no point was I surprised by a new take on a story, by new insight.

Perhaps I wanted too much for this book to be something other than it was. I was hoping for the delightful searching and frustration of protestant writers Sue Monk Kidd or Anne Lamott, who so willingly show their anger, their mistakes, their biases, and the joy of their discoveries without ever sounding quite so judgmental and sure they are right. I'm glad that Campbell is so satisfied with her life and her faith, but I wish I'd been more satisfied with her book.

Dallas Nateweyes says

my sisters the saints

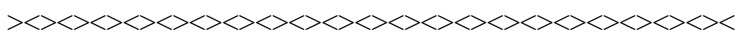
booklady says

Colleen Carrol Campbell, speechwriter for President George W. Bush, author of the critically acclaimed, *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy*, and host of her own international television and radio show, “Faith & Culture” which airs three times weekly on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)—among a host of other accomplishments—has now written what she calls ‘a spiritual memoir’. It is that and so much more.

As an aside, I thought I received *My Sisters the Saints* as a birthday gift from my sister. Actually it was *supposed* to be for my daughters; however it was together in the box from Amazon with my birthday book and a receipt wishing me Happy Birthday. Now what would you do? Not sure about you, but I had to read it. Colleen can tell an interesting tale. It's not at all hard to see why she has done what she's done in spite of watching her beloved father decline with Alzheimers and her personal struggles with infertility.

My Sisters the Saints is a fascinating story of a talented young writer and spokeswoman of her generation who discovers the importance of her senior ‘sisters-in-faith’ to particular problems. As Colleen would come to a crisis or turning point in her life, she would discover (or re-encounter) just the saint whose special forté she needed. As her readers we are then treated to a description of the saint, some background information along with the spiritual wisdom which Colleen found so helpful. For me, this information was mostly review, with the exception of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross or Edith Stein who I still want to read more of her writings. The holy women Colleen invites us to embrace are: Teresa of Ávila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Mary of Nazareth, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Now who wouldn't to have those ladies for sisters?!

And excellent story and introduction to—or revisit with—these wonderful icons of holiness, wisdom and grace. Highly recommended!



Read from start to finish in one long, late night/early morning. Probably shouldn't have, but I couldn't put it down. Review to follow.

Natasha Childress says

Not at all what I judged the cover to be, but exactly what I needed... good mixture of saintly stories and personal witness with words of wisdom from each that I have already found helpful. An easy and insightful read.

Emily says

I really wanted to like this book much more than I did. The writing is excellent, both in style and tone, so that wasn't the problem. I think it was just that my life has been so different than hers, and I already have

devotion to these saints, that I didn't really "learn" anything from this book. This had the effect of lowering my liking of it. I'm fairly sure this is just a me thing, and not a reflection of the worth of the book itself.

Emily says

I generally do not enjoy memoirs, and especially not spiritual/religious ones, but I actually liked this one. Campbell did a marvelous job knitting together certain saints with crucial moments of her life, relaying how their influence inspired and effected her character and guided her spiritual development at different hardships throughout life. The memoir reads like a story, starting when Campbell is 20, in college, and feeling an acute emptiness... and ends when she was 36, after having endured times of success and benefit, and times of tragedy and adversity. Through it all, she discovers and taps into the wise genius of saintly women (Teresa of Avila, Thérèse of Lisieux, Faustina, Edith Stein, Mother Teresa) whose insights awaken a deeper understanding of faith for Campbell and give her the strength to go on as she grappled with pain & suffering. My favorite part of the book is her explanations and accounts of the saints' lives, and then what she subsequently gleaned from them and how it changed her perspective of life. Overall, I enjoyed reading about her spiritual journey. I'm glad she shared it.

Christian Engler says

My Sisters The Saints tells the riveting story of a modern-day woman's journey through contemporary university life and beyond, a life where career and social ascendancy is usually the number one priority and religion-for the most part-is the first thing that is discarded by the free modern thinker. In the case of Colleen Carroll Campbell, God does not have to be, nor should He be, dumped by the wayside in order to obtain career success and social relevancy. In reality, looking towards God is a pivotal starting point for the obtainment of a positive and meaningful existence. Having a healthy faith can give one an unbreakable strength in which to meet all challenges head-on, despite the overwhelming and sometimes insurmountable nature of what those challenges can be. And the author, citing her own numerous struggles, which were all competing neck-in-neck with each other for first place on the podium of misery, can honestly say that she knows what she is talking about.

She recounts in crystalline detail the vacuousness that engulfed her while as a student: the contemporary feminist clichés, the hookup culture, the nonstop party circuit, the relativism, the activism, etc. By stepping outside of her unsatisfying merry-go-round life and trying to see the world through the lens of faith, she was able to get a healthier perspective and insight into herself. Her intelligence, femininity, talent and strength were genuinely valued: If not by anybody else at least by God. In discerning her vocation, she had to let her guard and cynicism down and try to be more open-minded as to where God was leading her, a battle, sometimes, all by itself. By opening herself up and maintaining her stick-to-itiveness to faith (and it was a struggle), she was able, over time, to discern a pattern and finally see the fruits of grace that was always working in and around her. But like in any human relationship, it took years of prayer, sacrifice and commitment. And it was in the subsequent years where her faith was truly tested that made for fascinating reading.

Turning to the Catholic Church and her saints, she found the most unlikely partners in her journey through life: Saints Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Faustina Kowalska of Poland, Edith Stein or Teresa Benedicta of the Cross of Germany, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Mary of Nazareth. Each of these strong

and faith-filled women embodied a strength, quality and experience that resonated deeply for the author. In her own journey in dealing with a loved one who suffered from Alzheimer's Disease as well as dealing with unending infertility struggles and the stresses of being a working woman, the obstacles and hardships seemed absolutely insurmountable as they became more and more crunched together, almost to the point of throwing the hands up in the air and screaming at the universe: "I give up." Yet, she didn't, as easy as that would've been to do. She found strength through her saints and the rosary. And in each chapter, her love and admiration for them really do shine through.

Her memoir beautifully lays out the beauty of Catholicism and of faith in action. It was interesting to read how her faith translated into her career as a White House speech writer, author and commentator. But what I related to, above all, was the struggle of her own human juggling act while still maintaining a deep rooted and proactive Catholic faith. My Sisters The Saints felt like a story of a struggling modern day career mystic who operated within the Washington beltway and who worked in the realm of political journalism but who fluidly crisscrossed to the divine world of the contemplative. This was a genuinely refreshing read, as I too have my saints, blessed, venerable and servants of God that I look to for inspiration in both good times and in bad. And it was nice to read of a modern-day professional who was so unashamedly open and articulate about it. Very worthy of the Christopher Award.

Mary Porter says

I could not put this book down. I found Colleen's story so relatable and she put into words much of the struggles I faced during my own father's sickness and death. Her faith journey throughout the different tunnels she traveled through is inspirational. A must read!

steph says

Read this for the first time one or two years ago. Read it again this weekend and liked it even more than I remembered. There was so much more that I picked up on faith, love, family, etc. this second time around. This is the book that introduced me to Edith Stein and St. Teresa of Avila, both of whom I am slowly working my way through their individual biographies. I will probably end up buying this book eventually to have for my own library. I highlighted a lot in the kindle, especially the part where she talks about suffering and what it means to love another. It really resonated with me.

Jill says

Loved this story! I related to so much of Colleen's life, crazy college days, infertility, parents' dementia and passing. She beautifully and honestly wove her story with the stories of the saints who carried her through these times. Just when I thought her words might become 'too' holy, she would admit to difficulties with her own ability to believe and understand. I definitely related to that! But we press on and remain open to grace so that we grow in love and understanding. That is the walk of a Christian. The saints are not out of reach. Heaven is all around us and this book will help me remember that daily, and perhaps even more often.

Elizabeth says

My Sisters the Saints: A Spiritual Memoir by Colleen Carroll Campbell begins with Colleen as a young twenty-something, nominally Catholic college student who slowly begins exploring her Catholicism as a way to decipher what it means to be a woman.

Colleen explores the faith through the guiding influence of six different women saints of the Catholic Church: St. Teresa of Avila, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. Faustina, Edith Stein, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Mary, mother of Jesus. The book worked on both levels. The events of Colleen's life, from exciting career opportunities and marriage, to her father's decline through Alzheimer's, engage the reader and made me cry on more than one occasion. The accompanying mini-biographies on the saints throughout the book gives enough information to make the saint real, but not so much as to be overwhelming or become textbook-like instead of a personal account.

I did find myself turned off in portions of the book where Colleen veered into apologetics of Catholicism's ban on birth control and in vitro fertilization, and a defense of prayer to Mary. I suppose this is because I've already heard these multiple times, and felt boredom and disruption to the narrative hearing them again. I did however, appreciate her candor in expressing the struggle of staying loyal to the Church's teaching in the face of infertility.

Overall, I think I would recommend this to anyone who is a fan of the spiritual memoir genre, or anyone curious about these saints. I'm resolved to read more concerning Teresa of Avila and Edith Stein, two saints who I've been ambivalent about in the past. Even just knowing the story and courage of Colleen's father is enough reason to read this book. At just over two hundred pages, it is a quick read and although not groundbreaking, it is an enjoyable, personal, and moving account of the spiritual growth of a modern woman.

Julie says

This engaging memoir is the story of “a twenty-first-century woman in a two-thousand-year-old church.” Campbell is a successful journalist and a devout Roman Catholic whose questions about life as a woman dig deeper than the typical questions about career-family life balance.

As a college student, the author begins to question the emptiness of her life and, finding feminist studies answer few of her questions, embarks on a journey back to the Roman Catholicism of her youth. She takes as her guides six woman saints: Teresa of Avila, Therese of Lisieux, Faustina of Poland, Edith Stein, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and Mary of Nazareth. This is a rather ingenious way of structuring a memoir, because the lives of the saints mirror different times of struggle and growth during this part of the author's life.

The author learned different things from each of these women: Teresa of Avila who struggled with being a pleasure-loving people pleaser, Therese of Lisieux who was headstrong and hypersensitive, Faustina a Christian mystic who cared little for worldly respect, Edith Stein an insightful scholar of women's spirituality, Mother Teresa whose early spiritual raptures were followed by a long “dark night of the soul,” and finally Mary the mother of Jesus who surrendered herself to be God's servant.

These women's struggles and insights are woven through the chapters which cover the author's years as a young student, author and journalist. Carroll shares here many of the interesting details of her life which included a job at the White House, travels, marriage as well as health problems in her family which tested her faith.

While I would recommend this book to all women who enjoy spiritual memoirs and are interested in the intersection between faith and feminism, I would add that this book is quite distinctively Roman Catholic.

Stuart says

Upon picking up this book, you might recognize the author's name as she is the host of EWTN's show Faith and Culture. She also writes for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and blogs for the New York Times and Washington Post. In a nutshell, this is Mrs. Campbell's autobiography of her spiritual journey so far.

In addition to being an autobiography, we also get a glimpse at key female saints in the Catholic Church. Drawing on these saints, such as Mary, Teresa of Avila, and Dorothy Day, Mrs. Campbell tells how each one's life helped shape various points in her life. This was not only informative about the author, but also about the saints as I had never known much about the lives of some of these saints.

Although this is a book whose target audience is women, I felt that I could relate to some of Mrs. Campbell's life. Perhaps the stage in her life I relate to most is her college years. This is where the book starts off, in fact. Mrs. Campbell described her days in college as a party girl who put religion on the back burner. While I was never a party guy myself, I can relate to losing my religion to some degree in college. I think more people than not can relate to this as that seems to be a time we "adults" go through where we think we know more than we really do.

This was a very well written book, and I would expect nothing less from a journalist and presidential speechwriter. However, my biggest gripe with the book is chapter length. The chapters do have subheadings thankfully. However, with only six chapters in a 200+ page book, it made them a bit hard to get through each chapter in one sitting, so I always had a hard time finding a good stopping point. Overall, I would give this book 4.5 out of 5 stars.

Faith says

My Sisters The Saints~

Once I began this book, I couldn't set it down any longer than was necessary.

Colleen Carroll Campbell writes like she's talking to friends- she gives us the gift of her story and she tells it with intensity.

She asks a lot of questions- what does it mean to be a woman?

What do I do about work and goals and choices?

And how do I live through waiting and suffering and falling in love?

Colleen begins with the day she realized that she wanted- needed- something more. She was a bright young college student with a promising future. And on that October morning all she felt was an ache.

Something was lost and needed finding, or dislocated and needed healing, and she wasn't sure what it all meant.

She never imagined that a dead saint, encountered through a old book, would speak words that soothed the ache.

Theresa of Avila's life in the 16th century helped made sense of Colleen's 21st century experience. One may think that career ambitions, relationship struggles, and personal identity questions would have no reference in the life of a saint. Yet they do.

And over the next decade of Colleen's life- when she publishes a book and becomes a White House speech writer, and lives with her dad's Alzheimer's diagnosis, and meets the man she one day marries, and then copes with infertility- she keeps finding strength and solace in the words of saints.

One by one, various female saints come into her life in the season she most needed them. Somehow these women address her reality, and point to their Jesus who redeemed them and guided them, offering Him to her.

Therese of Lisieux- one of her father's favorite saints- lived the "Little Way" of completely trusting faith. That seems too simple in our intellectual age, but it was just what Colleen needed as she watched her father's faith become more childlike.

Therese reminded her that great love in ordinary actions would sustain them.

Edith Stein's writing came along when Colleen wondered why God would give her the longing for children *and* the burden of infertility.

Edith affirmed these desires as holy and good, saying that every woman is called to nurture and bring forth life, whether or not she ever bears children.

This spiritual maternity is not a second-place prize after biological motherhood, rather it's the heart of all motherhood.

Theresa of Calcutta's private letters, published posthumously, met Colleen in the darkness after her father's death. The fact that this saint who lived with a "smile for Jesus" could feel absolutely bereft of God was a revelation. Her vulnerability taught Colleen "the promise of joy."

This is a really good read, very much worth the time it takes. (And I also think you'll want to find some of the saints original writing when you're done.)

Thank you to Image Books and Blogging for Books for my review copy.

Amy says

Ohhhhhhhhhhhhh...this one is a tough one to review. It is her journey so who am I to "review". This is a very Catholic book and is probably best read by very devout Catholics who grew up in Catholic homes.

I wanted to like this book more than I did. I am happy for the author that she is blessed with her religion and her family and much success.

At the risk of criticizing this spiritual journey book, I am only giving it 2 stars.

Maureen says

I was disappointed with this book. The best parts were the discussions of the saints. Though I have witnessed the effects of Alzheimer's and dementia in family members, I found Carroll Campbell's descriptions of her interaction with her father and this disease weak.

I also have to admit that I found her whiny in parts. Perhaps many of us would come off this way in a memoir. I almost put the book down while she was describing her dilemma while working as a speech writer. She wanted so badly to get married and have children but felt that it would fly in the face of her feminism and hinder her career. Even after she made the decision to leave her position to get married, she still wasn't ready for motherhood.

When she decided she was, it did not come easily to her. I am in NO way saying that she deserved to struggle. I guess I am just surprised that knowing all she did and professing that she accepted Catholic teaching, she thought that she could just decide that she wanted children and it would happen.

On the plus side, this book has encouraged me once again to read the writings of St. Edith Stein.

Barbara says

I bought this book at a friend's recommendation, and the first chapter turned me off immediately. The book sat on my bookshelf for another year before I decided to pick it up again. This time, I found it very compelling. Once I got past my initial skepticism -- the author's struggles are not my own -- I actually found many similarities as the book went on. More importantly than whether or not I related to her struggles, however, I found that the author has this wonderful ability to look back on her life and point out how God seemed to be working in her life, and how she is filled with gratitude at each turning point where God revealed himself, often through the lives of his saints. Her writing is honest and balanced. I have not read a book that more authentically deals with the specific experience of being a woman in the US Catholic Church today, though this is a by-product of the writer's reflection on her experiences -- I really would have no interest in a book that said, "this is about a woman's experience in the US Church."

The book has invited me to reflect on a few important questions: If I were to write a similar book where I thought about my life thus far and tried to point out how God has been at work, what would it look like? Who would the saints be whose examples have inspired me to make the right decision at critical turning points? Do I allow myself to have a relationship with Mary and the saints? Do I look to their examples regularly?

I think these are worthwhile questions, and for that reason, I highly recommend this book.

Molaika says

Mostly enjoyed this, especially her explanations of Edith Stein's writings, who I am eager to read now!
