WIKIPEDIA
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Main page
Contents
Featured content
Current events
Random article
Donate to Wikipedia

Interaction
Help
About Wikipedia
Community portal
Recent changes
Contact Wikipedia

Toolbox
What links here
Related changes
Upload file
Special pages
Permanent link
Cite this page

Print/export
Create a book
Download as PDF
Printable version

Languages
Afrikaans
Alemannisch
العربية
Aragonés
Azərbaycanca
Bamanankan
Bân-lâm-gú
Беларуская
Беларуская (тарашкевіца)
Boarisch
Bosanski
Brezhoneg
Български
Català
Чăвашла
Cebuano
Česky
Corsu
Cymraeg
Dansk
Deutsch
Eesti
Ελληνικά
Español
Esperanto
Euskara
فارسی
Føroyskt
Français
Furlan
Gaeilge
Galego
Хальмг

Paul Fallows

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Paul Fallows (pronounced Foul-ohs, birthdate unknown) was the pen name of an American writer and recluse. Best known for his enigmatic personality and his refusal to grant interviews or allow photographs to be taken of him, Fallows is the author of the known novels The Coil and The Golden Silence.

Contents

1 Known novels
2 Author photograph
3 Search for identity
4 "Lost novel"
5 Controversies
6 2010 "sighting"

Known novels

In 1971, amidst a time of literary change in America, Paul Fallows published his debut novel, *The Coil*. The novel has drawn comparisons to the work of Edith Wharton and Henry James. Focusing on a female character trying to make her way in early 20th century New York City, the novel was dismissed by most critics. Oskar van der Steen writing in The New Yorker called it "a derivative half-beat...an ode to a different time and a now-foreign place. It is as if Fallows has stepped out of a time machine and presented us with this document."

If initial reaction was lukewarm, the novel began to pick up steam in America's universities. Searching for a novel that might undercut the growing "literature of discontent" that seemed to be overtaking American letters, *The Coil* attracted students and professors of the realist movement. As literary scholars began to dig deeper into the novel, however, the more the book appeared to include "signposts" (a word used by Professor Jackson Nesbitt of the University of California-Davis) that suggested Fallows was up to something. A noted recluse who was extremely careful about allowing himself to be photographed or even seen, the author continually refused public requests for interviews. Forty years later, Fallows remains invisible.

Fallows's second novel, *The Golden Silence*, was published in 1975. A total deviation in both style and form, the novel is about a man who changes his identity. The book again was panned by critics; Laura Deering in *Harper's* called it "a cold, heartless riff on neo-surrealism," while others dismissed the book as a kind of publicity hoax. (Thomas Pynchon was identified as a possible stand-in for Fallows.) Yet it was again the American universities who saved Fallows; many professors—referring to themselves now in almost cultish terms as "scholars"—began to see odd symbols in the book and claimed that Fallows was using the text as a kind of map to his true identity. The novel and its hidden symbolism continue to be debated in lit departments and graduate programs.

Author photograph

The author photograph Fallows's now-defunct publisher—Cannon House—chose to display on his book jackets was that of encyclopedia salesman Charles Rutherford. Fallows's editor has never spoken about the photo (also called "the Drury Image") and its legitimacy has been intensely questioned by scholars. In 1975, the poet Elizabeth Gorey, writing in the underground magazine *Swordfish*, claimed the author photo was a fake and she was in fact Fallows. Gorey has since denied these claims.

Search for identity

Much of the search for Paul Fallows's true identity is focused on the author photograph and Charles Rutherford. A group of student writers at Bard College staged an expedition to find Fallows in the summer of 1977; a memoir, *The Nowhere Man*, was published about the group's failure. Prior to that, Dr. Benjamin Locke and his apprentice, a student named Richard Aldiss, traveled to Hamlet, Iowa, and spent four months interviewing Charles Rutherford's widow. The widow denied her husband's involvement in the Paul Fallows mystery. In the winter of 1994, Aldiss taught a class at Vermont's Jasper College. The class proved to be highly controversial: Aldiss, a convicted murderer, taught the class via satellite from his prison cell. Many scholars believe a student in that class, Alex Shipley, successfully uncovered Fallows's true identity. Others, including Nelson Vicard of Yale University, suggest that the information discovered was tainted and that Fallows is still at large.

"Lost Novel"

An unpublished, "lost" Fallows novel is said to exist, although no evidence of the document has ever been uncovered. The book is purported to be a crime story or a "locked room" mystery, although scholars have searched for evidence of the book for years with no success. Dr. Alex Shipley of Harvard University claims to have read one page of the book, although without factual evidence many in the Fallows community remain skeptical.

Controversies

Paul Fallows has been at the center of many literary controversies.

During a search for Fallows in February of 1994, Alex Shipley and Jacob Keller, students in Richard Aldiss's Jasper College class, went in search of Fallows. They traveled to Iowa, where Charles Rutherford lived before his death. What happened next has been debated in court and in the many books published on that fateful trip. Alex Shipley allegedly—

[Content removed by Wiki administrator due to open legal issues.]

2010 "sighting"

In May of 2007, a user named "Paul Fallows" contributed to an online discussion on a forum called bookpuzzles.com. The discussion's moderator, Professor Bethany Wilken of Pepperdine University, began to converse with the user. Some of the user's answers, published in the volume Tracking a Ghost (Pepperdine University Press, 2011), have convinced some scholars that Fallows is still alive and is working on a new novel.