

9-15-2016

## Out of the ordinary: a life of gender and spiritual transitions, Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka (book review)

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### Recommended Citation

McCallister, Kathleen, Out of the ordinary: a life of gender and spiritual transitions, Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka (book review) (2016). *Library Journal*, 141(15), 94.  
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# social sciences

## BIOGRAPHY

**Dillon, Michael/Lobzang Jivaka. *Out of the Ordinary: A Life of Gender and Spiritual Transitions*. Fordham Univ. Nov. 2016. 272p. ed. by Jacob Lau & Cameron Partridge. notes. index. ISBN 9780823274802. \$34.95. BIOG**

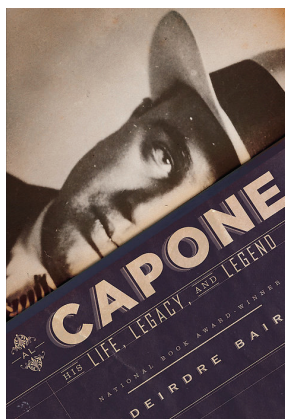
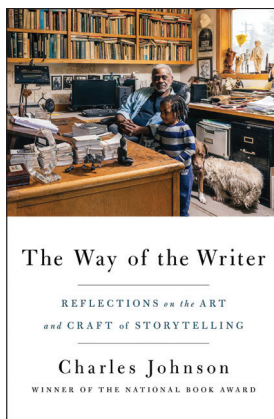
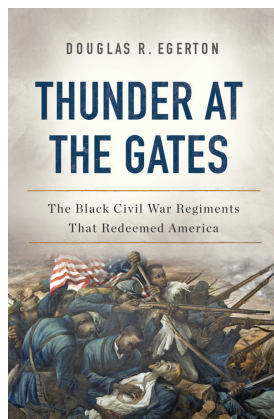
Completed in 1962 but unpublished until now is the long-neglected autobiography of Dillon/Jivaka (1915–62), born Laura Maud Dillon, who transitioned from female to male in the 1940s through testosterone treatments, a double mastectomy, and phalloplasty (the first performed on a transgender man). The public revelation of this transition and subsequent press attention spurred Dillon to flee to India, where he became a Buddhist monk as relayed in his memoir *Imji Getsul: An English Buddhist in a Tibetan Monastery*. Descriptions of emotional and psychological struggles regarding the author's gender identity and

**Girard, Philippe. *Toussaint Louverture: A Revolutionary Life*. Basic. Nov. 2016. 352p. illus. maps. notes. bibliog. index. ISBN 9780465094134. \$29.99; ebk. ISBN 9780465094141. BIOG**

Toussaint Louverture (1743–1803) is best known as the leader of the Haitian Revolution, a slave revolt in the French colony of Saint-Domingue that resulted in the establishment of the Republic of Haiti. Born a slave of African descent, Louverture saw himself as French; this dichotomy would define his life and shape his political policies. Girard (*Haiti: The Tumultuous History—From Pearl of the Caribbean to Broken Nation*) attempts to reconcile the contradictions of Louverture's life. Sources documenting his subject's early days are scarce, and the author spends the first part of the biography exploring the unusual race relations of Saint-Domingue, which along with discussions

**Goldhill, Simon. *A Very Queer Family Indeed: Sex, Religion, and the Bensons in Victorian Britain*. Univ. of Chicago. Oct. 2016. 344p. photos. notes. bibliog. ISBN 9780226393780. \$35; ebk. ISBN 9780226393810. BIOG**

Using the story of the Benson family to trace changing cultural attitudes toward sexuality, self-expression, and religion between 1850 and 1940, the transition from the Victorian era to the modern, Goldhill (*Greek, Univ. of Cambridge; Love, Sex & Tragedy*) examines the political, cultural, and literary concepts of self-identity and self-awareness. The Bensons were celebrities in their day but have since passed into relative obscurity. Patriarch Edward White (1829–1896), archbishop of Canterbury, had six children with wife Minnie Sidgwick, all of whom were public personalities in their own right. Daughter Maggie was the first published female Egyptologist. Others became activists, politicians, novelists, and teachers. Yet this clan carried secrets that first began with the unorthodox courtship and marriage of the parents. Prolific writers, the Bensons used diaries, letters, novels, and autobiographies to make sense of lesbianism, homosexuality, homoerotic attractions, unorthodox living arrangements, and teacher-pupil sexual attractions at a time when the vocabulary to describe these yearnings and relationships didn't yet exist. As Goldhill explains, this was a family “that wrote itself.” **VERDICT** This is not a traditional biography; it's more appropriately a family saga or Freudian case history. An engrossing yet dense and scholarly read.—Marie M. Mullaney, Caldwell Coll., NJ



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spiritual philosophy are clear and candid yet often surrounded by stretches of more prosaic detail such as family histories and accounts of his years as a physician. Editors Lau (postdoctoral fellow, Univ. of California) and Partridge (lecturer, Harvard Divinity Sch.) use Dillon's writings to create successfully a historical document. **VERDICT** Worthwhile, purely for its status as a personal voice from the shadowed world of 20th-century transgender history, though more of a general biography than a work on gender issues. Reading this in conjunction with *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology*, Dillon's study on transsexuality, might provide a fuller experience on the topic.—Kathleen McCallister, Tulane Univ., New Orleans

of the area's economic, political, and social issues, provide much-needed context to explain Louverture's shifting loyalties and self-reinventions. While Louverture's role in the revolution comprises a large portion of this work, Girard also considers the hero's life after the conflict, when he became governor and rebuilt Saint-Domingue's agrarian economy by instituting a cultivator system. At the height of his power, Louverture was deposed by Napoleon and imprisoned in France, where he later died. The book ends with a brief discussion of Louverture's legacy. **VERDICT** A compelling look at an extraordinary historical figure. Recommended for anyone interested in revolutionary and/or Caribbean history.—Rebekah Kati, Durham, NC

**Jackson, Joe. *Black Elk: The Life of an American Visionary*. Farrar. Oct. 2016. 624p. maps. notes. index. ISBN 9780374253301. \$30; ebk. ISBN 9780374709617. BIOG**

When John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* was published in 1932, it was scarcely noticed by readers. When republished in 1962, its spiritualism spoke to the emerging counterculture, thus becoming one of the most influential American Indian works of the 20th century. Jackson (*The Thief at the End of the World*) endeavors to extricate the historical Black Elk from the mythology surrounding his legacy. Black Elk (1863–1950) lived during the most turbulent time in Oglala Lakota history. He fought in the Battle of Little Big Horn, witnessed the

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