

any human heart by william boyd

Any Human Heart by William Boyd: An Intimate Exploration of Identity and Humanity

Any Human Heart by William Boyd is a profoundly compelling novel that delves into the complexities of human life, identity, and the search for meaning. Published in 2002, this literary masterpiece has garnered critical acclaim for its intricate narrative structure, rich character development, and philosophical depth. Boyd's novel is not merely a story; it is a reflection on the human condition, examining how personal histories shape who we are and how our perceptions influence our understanding of life and death.

In this article, we will explore the themes, narrative style, character analysis, and the significance of Boyd's work within contemporary literature. Whether you're a literary enthusiast or a casual reader interested in profound storytelling, this comprehensive overview aims to deepen your appreciation for **Any Human Heart by William Boyd**.

Background and Context of the Novel

William Boyd, a renowned Scottish novelist and screenwriter, published *Any Human Heart* in 2002. The novel is a fictional autobiography of Logan Mountstuart, a writer whose life spans almost an entire century—from the early 20th century through the post-war era and into the modern age. Boyd's creation aims to encapsulate the essence of human experience, emphasizing that individual lives, despite their unique circumstances, share common emotional and existential threads.

The novel's structure is innovative, comprising a series of diary entries, memories, and reflections that collectively form a comprehensive portrait of Mountstuart's life. Boyd's meticulous research and profound understanding of history, culture, and psychology enable him to craft a narrative that is both intimate and panoramic.

Themes Explored in Any Human Heart

1. The Search for Identity

One of the central themes of *Any Human Heart* is the exploration of identity. Logan Mountstuart's life journey reflects the universal human quest to

understand oneself amid the chaos of external circumstances. The novel portrays how personal experiences, relationships, and societal influences shape individual identity over time.

2. The Nature of Memory and Reflection

Boyd emphasizes the fluidity of memory and the importance of self-reflection. The diary format allows readers to see how memories evolve and how they influence perceptions of past actions. This theme raises questions about authenticity and the reliability of personal narratives.

3. Love, Loss, and Human Connection

Throughout his life, Mountstuart experiences profound love and devastating loss. The novel underscores the importance of human connection and how love, in its many forms, defines and complicates human existence.

4. The Passage of Time and Mortality

Boyd's depiction of the changing eras highlights the relentless march of time. The novel confronts mortality, examining how individuals grapple with the inevitability of death and the desire to leave a meaningful legacy.

5. The Impact of Historical Events

Set against the backdrop of significant historical moments—World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War—the novel illustrates how global events influence personal lives and societal shifts.

Narrative Style and Structure

Innovative Diary Format

Any Human Heart is narrated through a series of diary entries, letters, and reflections, giving it an intimate and authentic tone. This structure enables readers to witness Logan Mountstuart's innermost thoughts and feelings, creating a sense of closeness with the protagonist.

Non-Linear Chronology

The novel's timeline is non-linear, jumping across decades and significant life events. This approach mirrors the way human memory works—fragmented yet interconnected—highlighting the subjective nature of storytelling.

Multi-Layered Characterization

Boyd employs a layered approach to character development, revealing not only Mountstuart's inner life but also providing insights into the lives of those around him. This includes lovers, friends, family members, and colleagues, each adding richness to the narrative.

Character Analysis: Logan Mountstuart

Logan Mountstuart is a quintessential everyman—a complex character whose life encapsulates the human experience. His journey from a young man in England to a seasoned writer and observer of history provides a lens through which Boyd explores themes of ambition, love, regret, and resilience.

Key traits of Logan Mountstuart include:

- An insatiable curiosity about life and the world
- A deep capacity for love and vulnerability
- A reflective nature, often contemplating the meaning of his actions
- An awareness of his mortality, influencing his decisions and outlook

Boyd masterfully depicts Mountstuart's evolution, illustrating how external events and internal struggles intertwine to shape his identity.

The Significance of *Any Human Heart* in Contemporary Literature

1. A Reflection of the Human Condition

Boyd's novel resonates because it captures universal truths about human life—our desires, fears, regrets, and aspirations. It invites readers to reflect on their own lives and the stories they tell themselves.

2. Literary Innovation

The novel's diary format and non-linear structure challenge traditional storytelling, inspiring writers and readers to rethink narrative conventions.

3. Philosophical Depth

By examining themes of mortality and memory, Boyd contributes to ongoing philosophical discussions within literature about what it means to live a meaningful life.

4. Cultural and Historical Insight

Set against significant global events, the novel provides a nuanced understanding of 20th-century history through personal stories, making it a valuable resource for historical and cultural studies.

Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy of William Boyd's *Any Human Heart*

Any Human Heart by William Boyd stands as a testament to the richness of human experience. Its intricate narrative, profound themes, and compelling characterizations make it a timeless read that continues to resonate with audiences worldwide. Boyd's ability to blend personal introspection with historical context creates a narrative that is both intimate and expansive, inviting readers to ponder their own stories and the universal journey of life.

Whether you're interested in exploring the depths of human emotion, the intricacies of memory, or the complexities of identity, Boyd's novel offers a compelling and thought-provoking experience. It reminds us that despite the fleeting nature of time, our stories—our hearts—are what truly define us as human beings.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Any Human Heart' by William Boyd?

The novel explores themes of identity, love, memory, and the complexity of human experience through the life of its protagonist, Logan Mountstuart.

How is the narrative structure of 'Any Human Heart' unique?

The book is structured as a fictional autobiography, with Logan Mountstuart recounting his life in a series of reflective journal entries, spanning from the 1930s to the early 21st century.

Who is the protagonist of 'Any Human Heart'?

The story centers on Logan Mountstuart, a British writer whose life story is told through his personal reflections and experiences.

Has 'Any Human Heart' been adapted into any other media?

Yes, the novel was adapted into a three-part television miniseries in 2011, starring Jim Broadbent as Logan Mountstuart.

What are some critical themes explored in 'Any Human Heart'?

Critical themes include the search for meaning, the impact of history on individual lives, love and loss, and the nature of memory and storytelling.

How does William Boyd develop the character of Logan Mountstuart?

Boyd develops Logan through detailed personal reflections, capturing his emotional depth, relationships, ambitions, and the historical contexts that shape him.

What awards has 'Any Human Heart' received?

The novel was longlisted for the 2010 Booker Prize and received widespread critical acclaim for its storytelling and character development.

In what time periods is 'Any Human Heart' set?

The novel spans from the 1930s through the early 2000s, covering significant historical events and cultural shifts.

How does William Boyd's writing style contribute to the novel's impact?

Boyd's elegant prose, deep psychological insight, and reflective tone create an intimate and immersive reading experience that resonates with readers.

Why is 'Any Human Heart' considered a modern classic?

Because of its compelling exploration of human nature, its innovative narrative structure, and its insightful depiction of a lifetime of personal and historical change.

Additional Resources

Any Human Heart by William Boyd: An In-Depth Exploration of a Literary Masterpiece

Any Human Heart by William Boyd stands as a compelling and intricately crafted novel that delves into the complexities of human experience, identity, and the passage of time. This literary work, first published in 2002, has garnered critical acclaim for its ambitious scope, narrative innovation, and profound psychological insight. As a work that spans a century of life through the lens of one man's reflections, it offers readers a multifaceted portrait of what it means to be human. In this article, we will explore the thematic depth, narrative structure, character development, and literary significance of Boyd's masterpiece, providing a comprehensive understanding for both casual readers and literary scholars alike.

The Genesis and Context of *Any Human Heart*

Before diving into the thematic and structural intricacies of the novel, it's essential to understand its origins and the context in which it was conceived. William Boyd, a renowned British author known for his mastery of storytelling and character exploration, embarked on this project with the aim of creating an expansive portrait of a single life. The novel was inspired by Boyd's fascination with the fluidity of identity and the ways in which personal history intertwines with wider historical events.

Published in 2002, *Any Human Heart* arrived at a time when literary fiction was increasingly embracing experimental narrative forms and introspective storytelling. Boyd's work fits within this modern tradition, but it also pays homage to classic Bildungsromans and the confessional memoir genre. The novel's release was met with widespread praise, winning numerous awards, including the Costa Book Award for Novel of the Year, further cementing its place as a contemporary literary landmark.

The Narrative Structure: A Chronicle of a Life

The Epistolary and Fragmented Form

One of the most distinctive features of *Any Human Heart* is its unique narrative structure. Boyd employs a fictional autobiographical format, presented as a collection of diary entries, letters, and self-portraits penned by the protagonist, Logan Mountstuart. This fragmented approach allows readers to experience his life through multiple perspectives, emphasizing the subjective nature of memory and identity.

The novel's structure resembles a mosaic, with each chapter or section revealing different facets of Mountstuart's existence—his childhood, career, love affairs, philosophical musings, and reflections on mortality. Boyd's choice to fragment the narrative underscores the idea that human life is a series of moments, perceptions, and reinterpretations rather than a continuous, linear story.

Chronological and Thematic Layers

While the overarching timeline spans from the early 20th century to the early 21st, Boyd strategically interweaves historical events—World Wars, the Great Depression, the Cold War—with personal milestones. This blending of macro and micro narratives creates a layered reading experience, emphasizing how individual lives are shaped by, and in turn influence, larger societal shifts.

The novel's structure encourages readers to contemplate themes such as:

- The fluidity of identity over time
- The ephemeral nature of memory
- The impact of historical events on personal destiny
- The quest for meaning and authenticity

Character Development: The Many Faces of Logan Mountstuart

The Protagonist's Multifaceted Identity

At the heart of *Any Human Heart* is Logan Mountstuart, a character whose life story is both extraordinary and quintessentially human. Boyd crafts him as a reflective, introspective figure whose identity evolves across different phases—an aspiring writer, a soldier, a diplomat, a lover, and a father.

Mountstuart's personality is marked by contradictions: he is ambitious yet self-doubting, charming yet insecure, idealistic yet pragmatic. Boyd's nuanced character development allows readers to see him as a reflection of the human condition—flawed, resilient, and endlessly searching for purpose.

The Arc of a Life

Boyd delineates Mountstuart's life into distinct chapters, each illustrating a different aspect of his personality and circumstances:

- Youth and Education: His formative years in England, marked by innocence and curiosity.
- War and Political Engagement: His service during wartime, exposing him to the brutal realities of conflict.
- Literary Aspirations: His pursuits as a novelist and the struggles of artistic creation.
- Relationships and Love: Encounters with various women, each shaping his understanding of intimacy.
- Later Years and Reflection: Confronting mortality, regret, and the quest for peace.

This episodic yet interconnected portrayal underscores the novel's central theme: human lives are a tapestry woven from countless experiences, choices, and moments of grace or failure.

Thematic Depth: Exploring Humanity's Core Questions

Identity and Self-Perception

One of the most prominent themes in Boyd's novel is the fluidity of identity. Logan Mountstuart's self-portraits and journal entries reveal a man constantly reinterpreting himself in response to new experiences. Boyd suggests that identity is not fixed but a dynamic construct shaped by memory, societal expectations, and personal aspirations.

The novel prompts readers to consider questions such as:

- Can we truly know ourselves?
- How does memory distort or preserve our sense of self?
- Is identity merely a narrative we tell ourselves?

The Passage of Time and Mortality

Boyd employs a temporal scope that emphasizes the inexorable march of time. Mountstuart's reflections often confront mortality, emphasizing the transient nature of life. Boyd explores how individuals grapple with aging, loss, and the desire for legacy.

Key moments include Mountstuart's encounters with death, his reflections on the fleeting nature of beauty and youth, and his attempts to find meaning in a finite existence.

Love, Loss, and Human Connection

Throughout his life, Mountstuart's relationships serve as a mirror to his inner struggles and growth. Boyd vividly depicts the joys and pains of love, illustrating how human connection is both a source of happiness and vulnerability.

Notable themes include:

- The fleeting nature of romantic attachments
- The importance of friendship and mentorship
- The role of forgiveness and acceptance

Art, Literature, and the Search for Meaning

Boyd, himself an accomplished novelist, infuses the narrative with literary references and philosophical musings. Mountstuart's engagement with art and storytelling underscores the human desire to create meaning amidst chaos and uncertainty.

Literary Techniques and Style

Use of First-Person Narration

Boyd's choice of a first-person, diary-like narration fosters intimacy and immediacy. Readers gain direct access to Mountstuart's thoughts, doubts, and aspirations, creating a compelling sense of empathy.

Intertextuality and Literary References

The novel is rich with allusions to classical literature, philosophy, and historical figures, adding depth and context. Boyd's literary references serve as a commentary on the universality of human experiences.

Symbolism and Motifs

Repeated motifs—such as mirrors, photographs, and letters—serve as symbolic tools, emphasizing themes of self-perception, memory, and identity.

Critical Reception and Literary Significance

Awards and Honors:

Any Human Heart received numerous accolades, including the Costa Book Award for Novel of the Year in 2002. Critics lauded Boyd's craftsmanship, narrative ingenuity, and psychological insight.

Influence and Legacy:

The novel's innovative structure and profound themes have influenced contemporary fiction, inspiring writers to explore life stories through fragmented, multi-perspective narratives. It has also been adapted into a television series, further cementing its cultural impact.

Academic and Critical Perspectives:

Scholars have examined Any Human Heart as a meditation on the human condition, viewing it through lenses such as existentialism, postmodernism, and memoir studies. Its exploration of memory, identity, and mortality resonate with ongoing debates in literary theory and psychology.

Conclusion: A Reflection on the Human Condition

Any Human Heart by William Boyd stands as a testament to the richness and fragility of human life. Through its innovative narrative form, nuanced character development, and thematic profundity, it invites readers to reflect on their own identities, memories, and mortality. Boyd's masterful storytelling transforms a single life into a universal canvas, illustrating that beneath the surface of individual existence lies the shared tapestry of human experience. Whether approached as a literary tour de force or a

philosophical inquiry, the novel remains a vital, thought-provoking work that continues to resonate across generations.

Any Human Heart By William Boyd

any human heart by william boyd: *Any Human Heart* William Boyd, 2007-12-18 William Boyd's masterful new novel tells, in a series of intimate journals, the story of Logan Mountstuart—writer, lover, art dealer, spy—as he makes his often precarious way through the twentieth century.

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any human heart by william boyd: *Novels of William Boyd* Dr. Rajesh Shashikant Latane, 2015-02-25 have great pleasure in writing this foreword to Dr. Latane's book on the Novels of William Boyd. The book is a significant contribution to Boyd criticism. It has discussed the early, the middle and the last phase of Boyd's novels. In doing if the author has defined the totality of Boyd's vision. Indeed every novel is a part of this totality and the totality is more than a mere sum of the novels. The reciprocal relationship between the part and the whole is the crux of novel-criticism and the book has given due justice to this aspect. Another important feature of the book is the analysis of the postmodernist element in Boyd's novels. This critical framework can be used to analysis the postmodernist element in the contemporary Indian novel in English. Even going further it can be used to analyse the Postmodernist element in the contemporary Marathi novel. A thesis is really acknowledged when it become a source material for the future researchers and comparatives. Mr. Latane's book has that potential. I heartily wish a good reception to the book. Dr. Prakash Deshpande Kejkar Former Professor of English Shivaji University, Kolhapur

any human heart by william boyd: *Fiction and Poetry to Help Us Age* Laurence W. Mazzeno, Sue Norton, 2025-09-09 This volume explores the theme of age and aging, uniquely combining personal reflections from literature professors with sound scholarly analysis of a range of fiction and poetry. Bringing together leading literary scholars, this collection of essays covers a range of writers and texts, representing both the canon and new voices. By combining the chapter authors' expertise as literary and cultural critics with their own responses to novels, short stories and poems, the book offers new insights into the life trajectories made available to fiction and poetry readers through compelling narrative and vivid literary representation.

any human heart by william boyd: *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature* Dr Christine Berberich, 2013-04-28 Studies of the English gentleman have tended to focus mainly on the nineteenth century, encouraging the implicit assumption that this influential literary trope has less resonance for twentieth-century literature and culture. Christine Berberich challenges this notion by showing that the English gentleman has proven to be a remarkably adaptable and relevant ideal that continues to influence not only literature but other forms of representation, including the media and advertising industries. Focusing on Siegfried Sassoon, Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh and Kazuo Ishiguro, whose presentations of the gentlemanly ideal are analysed in their specific cultural, historical, and sociological contexts, Berberich pays particular attention to the role of nostalgia and its relationship to 'Englishness'. Though 'Englishness' and by extension the English gentleman continue to be linked to depictions of England as the green and pleasant land of imagined bygone days, Berberich counterbalances this perception by showing that the figure of the English gentleman is the medium through which these authors and many of their contemporaries critique the shifting mores of contemporary society. Twentieth-century depictions of the gentleman thus have much to tell us about rapidly changing conceptions of national, class, and gender identity.

any human heart by william boyd: *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Contemporary*

British and Irish Literature Richard Bradford, Madelena Gonzalez, Stephen Butler, James Ward, Kevin De Ornellas, 2020-09-03 THE WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANION TO CONTEMPORARY BRITISH AND IRISH LITERATURE An insightful guide to the exploration of modern British and Irish literature The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Literature is a must-have guide for anyone hoping to navigate the world of new British and Irish writing. Including modern authors and poets from the 1960s through to the 21st century, the Companion provides a thorough overview of contemporary poetry, fiction, and drama by some of the most prominent and noteworthy writers. Seventy-three comprehensive chapters focus on individual authors as well as such topics as Englishness and identity, contemporary Science Fiction, Black writing in Britain, crime fiction, and the influence of globalization on British and Irish Literature. Written in four parts, The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Literature includes comprehensive examinations of individual authors, as well as a variety of themes that have come to define the contemporary period: ethnicity, gender, nationality, and more. A thorough guide to the main figures and concepts in contemporary literature from Britain and Ireland, this two-volume set: Includes studies of notable figures such as Seamus Heaney and Angela Carter, as well as more recently influential writers such as Zadie Smith and Sarah Waters. Covers topics such as LGBT fiction, androgyny in contemporary British Literature, and post-Troubles Northern Irish Fiction Features a broad range of writers and topics covered by distinguished academics Includes an analysis of the interplay between individual authors and the major themes of the day, and whether an examination of the latter enables us to appreciate the former. The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Literature provides essential reading for students as well as academics seeking to learn more about the history and future direction of contemporary British and Irish Literature.

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literature on existential counselling and psychotherapy. Martin Adams provides an excellent overview of the field for those who are new to it at the same time as distilling key features in a way which will be valuable for experienced practitioners' - Meg Barker, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the Open University A Concise Introduction to Existential Counselling is just that: a brief and accessible pocket guide to the underlying theory & practice of the existential approach. Addressing everything a new trainee needs to know and do in a way that is entirely accessible and jargon-free, this book: - Provides a short history of the existential tradition - Puts key concepts into contexts, showing how theory translates into practice - Discusses issues in the therapeutic process - Shows how to work effectively with whatever the client brings to the session - Addresses the significance of existential thought in the wider world This book will be the perfect companion to new trainees looking to embark on their path to thinking and practicing existentially. Martin Adams is a practitioner and supervisor in private practice and a Lecturer at the New School of Psychotherapy and Regents College, both in London.

any human heart by william boyd: *The Book Club Bible* Michael O'Mara Books, 2011-07-31 With a foreword by Lionel Shriver, author of *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, *The Book Club Bible* is the essential guide to the best book club reads.

any human heart by william boyd: *The Work of Literature* Derek Attridge, 2015-03-26 What is distinctive about the cultural practice called 'literature'? How does it benefit individuals and society? How do literary works retain their importance and their capacity to give pleasure over decades and centuries? What constitutes responsible criticism? These are some of the questions addressed in this book, which develops the arguments put forward in Derek Attridge's influential study *The Singularity of Literature* (2004). Beginning with an extended cross-examination in the form of an interview addressing a range of topics relating to the work of literature (understood both as the activity of the writer and as the text itself) and the practices of literary reading and literary criticism, it asks what it means to 'do justice to' a work of literature, provides a full account of the concept of singularity, considers the problematic power of criticism, and advances an account of the role of context in the writing and reading of literary works. In other chapters it explores the issue of cultural difference in responses to literature, discusses the working of metaphor, questions the attribution of knowledge to literary works, and addresses the topics of affect and hospitality. The book follows through the consequences of regarding the singular and inventive work of literature as an event that takes place anew each time it is read, providing an opening to an otherness excluded by prevailing cultural norms and habits of thought and feeling. Although the focus of the book is on literature, the arguments are relevant to all the arts, and engage with the thought of major aesthetic theorists in a number of traditions.

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Bythell's funny and fascinating memoir of a year in the life at the helm of The Bookshop, in the small village of Wigtown, Scotland—and of the delightfully odd locals, unusual staff, eccentric customers, and surreal buying trips that make up his life there as he struggles to build his business . . . and be polite . . . When Bythell first thought of taking over the store, it seemed like a great idea: The Bookshop is Scotland's largest second-hand store, with over one hundred thousand books in a glorious old house with twisting corridors and roaring fireplaces, set in a tiny, beautiful town by the sea. It seemed like a book-lover's paradise . . . Until Bythell did indeed buy the store. In this wry and hilarious diary, he tells us what happened next—the trials and tribulations of being a small businessman; of learning that customers can be, um, eccentric; and of wrangling with his own staff of oddballs (such as ski-suit-wearing, dumpster-diving Nicky). And perhaps none are quirrier than the charmingly cantankerous bookseller Bythell himself turns out to be. But then too there are the buying trips to old estates and auctions, with the thrill of discovery, as well as the satisfaction of pressing upon people the books that you love . . . Slowly, with a mordant wit and keen eye, Bythell is seduced by the growing charm of small-town life, despite —or maybe because of—all the peculiar characters there.

any human heart by william boyd: The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction, 3 Volume Set Brian W. Shaffer, 2011-01-18 This Encyclopedia offers an indispensable reference guide to twentieth-century fiction in the English-language. With nearly 500 contributors and over one million words, it is the most comprehensive and authoritative reference guide to twentieth-century fiction in the English language. Contains over 500 entries of 1000-3000 words written in lucid, jargon-free prose, by an international cast of leading scholars Arranged in three volumes covering British and Irish Fiction, American Fiction, and World Fiction, with each volume edited by a leading scholar in the field Entries cover major writers (such as Saul Bellow, Raymond Chandler, John Steinbeck, Virginia Woolf, A.S. Byatt, Samuel Beckett, D.H. Lawrence, Zadie Smith, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Nadine Gordimer, Alice Munro, Chinua Achebe, J.M. Coetzee, and Ngûgî Wa Thiong'o) and their key works Examines the genres and sub-genres of fiction in English across the twentieth century (including crime fiction, Sci-Fi, chick lit, the noir novel, and the avant-garde novel) as well as the major movements, debates, and rubrics within the field, such as censorship, globalization, modernist fiction, fiction and the film industry, and the fiction of migration, diaspora, and exile

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engineering, wildlife, wonderful flora and fauna, art and literature. His journey takes him from industrial hubs to small villages and fishing communities, providing a keen insight into what makes each stretch of Scotland's shoreline unique and special. Evocative and often dramatic colour photographs help capture the great variety of the coast, and maps, book covers, stamps and local artefacts help convey the character of each area. This comprehensive and absorbing survey is a treasure trove of interest and knowledge for walkers, cyclists, boaters, holidaymakers and indeed anyone with an interest in coastal Scotland.

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any human heart by william boyd: Writers' & Artists' Yearbook 2018 Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017-07-27 This bestselling guide to all areas of publishing and the media is completely revised and updated every year. The Yearbook is packed with advice, inspiration and practical guidance on who to contact and how to get published. Foreword to the 2018 edition by David Lodge New articles in the 2018 edition on: - Writing popular history by Tom Holland - Editing and writing by Diana Athill - Ghostwriting by Gillian Stern - Writing Thrillers by Kimberley Chambers - The health and wellness market by Anita Bean - Self-publishing online by Harry Bingham - How to choose your agent by Jo Unwin - First Chapters by Emma Flint - Pitching your ideas by Mike Unwin - How to make a living by Alison Branagan All articles are reviewed and updated every year. Key articles on Copyright Law, Tax, Publishing Agreements, E-publishing, Publishing news and trends are fully updated every year. Plus over 4,000 listings entries on who to contact and how across the media and publishing worlds In short it is 'Full of useful stuff' - J.K. Rowling

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