ForeWord Reviews

ESSAYS

Confessions of a Guilty Freelancer
William O'Rourke
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For more than forty years, William O'Rourke penned essays that were as incisive as they were wide-ranging, bringing his lively wit, curmudgeonly tone, and biting intellect to personal, political, and literary topics as diverse as a graphic memoir of his heart attack, his assessment of the spirit of the nation after 9/11, the widening gap in earnings between executives and workers, and his reviews of the works of notable contemporary literary figures.

O'Rourke makes a confession early on, declaring that his essay collection is, in fact, misnamed; he never really was a "freelancer" at all, he says, but rather a "moonlighter," since he had been employed by institutions of higher learning throughout his career. He also confesses to not having had what it takes to live the freelancer's life, lacking "the general aggressiveness to wield a pen for hire."

O'Rourke is not a party hack—he openly blames former President Clinton for the Bush administration, and declares that George W. Bush, who in 2000 was named the winner of the closest election in American history, was president, not of the whole country, but mainly of what he calls "Yahoo Nation." He describes this demographic in an article, originally published in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, as "made up of primarily the deep south and the vast, lowly populated upper-far-west states that are filled with vestiges of gun-loving, Ku Klux Klan-sponsoring, formerly lynching-happy, survivalist-minded, hate-crime-perpetrating, non-blue-blooded, rugged individualists." O'Rourke received, he says, "over 500 e-mails of denunciation" in response to that article.

Of special interest are the author's observations on the transformation of late-twentieth-century journalism, including his analysis of how novelists contributed to what in the late '60s came to be called the "New Journalism."

Readers looking for a how-to book on freelancing success will not find it here, but those who enjoy a good romp through some of our country's most pivotal times in the company of an astute observer, who is unafraid to offer a penetrating, and sometimes scathing, critique of the state of the nation, will find themselves well matched.

William O'Rourke is a former columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the author of four works of fiction and five of nonfiction. He is the editor of *On the Job: Fiction about Work by Contemporary American Writers*, and, with John Matthias, of the collection *Notre Dame Review: The First Ten Years.*

Kristine Morris