



## The Speechwriter: A Brief Education in Politics

By Barton Swaim

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An intimate and hilarious look inside the spin room of the modern politician: a place where ideals are crushed, English is mangled, people are humiliated, and the opportunity for humor is everywhere.

Everyone knows this kind of politician: a charismatic maverick who goes up against the system and its ways, but thinks he doesn't have to live by the rules. Through his own experience as the speechwriter for a controversial governor, Barton Swaim tells the story of a band of believers who attach themselves to this sort of ambitious narcissist—and what happens when it all comes crashing down.

*The Speechwriter* is a funny and candid introduction to the world of politics, where press statements are purposefully nonsensical, grammatical errors are intentional, and better copy means more words. Swaim paints a portrait of a man so principled he'd rather sweat than use state money to pay for air conditioning, so oblivious he'd wear the same stained shirt for two weeks, so egotistical he'd belittle his staffers to make himself feel better, and so self-absorbed he never once apologized to his staff for making his administration the laughing stock of the country. On the surface, this is the story of one politician's rise and fall. But in the end, it's a story about us—the very real people who want to believe in our leaders and must learn to survive with broken hearts.

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## The Speechwriter: A Brief Education in Politics By Barton Swaim Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #138059 in Books
- Published on: 2015-07-14
- Released on: 2015-07-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.37" h x 1.00" w x 5.50" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 224 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"[Swaim's] book is not a tell-all or an effort to settle scores. Instead, it's a wryly funny, beautifully written, sometimes bewildered, always astute dissection of what it is like to perform a thankless job for an unreasonable person in a dysfunctional office during a period of unusual turmoil. . . . Swaim is so talented a writer, and has such an eye for a telling detail, that you suspect you could put him in any workplace—chicken-processing plant, airport sunglass emporium, stoner skate park—and he would make it come alive in the best possible way. . . . He may have been unsuccessful as a platitudinous speechwriter, but he has produced a marvelously entertaining book." (*The New York Times*)

"Revealing and unusual: a political memoir that traffics in neither score-settling nor self-importance but that shares, in spare, delightful prose, what the author saw and learned. *The Speechwriter* feels like *Veep* meets *All the King's Men*—an entertaining and engrossing book not just about the absurdities of working in the press shop of a Southern governor but also about the meaning of words in public life. . . . *The Speechwriter* will become a classic on political communication." (Carlos Lozada *Washington Post*)

"This is the truest book I've read about politics in some time, hilarious and sordid and wonderfully written." (Joe Klein, author of *Primary Colors*)

"[Swaim] writes . . . in a breezy, elliptical manner, letting his material work for him. . . . Swaim is insightful not only about Sanford but about the nature of modern political communications. . . . Although it left me feeling slightly dubious about democracy, I have no trouble calling *The Speechwriter*, with its gloomy reflections and wonderfully vivid character sketches, the best American political memoir written in my lifetime." (*The Spectator (UK)*)

"Barton Swaim's little jewel of a memoir reads like the best political fiction. Beyond taking you into the core of an epic political meltdown, Swaim's funny story also illuminates the eroding standards of language, the oddities of office life and the exquisite torture of working for a narcissistic and unappreciative boss." (Jonathan Alter, author of *The Center Holds: Obama and His Enemies*)

"At last: a political memoir 100-percent free of axe-grinding, score-settling, and self-promotion. What's left? A beautifully written, hilariously human inside look at a certain governor's ruinous, um, hike on the Appalachian Trail." (David Von Drehle, author of *Rise to Greatness: Abraham Lincoln and America's Most Perilous Year*)

"Politicians don't always come with warm smiles and narcissistic dispositions, but it was Barton Swaim's bad luck to work for one, and our good luck that he stayed long enough to tell his very funny tale." (Jeffrey Frank, author of *Ike and Dick*)

"Swaim's book is an uproariously funny and sometimes just weird story of idealistic belief and politics corrupted by narcissism and ruined by scandal. Unfortunately it's all too true." (Karl Rove, author of *Courage and Consequences*)

"A wry and eloquent memoir . . . offering an inside look at the life of a political wordsmith and, along the way, a portrait of a politician who was his own worst enemy. Beautifully written . . . *The Speechwriter* is a cautionary tale and well-timed, appearing as the race for the White House intensifies, with politicians

crowding rooms hoping to impress and true believers hanging on every word they say.” (*Wall Street Journal*)

“Darkly humorous. . . . Anyone who’s ever sought to maintain sanity in an absurd workplace knows that it requires a kind of gallows humor, a tone Swaim maintains throughout this terrifically entertaining book.” (*The Boston Globe*)

“Swaim's *Veep*-like experience of working for Sanford supplied him with a book's worth of mortifyingly hilarious anecdotes, and he tells them exceptionally well. But the greatest value of *The Speechwriter* is the deeper truths about political language, and the people who employ it, that Swaim learned during his tour of duty. . . . The best book about politics I've read in years.” (*GQ*)

“One of the few good books about speechwriting. . . . [Swaim] has a fine eye, a gift for satire, and a clean, clear style. . . . Highly readable and entertaining.” (*Washington Times*)

“A deeply humane study. . . . Swaim is plainly a gifted writer. His professional experience shows in a firm, easy command of language; with disciplined consistency, his sentences do what they’ve been ordered to do. There’s a smooth economy to his prose, which rarely staggers or overheats. If it isn’t always lyrical, it still has a lean charm that more writing should. . . . *The Speechwriter* [is] urgent reading, for both its literary and civic merits.” (*The Millions*)

“It would be hard to find a better book in the year leading up to the 2016 election than Swaim’s memoir. . . . His account is unlike the usual political insider’s story. For one thing, it’s better written, funnier too, blessedly concise, and free of huffing and puffing.” (*Christianity Today*)

“Very funny . . . original and interesting.” (*The Weekly Standard*)

“In an elegiac tone that recalls Robert Penn Warren’s classic novel *All the King’s Men* . . . [*The Speechwriter*] is less an account of a politician’s fall than an inquest into mass democracy. . . . His speechwriting days may be over, but Swaim seems to have found his true voice.” (*Foreign Affairs*)

“A must-read.” (*PoliticalWire.com*)

“[*The Speechwriter*] is brilliant. It’s not a ‘tell-all,’ nor is it even really an attack on Sanford. Instead, *The Speechwriter* is a dead-on depiction of life inside a modern day political spin room--with Swaim demonstrating on every page the supreme talent he brought to the table. Talent which Sanford wasted. . . . As for the politician chronicled by the book? Swaim nails him. *The Speechwriter* doesn’t just provide us the occasional glimpse into Sanford’s confounding eccentricities and chronic narcissism--it literally exposes the flawed essence of the man.” (*FITSNNews.com*)

“*The Speechwriter* is a funny book. Grammarians and word nerds will certainly love it. Political junkies too. . . . But for more than anyone else, *The Speechwriter* will appeal to other writers.” (*Charleston City Paper*)

“Highly amusing. . . . A remarkable account of a political education told with humor and insight.” (*The Post & Courier*)

“A deftly funny look at life inside the Sanford bubble and a thoughtful, clear-eyed account of what it takes to put words in the mouth of a politician in love with the sound of his own voice.” (*Free Times*)

“Excellent.” (*Times Literary Supplement (UK)*)

“A highly readable account of [Swaim’s] three years in the governor’s employ. Part *All the King’s Men* and part *Horrible Bosses*, it’s fascinating and almost impossible to put down.” (*Bookpage*)

“The narrative is strongest in its quiet reflection of the end of Swaim's political innocence. As [Swaim] came to realize, democracy—with its promise of liberty and justice for all—is ultimately based on rhetorical manipulation of the masses.” (*Kirkus*)

“An entertaining inside look at state politics and how the wheels of executive office grind. . . . Demonstrating empathy mixed with appropriate caution . . . [Swaim’s] report on his experiences as a governor’s idea man is a fine, sometimes brilliant foray into the nature of contemporary politics, the charismatic narcissists who seek high elected office, and the enablers who allow them to dance in the spotlight.” (*Publishers Weekly*)

“A candid, witty look inside the world of high-stakes politics. . . . A humorous and sobering glimpse inside the modern political crucible.” (*Shelf Awareness (starred review)*)

“For political junkies looking for more than the routine gotcha memoir, or another insider tale of revenge, Barton Swaim’s deliciously wicked *The Speechwriter* is this summer’s must read. With unsparing precision, Swaim dissects the inner workings and galactic stupidities of political life—the wall of spin, the thirst for glory, and above all the insatiable quest for acclaim and attention. The hypocrisy and duplicity revealed in the 200-page book read like a chapter from Kafka or an absurdist play.” (*The Daily Beast*)

“A sober, lucid, funny story about language and its fraught relation to statesmanship. . . . Unlike nearly every book of its kind, *The Speechwriter* at its core is sensitive and apolitical: Swaim just wants to understand why we so often insist on mangling the language.” (*The Paris Review*)

“Revealing, insightful, [and] hilarious. . . . Unlike other my-time-in-politics memoirs, Swaim does not go out of his way to trash his former boss or make everyone around look like idiots. If you are at all interested in politics, the crafting of words, and the absurdities of human nature, you’ll enjoy this book.” (*The Gospel Coalition*)

“An enjoyable, well-written volume. As he chronicles key events during his time in the governor’s office, Swaim demonstrates that he has an ear for dialogue, an eye for detail and a gift for pithy statements (as you’d expect from a speechwriter). Whether he’s describing the governor’s opponents in the legislature, or recreating conversations between himself, the governor and other staff members, Swaim displays an inspired literary hand.” (*Neil Hrab, Vital Speeches of the Day (blog)*)

“Swaim undertakes his rueful memoir without malice or anger, so that what we read is the sad and sometimes hilarious story of politics as usual in America. And what did Swaim learn as the governor’s speechwriter? That you can admire a man, agree with his ideas, even like him, but you can never, never, ever trust a politician.” (*The Daily Herald (Provo, UT)*)

“*The Speechwriter* is alternately hilarious and just plain sad. And it is well-written.” (*Independent Mail (Anderson, SC)*)

“Enjoyable.” (*Washington Free Beacon (Washington, DC)*)

“A rollicking jaunt through Mark Sanford's last term as governor.” (*The Ironic Cherry (blog)*)

"The governor's marital infidelity . . . and other moral shortcomings take a back seat here. And deservedly so, for Swaim's approach is far more entertaining and, if you care about language, far more indicting. He describes an administration in which the mistreatment of language—and staff—was commonplace." (*NPR's Book Concierge (Best Books of 2015)*)

#### About the Author

Barton Swaim, a native South Carolinian, attended the University of South Carolina and the University of Edinburgh. From 2007 to 2010 he worked for Mark Sanford, South Carolina's governor, as a communications officer and speechwriter. He lives in Columbia, South Carolina, with his wife, Laura, and three daughters, and writes regularly for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Times Literary Supplement*. *The Speechwriter* is his first book.

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The Speechwriter

1

#### THE DUMPS

About twenty of us sat in the conference room waiting for the boss to walk in. The room was warm and smelled faintly of sweat. A pair of law clerks quietly debated the correct pronunciation of "debacle." At last Paul asked what the meeting was about. "I think," June said, "the governor wants to apologize to the staff." She said it with a wry look, but nobody laughed.

Stewart looked up from a magazine. "He already did that," he snapped. "He apologized to his mistress, and to his family—."

"In that order," Paul said.

Nervous laughter made its way around the room.

"I don't think we can handle another apology," Stewart went on, throwing down the magazine. "Because let me tell you, I know what an apology from this governor sounds like, and it ain't really an apology. It's more like—."

He paused.

Someone said, "More like what?"

"I'll just put it this way. His apologies tend to have an unapologetic tone."

Another minute passed, and then the governor walked in. All went silent. He sat in the only remaining chair and made jokes with one of the interns.

A week before, he had been openly talked about by influential commentators in New York and Washington as a presidential candidate. In national media reports, his name had been routinely used in conjunction with the terms "principled stand," "courageous," "crazy," "unbalanced," and "interesting." The party's biggest donors had begun to call him and to pay him visits. Now he was the punch line to a thousand jokes; letters demanding his resignation appeared in newspapers; the word "impeachment" circulated through the capital like rumors of an assassination plot.

“How are y’all?” he said. “Wait—don’t answer that.”

More nervous laughter.

“Aahh.” That was his preface to saying anything significant. “Aahh. But that’s why I called you in here. I just wanted to say the obvious, which is the obvious.”

Paul gave me a look of incomprehension.

“I mean, the obvious—which is that I caused the storm we’re now in. And that’s made everything a little more difficult for everybody in here, and for that I want to say the obvious, which is that I apologize. But you know”—he rose up in his seat to an upright posture—“you know, I was telling one of the boys”—the governor had four sons—“this morning. We were up early and I was saying, ‘Look, the sun came up today.’ It’s a beautiful thing to see. And it’s a beautiful thing regardless of the storms of life. Of which this is one.”

People shifted in their seats and glanced at each other questioningly.

“As it happens,” the governor went on, “and before this storm started, I’d been reading Viktor Frankl’s book about being in a concentration camp. And it’s just incredible to me how you can find beauty, you can find reasons to keep going, in the most appalling circumstances. And I just wanted to say to everybody, keep your head up. Keep pushing forward. And let’s not be in the dumps here. The sun came up today. Aahh. We’re not in a concentration camp. So let’s not stay in the dumps. We can’t make much progress on the important things if we’re in the dumps. So if you’re in the dumps, get out. I mean, of the dumps. Get out of the dumps.”

Nobody spoke.

“Aahh. So, anybody want to say anything? Comments? Pearls of wisdom?”

Still no one spoke.

“Okay, well—.”

“Actually I’d like to say something.” That was Stella.

“Okay.”

“I just want to say—. Actually maybe I shouldn’t.”

“No, it’s okay,” the governor smiled, “go ahead.”

“No, I think I won’t.”

“You sure?”

“Mm. Yeah.”

The governor walked out. Stewart looked around the room and said, “For those of you who are newer to the office, that was the governor’s version of a pep talk. Do you feel pepped?”

Later that afternoon I asked Stella what she'd been intending to say. She had often told me that she didn't like her job—her husband wanted her to keep it for the income—and had often tried to get herself fired. I thought this might have been one of those times. She narrowed her eyes and pointed at me. “You know what I was about to say? You really want to know? I was going to say, ‘You know what, governor—maybe what you say is true. Maybe we should be thankful that we're not in a concentration camp.’” You could hear a slight tremor in her voice. “‘And maybe we take the sun rising for granted, and we shouldn't. But you're not really the one who should tell us that right now. And if you do say anything, it should be more like Sorry I flushed all your work down the toilet, people. Sorry I made you all a joke. Sorry about your next job interview, the one where you're going to be brought in as a curiosity and then laughed at.’”

“Stella, I wish you had said that.”

She had tears in her eyes.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Eva Byrd:**

The knowledge that you get from *The Speechwriter: A Brief Education in Politics* may be the more deep you looking the information that hide in the words the more you get considering reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to recognise but *The Speechwriter: A Brief Education in Politics* giving you thrill feeling of reading. The copy writer conveys their point in certain way that can be understood simply by anyone who read the idea because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. This book also makes your vocabulary increase well. Making it easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We suggest you for having that *The Speechwriter: A Brief Education in Politics* instantly.

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What is your hobby? Have you heard which question when you got learners? We believe that that question was given by teacher to their students. Many kinds of hobby, Every person has different hobby. Therefore you know that little person just like reading or as examining become their hobby. You need to know that reading is very important along with book as to be the factor. Book is important thing to include you knowledge, except your own teacher or lecturer. You discover good news or update with regards to something by book. A substantial number of sorts of books that can you decide to try be your object. One of them is actually The Speechwriter: A Brief Education in Politics.

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