



## **Scribble, Scribble, Scribble: Writings on Ice Cream, Obama, Churchill & My Mother**

*Simon Schama*

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**Scribble, Scribble, Scribble: Writings on Ice Cream, Obama, Churchill & My Mother** Simon Schama 'Wednesday brought a pungent sheepy smell emanating from the greyish lamb and barley soup my mother optimistically called 'Taste of the Garden of Eden'. Expel me, please. Haddock in the air? That would be Thursday. The faintest whiff of roasting garlic? That would be what my sister and I uncharitably dubbed 'Friday Night Memorial Chicken'; a venerable object smeared on the breasts with a dab of marmite meant to cheer the bird up as it emerged defeated from the oven. Rattling inside the brittle cavity was that one solitary clove of garlic; the exotic knobble that my mother conceded as a romantic touch amid the iron regimen of her unvarying weekly routine.'

Cookery is not necessarily a subject one immediately associates with Simon Schama - one of Britain's most distinguished historians and commentators. But this selection of his occasional writings is a treasure trove of surprises. Passionate, provocative, entertaining and informative, *Scribble, Scribble, Scribble* ranges far and wide: from cookery and family to Barack Obama, from preaching and Shakespeare to Victorian sages, from Charlotte Rampling and Hurricane Katrina to 'The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of *The Osbournes*'.

Never predictable, always stimulating, *Scribble, Scribble, Scribble* allows us to view the world, in all its diversity, through the eyes of one of its most original inhabitants.

## Scribble, Scribble, Scribble: Writings on Ice Cream, Obama, Churchill & My Mother Details

Date : Published August 5th 2010 by Bodley Head (first published 2010)

ISBN : 9781847921314

Author : Simon Schama

Format : Hardcover 427 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Writing, Essays, History, Art

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# From Reader Review Scribble, Scribble, Scribble: Writings on Ice Cream, Obama, Churchill & My Mother for online ebook

## Michael says

I'm very glad I read these essays. They are brilliantly written, thoughtful pieces on food, art, slavery, British and American history, family and more. The author is so quick, so smart, and so witty it makes these essays a delight and a whirlwind to read. There is so much that is so good in all of this. I loved it.

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## Howard Cincotta says

In this delightful collection from 2010, historian Simon Schama's ranges from European history and Dutch painting to contemporary foreign policy, reassessments of Churchill, and fond food recipes. Interestingly, the volume contains none of what later became his largest endeavor – two volumes and a BBC series – *The Story of the Jews*.

As noted in another review, the contrast between Schama and fellow British Jew, Cambridge graduate, and historian Tony Judt is fascinating. Judt debates the grim conundrum of Israel's occupation of the West Bank; Schama discusses why Victorian aesthete and critic John Ruskin hated Dutch painting (too materialistic, without a "spiritual" dimension). Judt ponders the new world order after Communism's collapse; Schama analyzes recipes for Bolognese sauce, voyaging on the Queen Mary 2, Hollywood profiles, and Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Henry IV, Part Two*.

In a way, this is unfair to Schama: he has written tomes on weighty subjects, after all – histories of the Dutch, the French Revolution, and Britain (three volume's worth) – but clearly he has said yes to more magazine and book-review queries, on more topics, than Judt has.

Language is another dimension that sets the two writers apart. Schama cheerfully admits that editors have been trying to cut down on his array of adjectives since he was in school. By contrast, Judt is precise and lucid, while Schama's prose is replete with flourishes and declamatory high drama. Schama loves writing (and talking, I suspect), and he wants you to know it.

Both men, in the era of George W. Bush, write about the origins and history of anti-Americanism in Europe. Schama describes the appalled reactions of such 19th-century visitors as Fanny Trollope (*Domestic Manners of the Americans*) and Charles Dickens (*American Notes*), whose books etched the image of Americans as boors for a generation. Judt examines 20th-century anti-Americanism as limned by a number of French intellectuals that, as he points out, are more about French anxieties than American realities.

Schama concludes his essay with an acute observation that is especially pertinent for the Bush years: "But of all the character flaws that Europeans have ascribed to Americans, nothing has contributed more to widening the Atlantic than national egocentricity."

Or as Franny Trollope put it more than 150 years earlier: "[Americans believe] that they are the first and best of the human race, that nothing is to be learnt, but what they are able to teach, and that nothing is worth happening, which they do not possess."

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## **Lm Huffman says**

I struggled with this one. I love Simon Schama so much, but I found this to be so dense and at times impenetrable. Just because he wrote it, didn't mean it needed to be included in this collection. Less is more.

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## **Linda says**

How can Simon Schama know so much about so many diverse things? There is unevenness in the articles; however, when I put down a book and feel inspired by what was written, I know I have experienced time well spent with a book. So I will go on to watch the movies of Charlotte Rampling, to read *Interrupted LIfe*, and to experiment with blood-orange and rosewater sorbet. And I will continue to reflect on Schama's praise for the historiographer in holding on to a broad perspective for history: "...the two arms of our metier [popular and scholarly history] are mutually strengthening, and that without an abiding sense that we can work to make the past live for the public, we will doom ourselves to an intellectual graveyard: that of the connoisseurship of the dead."

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## **Sharen says**

A collection of his reviews, articles and essays. Simon Schama's knowledge is eclectic and vast; his range of interests covers art, history and geography around the globe.

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## **A. says**

Why does it always take me so long to work through collected essays? I think it's because finishing each essay gives that feeling of 'done' and let's me walk away for a while guilt-free.

There is absolutely no question about the quality of the writing in this work. It's amazing. There is a remarkable diversity of subject matter (as the sub-title suggests) and inevitably I found some of them more riveting than others. A number of the pieces on art are in fact catalogue introductions and so not especially engaging if ( like me) you are not very familiar with the artist in question.

Overall a very good read.

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## **Lindz says**

Lets get this straight. 'Scribble, Scribble, Scribble' Simon Schama showing off. Flouncing with nouns, dazzling with adjectives. Look, look, see what I can do. When writing a review on a biography of Winston Churchill, he talks about the power of Churchill as an operatic orator, which the author did not really discuss in the bio.

Though I have to admit I have always loved a writer who knows how to throw his weight in synonyms around.

This a collection of essays, reviews, philosophies, and in some cases recipes Schama has belted out over a 20 year career. Like many collections it can be hit and miss. Schama is at his best when he is a deep historical rant on ideas. The difference between narrative and scholarship, which keeps cropping up; whether talking about Churchill, Thomas Malaculey, Isaiah Berlin, himself with his series (a history of Britain) Barack Obama, and George Bush (or there lack of). The very notion of how to create history with words to explain an hypothesis seems very importnat

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## David says

Have they changed the rules without telling me? Is it now obligatory for intellectuals, having established their reputation in one discipline (maybe even two) to try to dazzle us further by writing essays (or, God forbid, entire books) about completely random stuff in which they appear to have no particular expertise?\* I expect to find Professor Schama writing about history, or art, or art history. I'm not so sure I care that much about what he has to say about travelling, cooking, eating, and I am absolutely sure I don't want to read his writing about baseball. And while he is obviously within his rights to include the transcripts of lectures he was invited to deliver on some honorific occasion, omitting them might have been wiser. Because, frankly, that one lecture "Gothic Language: Carlyle, Ruskin and the Morality of Exuberance" might have been terrific when delivered in person with Professor Schama's indisputable panache. But, in print, it seems so ridiculously overblown that it borders on parody, like some kind of academic in-joke.

You don't need to show off for me, Professor Schama, **I know** you're smart as all get out, and it's just kind of embarrassing for everyone when the compulsion to rub our noses in it gets the better of you. For example:

as an introduction,

You always remember where it was that you first read the books that changed your life.  
I first read *Macaulay: The Shaping of the Historian* in September 1976 in rocky, Medusa-infested coves on the Aegean islands of Hydra and Spetsai.

might be a perfectly true statement, but it doesn't endear you to the reader. It's a little ... obnoxious, perhaps. Not that pleasing the reader is the be all and end all, but a few of these essays provoke the question of whether they were written to be read, or just admired.

So I didn't care much for the recipes, the baseball essay, the fluffier travel pieces; it's a matter of personal taste. I'm too much of a philistine to be interested in essays about Macaulay, Carlyle, and Ruskin and their views about how history should be written. It was a nice gesture to include an essay about your history tutor at Oxford, but very few people are likely to read it all the way through.

Before I seem to be a complete grouch, let me say clearly that some of the essays in this book are extraordinary. Ten of them are sublime. These are the essays focusing on the visual arts. Schama's writing

about art is hypnotic - you want him never to stop (even when Ruskin is involved). These essays make up about a quarter of this book. They alone are well worth the entrance fee. If someone could persuade Professor Schama to stick to his strong points and write another dozen such essays, I for one would be happy. I am not ever likely to be interested in Professor Schama's recipes. Not for ice cream, not for cheese souffle, not for bolognese sauce. But if he writes about art, I'll read every word.

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\*: Well, not completely random stuff -- one standard gimmick is to travel somewhere a little off the beaten path (or not) and cobble together some kind of impressions piece. It appears to be a common belief that such pieces are necessarily fascinating (public intellectual in exotic location = searing insights etc etc); the results are often fodder for the Sunday supplements, but rarely attain a shelf-life beyond that. I guess what I'm suggesting is that not every newspaper or magazine article merits inclusion in a collection like this.

It seems unfair to single Professor Schama out for criticism in this respect; I have on my desk Updike's hefty "Higher Gossip", a collection of pieces that weighs in at 500 pages. Mostly, it's great stuff, but I would have much preferred the skinnier, 350-page collection struggling to get out, the one that omitted Updike's thoughts about golf, dinosaurs, cosmology, Mars, and Einstein, and where the editor's gentle reminder that transcripts of past speeches often age badly had been heeded.

And why, in the name of God, is Steven Pinker now writing books that attempt (in a highly dubious, completely unreadable fashion, if you ask me) to analyze the history of human violence. Books that go on for 800 pages. Are these guys now being paid by the kilogram?

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## James says

I have a huge crush on Simon Schama. I can't even count the times I've watched *History of Britain*. As history documentaries go, it's first rate, and, closet Anglophile that I am, it's just my cuppa, but I watch it over and over again because I can't get enough of his voice and his swishy, dishy, smarty-pants-with-his-hair-down-Oxbridge schtick. In one episode, he sneeringly describes Thomas Cromwell as "a jumped-up Putney Clever Dick."

I'm pleased to report, for crushing purposes, that the tone in these collected magazine pieces and lectures matches with the delicious tv presenter voice pretty well. I read *Citizens* a few years ago and was a little disappointed. I found it sort of meandering and lacking in the wicked verbal elan that had so taken my fancy. Of the pieces on offer here, I was most charmed by the food writing, which was no accident, since it's there that he pours on the adorable most shamelessly. I was impressed that he included two reminiscences of his mother's cooking - one dismissive, one rhapsodic - side by side, as though he wants us to know that as far as he's concerned, history schmistory, rhetoric trumps truth-telling every time.

I think Schama's a really astute art critic. *The Power of Art* was a great show, and I always enjoy his criticism in the New Yorker, but some of the art essays here would really have benefited from color plates. This book included one muddy black and white reproduction per piece of criticism, and they were utterly useless.

The essay on British politics made even less sense to me than Chuck Klosterman's Lakers vs. Celtics essay, my previous winning choice for the Piece-of-English-prose-that-I-actually-finished-that-didn't-engender-a-single-cogent-thought.

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**Matt says**

Man, Schama has ruined me for reading anyone else or in attempts at my own writing. Say what you will, but I enjoy his over the topness. Perhaps since I am in the sciences and have to read very droll pieces day in and day out, I find his style very refreshing and always spot-on. Does he come across as full of himself sometimes? Yes. Does he use 10 words where perhaps none would suffice? Yes. So what? If those bees get in your bonnet, read something that you already agree with or that doesn't make points as matter-of-fact. To be sure, this is recreational reading and should be enjoyed as such.

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**Rob Shurmer says**

anything Schama writes is worth the time

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**Finlay says**

Loved some of them, abandoned others. Had to look up a bunch of words. Perhaps a little too clever.

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**John says**

Overall, I thought it a good read for a Schama fan, as his humor translates well to the written page. The travel, food, and memoir sections were the most interesting to me, while I had to bail on the art-centered essays after a while as I just didn't have the background to follow the "inside baseball" discussions. The final section focusing on history got a bit dense, though the last entry on the making of a Red Sox fan redeemed things! (grin)

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**Karen-Leigh says**

Loved the title and the cover. Many very good reviews of interesting books. Many articles on subjects that bored the bejesus out of me as I struggled to read my way through..like wading through molasses. Very erudite and in spots had me questioning my own intelligence and attention span. I have this book on my Kindle...if it were a paperback I would give it away because I will not reread this one.

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**Ann says**

I am reading it now and love love love the language. I am savouring his use of metaphor, cross references and imagery, the combination of which, alarmingly for fellow cafe patrons, induce reading and laughing out loud. The introduction had me howling when he goes off on a tangent about his own handwriting and so far

the stories, both published in the New Yorker, are entertaining, interesting and humorous.

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