



# Sophia

*Michael Bible*

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“You’ll smile with joy turning every page.” —Barry Hannah

Reverend Maloney isn’t the world’s greatest spiritual advisor. He drinks gin out of his coffee cup and has sex dreams about the Holy Ghost. His best friend Eli isn’t perfect either, but he’s a chess genius, so Maloney sees an opportunity in traveling around the country so Eli can win major chess tournament after chess tournament (while Maloney pockets Eli’s winnings).

Chased by a blind headhunter named Jack Cataract, the Reverend, his girlfriend, and Eli race across North America and around New York City, from Washington Square Park to a jetski ride to the great green gown of Lady Liberty.

In this uproariously funny, unabashedly sexy, and highly-anticipated novel, Michael Bible delivers a devastating story about the American South, chess tournaments, and one debaucherous reverend’s struggle with spirituality. In the spirit of Nicholson Baker and Barry Hannah, Sophia is an adventure with a raunchy and obviously flawed cast of characters, written with enormous heart.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Sophia Details

Date : Published December 8th 2015 by Melville House

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Author : Michael Bible

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# From Reader Review Sophia for online ebook

## Sophia Ramos says

This book was a little...out there for my tastes, if I'm being honest. It was almost a novelized version of the "Trashin' the Camp" scene in Tarzan, with so much going on that you kind of forget that it's forming a cohesive whole until you pan out. In truth, it wasn't until the last 10 pages or so that things finally began to click. It's a short read, and though I probably won't ever pick it up again, I can see the appeal, to the right kind of audience. I don't think I was exactly that audience, though.

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## Heather says

This was a weird book. I really don't know what else to say about it other than that. Much of the writing was quite lyrical and poetic in its way, but the story was just weird. Not my cup of tea. But it checked a box in my 2018 Read Harder Challenge.

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## Pop Bop says

Unfiltered Southern Goth-Raunch

In the 1960's I was very much influenced by Richard Brautigan, whose left-coast, summer of love pieces and books, ("Trout Fishing in America"), featured humor, imagination and endlessly inventive metaphors. Brautigan's heroes were often naive lost souls who muddled through, or were bemused by, the culture around them. I thought of Brautigan while I was reading this book, and it seems to me that the comparison is passingly fair.

Bible's characters are more energetic and more quirky in that loud, crazy, booze soaked, sunstroked, humid style that marks Southern-goth-crazy, and that is just fine by me. Delivery is rapid fire, and thoughts and observations ping-pong from subject to subject like those little balls in lottery number-picking machines. The book is practically a catalogue of every aspect, big and small, important or trivial, of current popular culture.

There's a plot, but it's not much, it doesn't really pick up until half-way through, and it doesn't matter anyway. Rev. Maloney and Eli could just never have left their front porch at all, and the book wouldn't suffer one whit. The humor and wordplay alternate among sly, base, clever, raunchy, impolitic, insightful, satirical, and arrestingly perceptive, sometimes within the same paragraph. And once Rev. Maloney builds up a head of steam, which happens every few pages, the reader has to just get out of the way and try to keep up.

So, this is wonderful, entertaining and rewarding stuff. A great find. (Please note that I received a free advance copy of this book without a review requirement, or any influence regarding review content should I choose to post a review. Apart from that I have no connection at all to either the author or the publisher of this book.)

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## **Geoffrey says**

The Barry Hannah blurb got me to read this quirky effort. I liked it well enough that I'll try some of the author's other books. That said, this didn't seem like much more than a collection of clever aphorisms and down-homey local color anecdotes strung together in something resembling a plot.

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## **Rebecca says**

It kind of reminded me of Brautigan's "Trout Fishing in America," only with chess, instead. Nice stream of consciousness/absurd.

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## **ril says**

Put C.D. Wright and Warren Ellis into a blender. Pull out the disjointed poetics of Wright and mash them with the unforgiving urban imagery of Ellis, now watch the story happen.

What starts out as a rough stream of conscious novel turns into a beautiful and haunting jaunt into the inner-workings of reverend who is trying to find the best way to die.

I wish I didn't have to loan my copy to others to read; else I would have so many highlighted lines to munch and mull over.

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## **Brian Alan Ellis says**

## **Chris Lazinsky says**

It's always fun to read the fiction of someone who used to sell you fiction. It seems to me that should be more inevitable than it is, but never mind, this is one hell of a read.

"I'm a holy fool on the hunt for something worthy."

Sophia pretty much opens with that, and what follows delivers on that promise. I could namedrop Barry Hannah here, but this book has two little legs of it's own to stand on (albeit with a wobbly, boozy, I'm-too-southern-to-be-an-existentialist swagger, soooo.... maybe Barry Hannah?).

Oh, and Dick Dickerson as the mayor of the once great Southern Bohemia? Seriously, I kinda peed myself a little there.

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## Kristina says

This is a weird book. It's certainly not what I expected. However, I enjoy some weirdness now and then so I kept reading. Overall, I did not like Michael Bible's *Sophia*. Its oddness irritated me and I did not find it charming.

This is the story (and I use the word "story" loosely) of Reverend Maloney and his chess champion friend Eli. They live in the South. They drink and enjoy illegal substances and chase women. Reverend Maloney has sex dreams about a female Holy Ghost. Together, Eli and Maloney go across the country playing in chess tournaments for money. Then the story's narrative (such as it is) falls apart and I have no idea what the hell is going on.

*Sophia* is more like poetry written in short prose-like paragraphs. Maloney speaks directly to Eli and to the reader (although the reader is not acknowledged). There is a *very* loose narrative which falls apart for me when a character named Dick Dickerson kidnaps Eli and Tuesday (female character) and holds them in his "compound" and Maloney gathers up a small army of friends (including, but not limited to, cosplaying teenagers, a horse named Forever, and an albino Nigerian named Snowball) to rescue them. It's all very strange and improbable and I'm thinking Maloney must be high and imagining it all or dreaming it. It all gets weirder from there when he and Darling become fugitives from the law and escape to New York City (with his sailboat). All this weirdness is interspersed with short paragraphs describing the deaths of various saints. I do not know if these saint stories are accurate retellings or if Bible made them up, but sometimes they are more interesting than Maloney's adventures.

Here's an example of one of the saint stories:

St. Anne is bound with chains to the stake by her ankles, knees, waist, chest, and neck. She is burned slowly. She does not scream. There is music in her ears from a small boy practicing his flute on a roof in the distance. His mother would not let him go to the execution until he finishes his scales (36).

And if you like that, here's a description of the rescue attempt of Eli and Tuesday:

There are mortars flying from the windows and Snowball is dropping bombs from the balloon. Fire at will. Finger is pinned down behind an old sharecropper's cabin. I ride Forever through the gate and Nono and the Malchows flank right. There, in the top-floor window is Dick Dickerson with his robe open and his privates flapping in the night. I fire off three rounds but he vanishes behind the velvet curtains. Here come the bullies out the door, Eli, and I put rubber bullets along their chests. One gets a throwing star off and it whizzes by my face so close I feel the breeze. Al and Hal come in with their staffs and hold them down and cast spells (70).

While the writing is lyrical and vivid, the story does nothing for me. It's a very short book (120 pages), but it's very long to read. I want to enter into the book's world. I want to forget I'm reading a book.

Unfortunately, this book to me is more of a literary experiment and didn't enthrall me. Chapter 12 made no sense to me at all. I'm guessing "Bc4 Qh4+" (and all the other notations like that) are chess moves, but I'm only casually familiar with the game and haven't played it in years. People being moved around as chess pieces is interesting, but I wasn't quite sure *why* this was happening or even *how*. The struggle between

Maloney and his supporters and the (turned traitor?) Nono and a guy named Cataract is played out via chess movements and I'm baffled. I suppose if I read the book a few more times and took the time to think about it, I may appreciate it more, but I'm not inclined to do so. If you like weirdness, give this book a try. It's not that it's bad, it's just unusual and it's the kind of unusual that I don't enjoy.

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### **Dusty says**

My feeling is this book tries, and in many ways succeeds, to emulate Barry Hannah's Ray. But outside the literary and social landscape the 1980 south, the provocations just aren't provocative. Nothing lands. It's like a caricature of someone I've never heard of before.

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### **David says**

I'm glad I first read Bible's 'Simple Machines', if only to get a sense of his emphasis on provocative sentences. 'Sophia' is compiled of such sentences, but to a narrative effect that demands a second and third read of this short novel. No spoiler here, but all the beauty, hedonism, and irreverence of this story wait until the final sentence of the book to come into true revelatory blossom.

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### **Erica says**

Far out road trip. Fun to read.

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### **Chris Roberts says**

The Preacher as problem child...

Is so over and over...

The Bible is a book...

Written by (a) flawed man/men...

It reads from left to right...

Who exactly scribed it...

Everyone and no one...

A collaboration or solitary acolyte...

And what we are left with...

A collection of shady stories...

Prophets like water...everywhere...

Wino spelled backward is Apostle...

Miracles a contact high...unreal...

.....

Before there was a Bible...

Humans acted instinctively...

Wrong and right were natural born...

Not one damn preacher...

Parables were burned in the fire...

As one worshiped self...

Not The Good Book...

No metaphoric abstractions...

In the days of black and white...

Kill your fellow or not, it was a choice...

Absent cyclic self-reflection...

And live with it...

Who the hell wants to know...

About the dead man down the road...

Stand away from me, I want to burn and burn...

Chris Roberts

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**Jafar says**

"Every woman's a feminist until they need a jar of pickles opened."

The narrator is clearly out of his mind - which makes this book a great read.

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**Melissa says**

Wild ride of a stream of consciousness novel. The voice of the narrator Maloney has a cadence like a Holy Roller. So glad Liberty rec'd this on an All the Books! episode otherwise I might have missed it.

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