

John Rodwan Jr., author of *Fighters and Writers*, on what the two have in common

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John Rodwan Jr. has long been writing critically about music, boxing and literature. His essays have found homes in *The American Interest*, *The Mailer Review*, *Blood and Thunder*, *Open Letters Monthly*, and *Spot Literary Magazine*, among others. Last year, he published a book, *Fighters and Writers*, examining the relationship between the two through personal experience and historical precedent. He will be in [Denver tomorrow reading from the book at The Bookery Nook](#). We talked to him about how fighting and writing are similar and his experience with Colorado.

Westword: *Why do you think fighting inspires writing, both in relation to other sports and in general?*

John Rodwan Jr.: Fights are conflicts with winners and losers. There's always drama in such contests. The boxing world is also filled with colorful and fascinating characters. All this might also be true with other sports, of course. Unlike in team sports, however, fighters confront their challenges as individuals, and writers have long seen a resemblance between their own activity and boxing.

WW: *What do you think is the relationship between fighting and writing?* **JR:** I identify two schools of thoughts on this, and I consider them both in the title essay of *Fighters & Writers*. In one corner are those who see meeting between combatants pursuing victory by the unmediated imposition of their wills as akin to writers' lonely quests for the elusive truth. In the other corner are those who recognize boxing as a far more complex endeavor involving intelligence and cunning as well as physical strength and skill. Rather than something elemental and true, boxing involves deception and trickery. The thinking here is that boxers can evade any punch they can see coming, making it necessary for them to conceal their intentions with misdirection, just as writers must concoct stories and devise fiction. Some see boxing as free of artifice. Others see it as full of it. Writers from both camps recognize something of themselves in fighters, and this has been the case at least since Homer told tales.

WW: *The content of this book is presented in a somewhat unusual manner (i.e., not a curated collection of essays nor strictly literary analysis). How did you decide on the way you would present this material?* **JR:** I wanted *Fighters and Writers* to be something different from either a conventional sports book or a collection of literary essays. All the essays involve both boxing and literature, but some lean very much toward one or the other. I wanted to explore the various ways boxing infiltrates writers' imaginations. This meant looking at books about figures like Muhammad Ali and the ways novelists incorporate the sport into their fiction. It also meant writing personal essays about my own experiences in which boxing played a part. Variety keeps things interesting, and I wanted to include some surprises.

WW: *I saw that this is your second Colorado reading. How do you think this one will be different?* **JR:** In Boulder late last year, I read from an essay that covers expressive activities in addition to fighting and writing, such as music, movies and tattooing -- one of the more autobiographical pieces in the book. In Denver I plan to recognize the 75th anniversary of Joe Louis's first fight with Max Schmeling -- the first of two epic bouts between the longest-reigning heavyweight champion and a German fighter associated with the Nazis soon before World War II -- with a reading that examines those intensely symbolic episodes. Colorado has been very welcoming to me -- a resident of Portland, Oregon, who has also lived in Detroit, Michigan; Brooklyn, New York; and Geneva, Switzerland. In fact, after the reading at the Bookery Nook, I'm heading to the Durango Independent Film Festival, which is screening a short film I wrote and my wife directed.

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