

= Debby Applegate =

Debby Applegate ( born 1968 ) is an American historian and biographer . She is the author of *The Most Famous Man in America : The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher* , for which she won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography .

Born in Eugene , Oregon in 1968 , Applegate attended Amherst College as an undergraduate , where she began a two @-@ decade fascination with famous alumnus Henry Ward Beecher , a 19th @-@ century abolitionist minister who was later the subject of a widely publicized sex scandal . She made Beecher the subject of her dissertation in American Studies at Yale , where she received a Ph.D. in 1998 . After several more years of research , Applegate published *The Most Famous Man in America* , which was praised by critics and awarded the Pulitzer Prize . She has announced that her second book will be a biography of New York City brothel @-@ keeper Polly Adler .

= = Biography = =

Born in Eugene , Oregon , Applegate grew up in Clackamas , Oregon , graduating from Clackamas High School in 1985 . She was raised in what she described as an " unusual religious environment " : her mother , from a Mormon family , became a New Thought minister , while her father was an Irish Catholic . She graduated summa cum laude from Amherst College in 1989 and was a Sterling Fellow at Yale University , where she earned a Ph.D. in American Studies in 1998 .

Applegate has taught at Yale , Wesleyan University , and Marymount Manhattan College . Her contributions have appeared in *The Journal of American History* and *The New York Times* .

Applegate was a founding member of Biographers International Organization ( BIO ) , and served as its interim president in 2009 . She currently serves as the Chair of BIO 's Advisory Committee .

She is married to Bruce Tulgan , a business writer whose books include *It 's Okay To Be The Boss* . They live in New Haven , Connecticut .

= = The Most Famous Man in America = =

As an undergraduate student worker at Amherst College , Applegate was assigned to assemble an exhibit on a famous alumnus and selected Henry Ward Beecher , a 19th @-@ century minister known for his abolitionist preaching and widely publicized sex scandal . Applegate described him as " unlike any religious figure I ? d ever seen . I loved his very modern sense of humor , his irreverence , and his joyful , ecumenical approach to religion and life in general . " She later made him the subject of her undergraduate senior thesis and her PhD dissertation at Yale University . After graduation , Applegate signed a publishing contract to write a biography of Beecher .

Applegate 's initial chapters were written in what she considered an overly academic voice , so to write a biography with popular appeal , she studied fiction writing , including techniques for suspense and pornographic writing . She structured the resulting book as a psychological thriller .

Though she had originally hoped to publish the book during the 1998 Lewinsky scandal , in which US President Bill Clinton was discovered to have had a sexual relationship with a White House intern , the research took several years longer than she had initially planned . The book was finally released in 2006 by Doubleday .

= = = Reception = = =

*The Most Famous Man in America* was sold well and was generally praised by critics . NPR selected it as one of the year 's best nonfiction books , stating that the book " convinces readers of the truth of that swaggering title " . *Kirkus Reviews* called it a " beautifully written biography of America 's one best @-@ known preacher ... An exceptionally thorough and thoughtful account of a spectacular career that helped shape and reflect national preoccupations before , during and after the Civil War . " *Publishers Weekly* wrote that " this assessment of Beecher is judicious and critical . Applegate gives an insightful account . " In a review for *The Boston Globe* , Katherine A. Powers

called the book a " fantastic story with novelistic flair and penetration into the ever @-@ changing motives and expediencies of its many actors . " Michael Kazin , reviewing the book for The New York Times , stated that Applegate 's writing occasionally " loses its force in a thicket of personal details " , but concluded that the book is " a biography worthy of its subject " .

On April 16 , 2007 , the book was announced as the winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography . Applegate said of her win , " Half of it is just good luck ... Had it come out four years ago , I don 't think the climate was ready for it . The religious right intersection with politics is very important now . "

= = Madam : The Notorious Life and Times of Polly Adler = =

As of 2011 , Applegate was working on a biography of Polly Adler , New York City 's notorious Prohibition @-@ era brothel @-@ keeper whose 1953 memoir A House is Not a Home became a New York Times Bestseller and a 1963 film starring Shelley Winters . The decision to write the book came after a year of research into 1920s New York City cultural history , during which Applegate discovered Adler 's memoir and grew fascinated by it . Applegate 's book is to be titled Madam : The Notorious Life and Times of Polly Adler and will be published by Doubleday .