

“Standing on the threshold of American history is one of its most colorful and controversial figures, Captain John Smith (29).” Right off the bat, Marshall Fishwick challenges the traditional images engrained in many people’s minds of John Smith in his review titled, “Was John Smith a Liar?” The title itself can raise many questions in one’s mind about John Smith’s supposed life and the article is no different.

Marshall Fishwick’s main purpose in writing this review was to get people thinking that John Smith might not have been the man many people believe he was. Fishwick accomplishes this in very many ways. First of all, he refers to the writings of a Hungarian historian named Lewis L. Kropf. In the British *Notes and Queries* he claimed that many of the places and people in Smiths accounts were purely fictional. He also stated that most likely John Smith never actually got to South Eastern Europe as he claimed he did in 1601-02. He also thought that John Smith was a complete liar. The research done by Kropf stunned many Smith supporters because if Smith’s accounts in Hungary couldn’t be trusted, how could they be trusted in Virginia?

Fishwick was sure to not only include the research of one person in his review though. Sixty years after the writings of Kropf had been published, another Hungarian historian named Laura Polanyi Striker came to restore John Smiths reputation. Striker proved much of Smith’s account to be true. How could someone’s research be completely opposite another’s? Kropf couldn’t find any of the names that Smith mentioned in his account most because of gross misspellings. When Kropf couldn’t find the names in the archives he called Smith a liar. When Striker did more in depth research and had more attention to detail she discovered these errors. “‘Ebersbaught’ was Carl von Herbertsdorf. ‘Kissel’ was Hanns Jacob Khisl... ‘Volda’ was actually Folta...(110)” Fishwick further emphasized the idea that Smith’s stories could be true

by writing about the studies of Dr. Franz Pichler. In one of Smith's accounts he described some battle plans where he used fireworks to make the Turks believe that they were being attacked from the left. When Smith sent his troops, they overran the Turks from the right. Kropf believed this battle was pure fiction. Dr. Pichler decided to re-enact the events on the same terrain and as far as he could tell it was very possible to accomplish.

If Fishwick's main purpose was indeed to get people to question the reality of the John Smith story, he did a very good job. Fishwick doesn't just draw conclusions for the reader, he presents information and points for both sides and then allows the reader to come to their own conclusion. I think this is probably the best way the point could have been achieved. He doesn't try to change what the reader thinks about John Smith. Fishwick simply tries to get the reader to realize that the traditional story of John Smith that we're told in grade school might not be entirely accurate.

This review as seems very unbiased. It presents both sides quite evenly and the purpose of the review was not to persuade. The title of the article can be used to illustrate this point. "Was John Smith a Liar?", is the title when a biased review may have been titled something like "John Smith: A liar". If there is any kind of lean detected in the review it could be towards Striker's arguments. There could have been more argument against the validity of Smith's accounts especially in Virginia. Fishwick mainly referred to arguments that took place in Hungary with the idea that if the events in Hungary were true, then they were also true in Virginia. Unfortunately many people do not know of Smith's adventures previous to Virginia but the article steered more towards the accuracy of the accounts in Hungary.

In his review, Fishwick mainly used the research of others to accomplish his points. He writes of the research done by several Historians. He doesn't use the research to prove a point,

but to help the reader find out what they believe for themselves. In the article there are also several engravings and drawings of depicting John Smith and his heroic journeys from the rare book room in the New York Public Library. Fishwick does a satisfactory job gathering opposing viewpoints, but they seem to be on a matter that isn't quite so controversial because Striker's arguments are widely accepted. It would have been more interesting if the article focused more around Smith's doings in America.

The writing style of this piece is difficult to determine exactly because both a layman and a scholar could equally appreciate it. It is popular because the story of John Smith is already quite well known and many people would find it interesting because they know who John Smith is. It also offers new information that an average person probably wouldn't know. It is scholarly probably because it offers arguments that are extremely precise and on-topic by Historians that have access to rare documents. A scholar would appreciate this article on a different level than average person. The research done by Fishwick would probably be more appreciated by a scholar, and the new ideas presented would be more appreciated by a layman. Fishwick does a good job making the article appeal to both types of readers.

The obvious question that this review has raised is, was John Smith a liar? By drawing no conclusions, Fishwick forces the reader ask themselves that very question. Based in the information in the review alone, most readers would probably come to the conclusion that he was not a liar. Still, no one will ever know if everything in the accounts of Virginia is entirely true. Fishwick's intention may have been to present information mainly on the events in Hungary in order to make the reader pick a side on the Virginia controversy. The purpose in doing this would probably be to make a decision on a debate where there aren't a lot of reliable sources by referring to evidence that could be solidly proved by the archives in Hungary.

In “Was John Smith a Liar?”, by Marshall Fishwick, two contrasting opinions about the validity of John Smith’s account of his time spent in Hungary are presented. The purpose of this was to help the reader make conclusions about what actually happened in Virginia based on evidence in another area. After reading the review, the reader gets the feeling that Fishwick believes that Smith had told many truths. Fishwick’s intention was to provoke questions about the reality of the traditional John Smith story.

“Was John Smith a Liar”, was written in the October 1958 edition of American Heritage by Marshall Fishwick on page 28.