

NOW

VIEWS



BOOKS

GUIDE



INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE SALIS

George penned two pieces for Afterlives of the Writers: one on David Foster Wallace called In Which David Foster Wallace Experiences Several More or Less Embarrassing Posthumous Revelations, To Tell You the Truth, one on Jorge Luis Borges called Tres Borges.

1. When did you first want to become a writer? What were your writing ambitions then? Have they changed since then?

I first started writing with any serious literary intent about halfway through college. Also, I started reading novels seriously around that time after having ditched fantasy and other genre work in high school in order to read science-popularizing books. My nascent ambition was simply to write a story and then another and another. Of course, as momentum built, I became distracted by the external concerns of the writing world, wanting to be published in popular journals, obtain awards and residencies and an MFA, and see my physical novel with blurbs by writers I admired. Thankfully, these distractions did not last too long and I soon realized how circumstantial if not totally meaningless most of those distractions are.

My focus came back totally to the words themselves when I discovered the vast world of buried books and neglected authors. I learned that the work of these writers is usually much better than what people are told to read by the New York Times and other mainstream echo-chambers. It's often the case that these neglected authors write works that are entirely devoid of the distractions named above and more, thus they are pure and fresh and stimulating. And so, in communion with writers such as Ricki Ducornet, Joseph McElroy, Wendy Walker, João Ubaldo Ribeiro, and many others, I write with freedom of intellect and imagination. Instead of writing one story after another, I now think in terms of one novel after another. I'm currently working on an encyclopedic, maximalist novel of cosmic proportions and I have many clear ideas for the novel after that. Words are now my world.

2. What made you want to write a piece on each of the writers that appear in the anthology?

I wanted to pay homage in my small way to writers whose works have dazzled me. There was something of a sidereal happenstance behind my writing the David Foster Wallace story because I had not so long ago read *Infinite Jest* and was completely changed by it. After *Infinite Jest*, I read in close proximity Lipsky's book, Max's biography, and DFW's *Oblivion*, among relevant essays/articles of all kinds and many YouTube videos, so when I found your submissions call I was primed and ready to write that story.

Borges is another brain-altering influence of mine and although I wanted to write a story about him, I wasn't sure what form it would take or if I could even write it, but then I was thumbing through a large anthology of poetry translated from the Spanish and I stumbled on "Borges and I," which I read before but after reading it again I realized my story would be something of a sequel to that piece and then it came quite swiftly.

I also wanted to write a story for Italo Calvino but, as you know, someone else claimed him and unfortunately did not deliver. I would have definitely written a story in which Calvino meets with his created Creator Qfwfq.

3. Do you have a favorite book by each of those writers?

Infinite Jest is, not surprisingly, my favorite DFW book, because it encapsulates so many emotions and experiences. The anxiety, loneliness, hilarity, happiness, and irony of life in America. But I first read *The Pale King* and I think, had DFW been able to truly finish it, it might have been able to surpass or at least be as great as *Infinite Jest*. However, that unfinished novel already comes close as it is, which is a testament to his storytelling powers.

As for Borges, his *Ficciones* is the closest to perfection that a short story collection can come to. I think it's partly due to Borges' style where, instead of writing massive tomes like DFW, he wrote stories that are as dense as any black hole. The energy of each tale is such that you could almost enter through it into a cosmos unto itself.

4. Do you believe in the possibility of an afterlife? And if so, where would you like to go in your afterlife, and what might you do?

No. I think that George Orwell's essay "Can Socialists Be Happy?" demonstrates that an afterlife, at least in the way that most death-fearing humans wish it, would be boring and depressing by nature. Any concept of eternity

experienced by us would condense centuries into seconds, millennia into moments, and after we've lived every conceivable permutation of existence, there would still be more time and more time and more time and more time.... No, the beauty of life lies in its impermanence. An infinite sunset would eventually become an infinite bore. With that said, it is my wish to be able to live life with my wife until we are both content with what existence has to offer, however long that may take, and then to die at the same time in each other's arms, returning to the earth whence we came. From atoms to atoms. But it pains me that this scenario is not very likely.

5. What's the next writing project you're working on?

My debut novel *Sea Above, Sun Below*, is coming out soon from *River Boat Books*. I'm humbled by the talented company I keep with them.

As for the next project, I'm over 100,000 words into a novel titled *Morphological Echoes*. I have a few more years of work ahead of me. It's a book that contains a universe of stories, connected across time and space by the rearrangement of schizoid atoms, the transmutation of the laws of physics. It's a polyphonic, multilinear, omni-temporal epic with thematic and syntactic echoes, taking place in 1940s Japan, 9/11 New York, medieval France, ancient Egypt, Neolithic prehistory, and more, with a broken family at its kaleidoscopic core. The novel begins with a myth, a truth: the moon gives birth to a boy and when he grows weary of life on the landscape of his mother, he yearns for a strange planet called earth. After quarreling with his mother over the course of years, she eventually concedes with sadness, and she breathes in with the elasticity of a balloon, causing the moon boy to sink with her surface, and she breathes out, a supernal sigh that sends him on a trajectory straight toward the earth....

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