



INTERVIEW conducted on 3.10.2019

by

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INTERVIEW with GEORGE WALLACE

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BIODATA.

George Wallace is writer in residence at the Walt Whitman Birthplace, editor of Poetrybay and co-editor of Great Weather for Media, editor of Long Island Quarterly, Walt's Corner and many others. He travels internationally to present his work, perform, lead writing workshops, and lecture on literary topics. A graduate of W.D.Snodgrass(BA Syracuse U) and Marvin Bell (MFA Pacific University). He taught writing at Pace University (NYC), Westchester Community College. Research resident at Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington DC.He had worked as a Peace Corp Volunteer, health care administrator, community organizer, community journalist, active duty medical military officer and local historian and others. George Wallace is recent recipient of the Orpheus Prize (Plovdiv BG), Naim Frasheri Laureateship (Tetovo MC), Corona d'oro First Prize (Korca AL) and the Alexander Gold Medal (UNESCO-Pireus GR), Centro Studii Archivio d'Occidente Award (CSAO, It) Blue Light Book Award, Laureate, National

Beat Poetry Festival, First Poet Laureate, Suffolk County LI NY amongst others.

George Wallace published 35 chapbooks of poetry: I Feed the Flame and the Flame Feed Me, Sacred Language of Wine and Bread, One Hundred Years Among the Daisies, The Sulphur of Troy/ Lo Zolfo di Troia, Smashing Rock and Straight as Razors, A Simple Blue With A Few Intangibles, Drugged by Hollywood,

Beauty Parlors, Trainyards and Everything in Between, Belt Buckles and Abductor of Men, Incident on the Orient Express, Sleeping Beauty's Revenge, The Hard Stuff, Jumping Over The Moon. He was in many anthologies, and journals.

Q. Tell me more about your childhood and early life, family, schooling and education background.

I'm from a working class 'ethnic-New York inner city' family, which migrated to suburban Long Island in the 1950s -- a family with perhaps a disproportionate number of artistically-minded individuals in it (read theatre, visual arts, music, haute couture). We were people who didn't fit in all that well with the old neighborhood, or with the middle class environs of the suburbs. Artists and divergent thinkers are so often outsiders in their communities, and it's up to them in adulthood to find like-minded people with whom they can confederate. That goes for family too -- there was a lot of tension between family members in my house -- so many strong personalities, impossible to hold them all in a cracked little bucket called family. We did the best we could.

As for the schooling and education bit, you can read the specifics on wikipedia or at Poets and Writers if you want -- but my real schooling came as I 'grew into' the loose association of artistically-minded poets and writers that are my community now.

Q. When and how did you start writing and going into literature?

When I realized that I would never make a Bach fugue truly sing, or compose music so moving - so architecturally magnificent or so perfectly attuned to the cosmic tick-tock.

Q. What inspires you into writing?

The overwhelming passion to be a 'little god,' as Vicente Huidobro put it, to be a creator. Writing poetry is an opportunity to reveal the sacred geometry which exists below the surface appearance of material objects, existences, circumstances. The intrinsic life in the world is present in our lives because of our perception of it; but doubly alive for creative people because of their ability to tease out, to re-enact, that intrinsic life in their art. I love to make the dead dust dance.

Q. Tell me more about the genres of literature you are involved in since beginning until now.

Surrealist European writers were big for me for a long time, lesser so Dada deconstructionists and more the Cubists. South American and Greek surrealists have inspired me, too. Beat writing is more than an involvement, Kerouac and Ginsberg, in particular, are mentors (in terms of bop prosody and flow, and Blakeian ecstasies). I have a lifelong affinity to Ferlinghetti's kinetics. In recent years I have begun a serious charge into the Greek classics.

And of course, I am an American, I am both son and daughter, lover and friend, to Walt Whitman.

Q. Your publications since beginning till now?

As one of the cadre of poets outside the mainstream, I think of publications as the offspring of relationships, with individuals and/or with communities of poets. Here in New York, I was a Long Island poet first, and published a few books with David Axelrod Writers Ink), but in recent years my work has been more NYC-based, and some of my very finest recent publications have come through Kat Georges, Peter Carlaftes (Three Room Press).

In England, a number of publishing opportunities have developed through friends and colleagues of Geraldine Green. In Italy, I have a very good relationship with the poet Marco Albertazzi (La Finestra Editrice). And in Macedonia, the Tetova-based Shaip Emirlahu (Ditet e Naimit).

Other US vortices for poetry, and people in them who I've worked with on chapbooks, include

Cleveland poets, particularly Bree Bodner (Green Panda), John Burroughs (Crisis Chronicles) and Dianne Borsenik (NightBallet)

California poets, including Diane Frank (Blue Lights) and Cathy Cusimano (Amethyst & Emerald);

KC poets, initially through my introduction to Prospero's Books by Eero Ruttilla but then with Jason Ryborg (Spartan Press) and Jeanette Powers (Stubborn Mule); And a number of people, through those associated in some way with neo-Beat writing or other special communities, have been important to me, including David Greenspan (Butcher Shop), Shiv Mirabito (Shivastan), Michael Czarnecki (Foothills), Yuyutsu Sharma (Nirala), and James Wagner (Local Gems).

Q. What are the awards and achievements you had received from beginning till now?

I've received a number of literary awards and prizes, particularly in recent years in my visits to the Southern Balkans and the Mediterranean-- including the Naim Frasheri Prize in Tetova, Korona d'Oro in Korca, Orpheus Prize in Plovdiv, Centro Studii Archivio d'Occidente Award in Trento, and Alexander Medal in Salonika. Here in the states I have been named Poet Laureate of Suffolk County, on Long Island, and the first laureate of the National Beat Poetry Conference. Won some poetry prizes (Blue Light Press, CW Post Poetry Prize), too. And of course to have served for nearly a decade as writer in residence at the Walt Whitman Birthplace has been a great honor.

Perhaps my most prized award was one I received from the little town of Faison, NC, the Key to the City, for community service -- that was back in the 70s, when I was a rural health organizer. And I would be remiss if i failed to mention the medal of appreciation I received from Soong Ju Gun county in South Korea that same decade, as a Peace Corps volunteer.

Q. Future plans and projects?

As I enter my 70s, it is time for me to tend my garden. I anticipate pulling back, at least temporarily, on long distance travel, and engage in a more intense focused way on my 'inner' work, and on my engagement with the NYC writing community. This will be a time of redirection, reflection -- a time to 'reap the whirlwind' of my travels.

Thank you very much for this exclusive interview for DIOGEN pro culture magazine, respectable George Wallace.

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