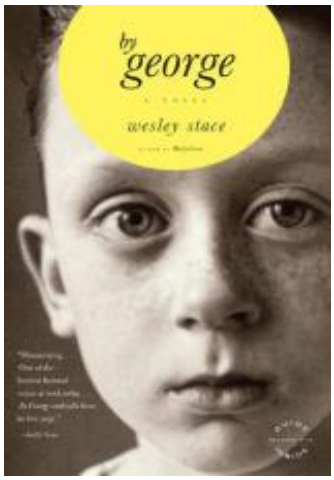
By George

by Wesley Stace



About the Book

Two years ago, singer-songwriter Wesley Stace blew onto the literary scene with his bold and free-wheeling Dickensian comedy **Misfortune**. Now, he is back with another wonderfully entertaining and inventive novel. **By George** is the twisting story of four generations of the curious Fisher family, as told by two boys named George Fisher: one, a schoolboy in the 1970s; the other, a ventriloquist's dummy in the Second World War It's a story of love, loss and family ties, and of two boys separated by years but driven by the same desires: to find a voice, and to be loved.

Discussion Guide

1. Wesley Stace?s **by George** is narrated by two boys named George Fisher: one is made of wood, one of flesh. How do they echo each other? Why do you think they part at the end?

2. The book follows a motley cast of characters across generations of the entertainment industry, from vaudeville to television. Which characters and settings did you most identify with?

3. The first epigraph of the novel is from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

Imaginations, fantasies, illusions,
In which the things that cannot be take shape,
And seem to be, and for the moment are.

In what ways can these lines apply both to the tricks of a magician and the techniques of a novelist?

4. George grows up in a household ruled by women. How do you suppose this environment affected George in his upbringing? What are the different female archetypes that appear in **by George**? Where else do gender dynamics crop up

in the novel?

5. Like his grandson George, Joe Fisher grew up without a father. In what ways does this common feature make these two Fishers similar, and how do they remain essentially different? How do George?s feelings about his grandfather change, and what do you make of George?s opinion of him at the end of the book?

6. Did you think at any point that you, as a reader, were meant to know things about George that he himself hadn?t realized or that he knew but couldn?t admit to himself?

7. Family secrets play a large role in the novel --- to George, they seem to be everywhere. When, if ever, were the characters best served by maintaining a family secret? Which secrets were most damaging? In what sorts of situations is maintaining a lie defensible or necessary? Do you consider the novel?s ending a ?happy? one?

8. Magic works when an audience is convinced by a magician?s technique --- something impossible seems to occur on the stage. Can this book be said ever to venture into magical realism, or does the author keep us firmly within the limits of ordinary reality? What would you have thought if the author of the ?wooden? George?s story were never revealed?

9. Frankie Fisher often takes roles in the Pantomime, ?a mysterious upside- down world? where old men play ugly women and beautiful women play handsome young men. Why is Frankie particularly suited to the role of Principal Boy, and where else does role reversal occur in the novel?

10. In the essay at the beginning of this reading group guide, Stace hypothesizes that in some ways all writing is ventriloquism. To what extent do you agree, and why or why not? What are some examples of books where one can ?see the author?s lips moving,? so to speak, and what sorts of books most successfully pull off the illusion?

Author Bio

Wesley Stace is the author of three widely acclaimed novels: the internationally bestselling MISFORTUNE, selected by the *Washington Post* and Amazon as one of the best novels of the year; BY GEORGE, one of the New York Public Library?s 2007 Books To Remember; and CHARLES JESSOLD, CONSIDERED AS A MURDERER, one of the *Wall Street Journal*?s best fiction books of 2011. He has also recorded under the name John Wesley Harding, though his recent album, *Self-Titled* (September 2013), was the first released under his own name. He is the founder of the Cabinet of Wonders variety show, contributes frequently to *The New York Times*, teaches at Princeton, and lives in Philadelphia.

Critical Praise

"Filled with wit, warmth and imagination... Stace amasses enough gently ironic humor, emotion and insight to carry his voices beautifully."

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