A Conversation with George Saunders

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Abstract
George Saunders is a fiction writer and essayist whose work has appeared in The New Yorker, McSweeney’s, Harper’s, and GQ, earning him the National Magazine Award for fiction in 1994, 1996, 2000, and 2004. He is also responsible for several acclaimed short story collections, including CivilWarLand in Bad Decline, a finalist for the 1996 PEN/Hemingway Award, and In Persuasion Nation, a finalist for The Story Prize in 2007.

On his way to becoming a professor at Syracuse University, Saunders worked as a technical writer and geophysical engineer, a member of an oil exploration crew in Sumatra, and as a knuckle-puller in a Texas slaughterhouse.

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While interviewing author George Saunders last week on the release of the audiobook of his new story collection, Tenth of December, my Skype connection cut out maybe four times. Such a miserable and embarrassing development on so many levels — maybe the worst being that Saunders is one of the best talkers I’ve ever met, and in the middle of this incredible riff his voice would just float and burble off, culminating in that awful, plopping Skype disconnection sound. And thus it was that I learned a great deal about George Saunders’ working methods not only from the conversation that follows, but from its eventual documentation. There was careful, very careful rephrasing of line after line (an example is below). George Saunders will be in conversation with Stanford faculty on the topic of Ethics in Fiction. His latest book, Lincoln in the Bardo (Random House, 2017) will be available to purchase. Read the New York Times review here or check out The Guardian’s take here. George Saunders is an American writer of short stories, essays, novellas and children’s books. His writing has appeared in The New Yorker, Harper’s, McSweeney’s and GQ. He also contributed a weekly column, American Psyche, to the weekend magazine of The Guardian until