

## A Conversation with Casey Gray

*What inspired the novel? How did you decide to make the setting a superstore?*

I became seriously interested in the idea of price. Price seems to quantify something ineffable about desire and value. People are paid to create the product, to package it, ship it, load it on the shelves, and to scan it. Peoples' time—hours, minutes, measures of actual lives—are factored into the cost. There's the cost of the raw materials to consider. Price fluctuates based on peoples' desires, and on competing products that vie to fill a similar desire. People are paid to market the product, to stoke desire. All these efforts and desires culminate in price, and thinking about it made me feel connected.

*The novel follows several different characters. Did you have a favorite to write about? How did you keep track of so many story arcs and voices?*

I can't say I enjoyed writing one character more than any of the others. It always felt like I was writing about all of the characters in concert. Even when I was working on a section that focused on one in particular, all of the other characters were alive and still happening, if that makes any sense. There were characters I wound up liking more than others, characters that I would like to spend actual time with more than others. But they all seemed equal when I was writing.

*How did you decide to make the novel span only a few days? Was it difficult confining yourself to writing about only a short amount of time?*

I wanted to create—as much as it's possible in narration—the sense of actual time passing. I worked at Wal-Mart, and I've had many low wage jobs. That life is lived in hours and minutes: the weekly hours you need to log to pay the light bill, the seven minutes of brake you have left to suck down a cigarette. You can't bypass the last three hours of your shift with a declarative sentence. I wanted to put the reader inside of that feeling. Creating that illusion was maybe the greatest challenge I faced while writing the novel.

*The novel is a blend of comedy and tragedy. How did you go about blending the two? Was one of them more difficult to write than the other?*

I guess I blended them without any conscious effort. I was never trying to undercut or soften the tragedy with humor. And I wasn't trying to balance comedy and humor. It just all sort of happened, the way funny and horrible things happen all the time, the way they tangle up and become the same thing sometimes.

*What other books would you recommend to readers who enjoyed Discount? What did you read or watch when you were writing this book?*

If they enjoyed *Discount*, and were compelled by the wide narrative aperture and the large cast of characters, they may love *The Tale of Genji*. They may also love *JR* by William Gaddis; *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich; *The Safety of Objects* by A.M. Homes; *The Pale King* by David Foster Wallace; *Butterfly Stories* by William T. Vollmann; *Hadji Murad* by Tolstoy, and *Swann's Way* by Proust. I'm not comparing *Discount* to these books. I would recommend them because they are damn fine books.