



# Georges Perec: A Life in Words

*David Bellos*

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"It's hard to see how anyone is ever going to better this User's Manual to the life of Georges Perec" - *Gilbert Adair, Sunday Times*

Winner of the Prix Goncourt for Biography, 1994

George Perec (1936-82) was one of the most significant European writers of the twentieth century and undoubtedly the most versatile and innovative writer of his generation.

David Bellos's comprehensive biography - which also provides the first full survey of Perec's irreverent, polymathic *oeuvre* - explores the life of an anguished, comical and endearingly modest man, who worked quietly as an archivist in a medical research library. The French son of Jewish immigrants from Poland, he remained haunted all of his life by his father's death in the war, fighting to defend France, and his mother's in Auschwitz-Birkenau. His acclaimed novel *A Void* (1969) - written without using the letter "e" - has been seen as an attempt to escape from the words "père", "mere", and even "George Perec".

His career made an auspicious start with *Things: A Story of the Sixties* (1965), which won the Prix Renaudot. He then pursued an idiosyncratic and ambitious literary itinerary through the intellectual ferment of Paris in the 1960s and 1970s. He belonged to the Ouvrier de Littérature Potentielle (Oulipo), a radically inventive group of writers whose members included Raymond Queneau and Italo Calvino. Perec achieved international celebrity with *Life A User's Manual* (1978), which won the Prix Medicis and was voted Novel of the Decade by the Salon du Livre. He died in his mid-forties after a short illness, leaving a truly puzzling detective novel, *53 Days*, incomplete.

"Professor Bellos's book enables us at once to relish the most wilfully bizarre aspects of Perec's *oeuvre* and to understand the whys and wherefores of his protean nature" - *Jonathan Romney, Literary Review*

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