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On The Table Read, “the best book magazine in the UK”, author Emily B. Scialom talks about her writing career, the books in her collection, and what inspires her.

I interviewed Emily B. Scialom about her life and career, what inspired her to start writing, and her book, The Religion Of Self Enlightenment.

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Tell me a bit about who you are.

My name is Emily B. Scialom and I am an author of six books based in Cambridge. My debut, ‘The Religion Of Self-Enlightenment’, has been labelled “a cult sensation” (Cambridge News) and “a classic of near-death experience literature” (The Oracle). I recently featured in The London Book Fair and The Los Angeles Times Festival Of Books and I am currently working on my seventh book, ‘In The Arms Of The Universe’.



Emily B. Scialom Releases:

‘The Religion Of Self-Enlightenment’ (Olympia, 2016)
The Rivers (Austin Macauley, 2019)
Eternal Artist (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2020)
My Searches For Meaning (KDP, 2021)
Viajes Internos (KDP, 2022)

When did you first WANT to write a book?

I was a nationally published poet age 8 and became internationally published at 17, but what I really wanted to do was write songs. After a series of tragedies my dreams of being a musician ended in tears and I began my first novel in 2008. I can’t say I ever WANTED to write a novel, but when I thought of the first line – “He was the kind of person who has forgotten why he is here.” – I realised it needed to be expanded upon: what the main character forgot, how he forgot and how he ultimately remembers were aspects of the story which required elucidation.

When did you take the first step to start writing?

I wrote the aforementioned opening to my debut novel, ‘The Religion Of Self-Enlightenment’ (The ROSE), in Spring 2008. It was a very powerful moment: my boss at The Granta Pub in Cambridge told me an outlandish story that illuminated his transition from explorative young man to a set -in -his -ways moany robot! I realised that particular element of human development could be explored in literature and this excited me as I felt like I had something to say.

w long did it take you to complete your first book from the first idea to the release?

Just over 8 years.



How long did it take to complete your latest book from the first idea to the release?

A year or two.

Focusing on your latest release. What made you want to write this book?

'Viajes Internos' (Internal Voyages) is a collection of poetry written mostly during lockdown. The pandemic has given me time to create like never before and producing poetry felt natural.

What were the biggest challenges when writing it?

To engage the reader with contemporary issues in a hopefully thoughtful and edifying manner. I wanted to let people know that someone cares.

Who or what inspired you when creating your Protagonist?

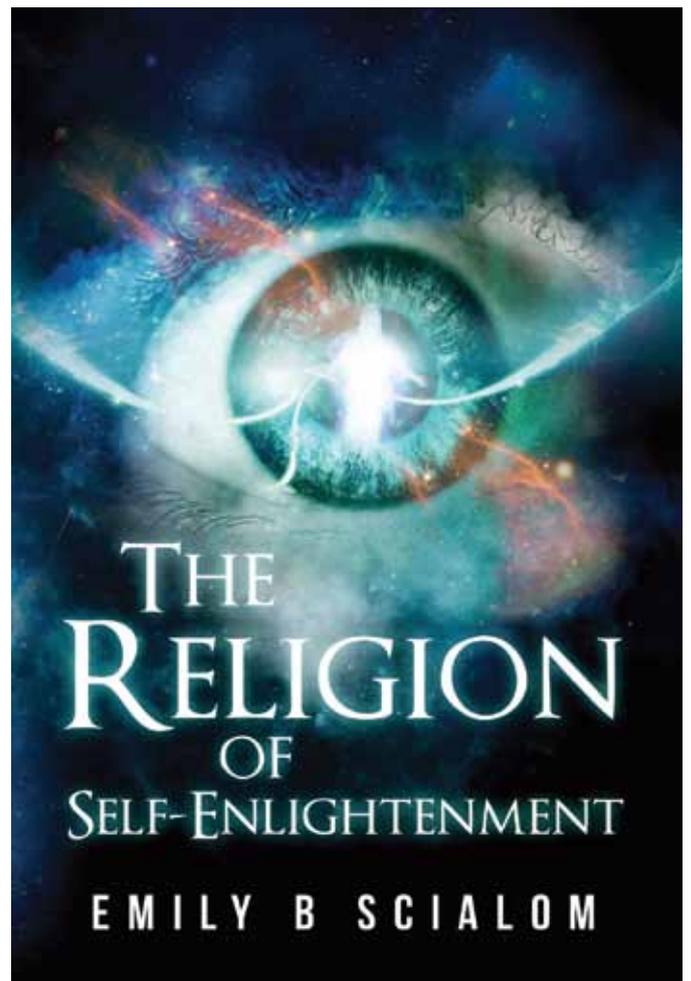
As mentioned previously, my boss at my summer pub job inspired the protagonist in 'The Religion Of Self-Enlightenment'. He told me he used to listen to Pink Floyd on headphones and get a bit merry, let's say, and it blew my mind that someone so seemingly boring could come out with something from his youth which was completely at odds with his contemporary persona.

Who or what inspired you when creating your Antagonist?

I don't really do Antagonists! I have one really bad guy in my latest unpublished novel, 'A Moment Of Perfection', who is basically a drunk racist. History inspired his character.

What is the inciting incident of your book?

The inciting incident in 'The ROSE' is certainly when the main character, Carrick Ares, has a near-death experience (NDE) as a result of a car accident aged 29. I was inspired after reading the works of Raymond Moody and Dr. Brian Weiss, who collated much research into NDEs as medical capabilities developed and increasing numbers of people were recovered from dead or nearly dead states. I find NDEs fascinating and so this part of the book became pivotal in terms of Carrick's long-term journey.



The Religion Of Self-Enlightenment

The journey from being open and alive to becoming closed and downtrodden was fascinating to me as it was such a common trajectory. Is there something wrong with our society, I asked? If so, how do we fix it?



Do you get support with editing, and how much editing did your book need?

'The ROSE' was edited twice by a Cambridge University employee who worked at the English Faculty and has books published himself. Though the relationship was difficult, I found his assistance invaluable.

My current editor has a library of his own books as well as a library of other people's work. He has aided me with the editorial needs of five books now and I couldn't imagine my life without his kind help!

What is the first piece of writing advice you would give to anyone wanting to write a story?

Write from your heart, as glib as it sounds, and always be honest!

Can you give me a hint about any further books you're planning to write?

I am currently working on a novel called 'In The Arms Of The Universe', which is about the wild side of life. Think 'Trainspotting', 'Junky' or 'Dharma Bums'. It is only 17,000 words long and I already have a tattoo of a line from it: "Words of anarchic wisdom".

And, finally, are you proud of your accomplishment? Was it worth the effort?

My books are my life and I love them all as dearly as children. I am fiercely proud of the reception my literary offerings have had and 'The ROSE' has become increasingly sacred to me as I receive many messages and reviews describing it as life-changing and deeply helpful. For this I will be eternally grateful and I can only hope my words continue to touch readers as things progress.

Pop all your book, website and social media links here so the readers can find you.

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