

INTERVIEW: Gastón Virkel (with Braden Netzley)

Fall 2016

Where were you born and when?

I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1972.

Where did you grow up?

Buenos Aires.

What was your childhood like?

Normal guy from Buenos Aires. I was a good student, I didn't have issues with school. We used to go to a Jewish sports and social club every Saturday and Sunday. I was always mad about soccer, played a lot. Watched a lot. The World Cup took place in Argentina in 1978 when I was 6 years old. I remember my parents reading books every night.

Tell me about your family.

My father was an Accountant, my mother a pre-school teacher and Principal. I have one younger brother.

What is your heritage? Does it influence your writing? If yes, how so?

I'm a Jewish, Argentine man. I strongly believe everything we are impacts our personality. And a writer should write from his own perspective even if he/she decides to tell a story with characters far away his/her own experience. You need some empathy and this comes from our own experience.

Where were you educated?

Argentina. All my scholarship. I moved to Miami when I was 28.

Do you speak Spanish? Why or Why not?

Yes, I do. I was raised in Argentina, it is my first language.

If you speak both Spanish and English, do you find it easier to express certain ideas in one language more than the other? If yes, can you name some small examples?

Yes. Especially living in the States where there's a cultural tradition of speaking short and sweet. To find expressions that help you define a situation, a feeling, something that would eventually require a longer explanation.

What inspired you to write?

My readings. Borges, Bioy Casares, Latin American writers in general. The feeling that I want to become a storyteller. Beyond formats or platforms (can be a movie, a book, a TV Show, a short story...). Adolfo Bioy Casares was really important to me. Borges was his mentor and he always said Bioy “teach” him the simplicity in writing. I feel Bioy’s work is not aging well. But it was really important in my life.

Who is your audience and how do you think your writing impacts your audience?

I don't think much about the audience when I'm writing. It has to be good just for me. Success comes later.

How would you describe your style of writing?

I like to think that my style is related with simplicity. The idea can be complex but the style, should not. I enjoy a lot “the search for the perfect word.” That usually means not pretentious, organically aligned with the narrator, not with the writer. My style also carries a big chunk of humor. Even when that’s not the goal, humor sprouts.

What are some of your works? Any favorites? (If yes, why?)

“Ya no hay 10” (Short story) will be included in my upcoming ebook published by Suburbano Ediciones. “Si un oso panda caminara en tu cocina,” a feature film script based on a real story that I always heard back in Argentina. Both stories are fictional recreations of something I was told at some point in my life.

What do you like to do besides writing?

Sports, reading, movies & series, travelling. Sharing a coffee with friends (in the Latin American/European way. Not a Starbucks on the go. Rather a moment when we fix the world with the help of a dark cappuccino).

What is your favorite novel or short story?

Really tough question. I would say a Jorge Luis Borges short story. “El Aleph,” “Funes el memorioso,” “Las ruinas circulares.”

What's your favorite topic to write about?

Regular people finding themselves in unexpected situations. Absurd, bizarre, over the top moments in life.

Who were your influences on your writing? How are you similar or different?

Borges, Bioy, Cesar Aira, Boris Vian, Enrique Vila Matas, Vargas Llosa, Abelardo Castillo, William Faulkner... I hope I'm similar to any of them in any way you can find.

Is there a deeper meaning to your work?

I don't think that's my role. I know it may have it. But that's a task that would be an obstacle at this point in my career. It's time to tell the stories I want to tell. In the best way possible.

What advice do you have for new writers?

Don't waste time. Write, write, write. Never wait to be better prepared.

Read El otro, a short story by Borges where an experimented Borges meets a 14 year old Borges.

<http://www.lamaquinadeltiempo.com/prosas/borges01.htm>

What advice do you have for your younger self?

Don't waste time. Write, write, write.

How do you define success?

Get paid to do what you really want to do.

Is writing your principal occupation? If no, what is your other occupation?

Kind of. Copy Writing pays my bills.

Any additional comments or information you would like to relay?

I'm part of the "Grupo SEd" (writers gathering around Suburbano Ediciones). A group of writers promoting literature in Spanish in the USA. Very, very complicated goal. There's suburbano.net and we have our own Publishing initiative (suburbanoediciones.com) for writers based in the US.