

INTERVIEW: Camilo Pino (with Hannah Peiffer)

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Where were you born?

North of South America, in Venezuela.

When?

1970, that's 46 years ago.

Where did you grow up?

My hometown of Caracas, it was a city of four million people when I grew up.

What was your childhood like?

I grew up in the seventies, a time of change. My parents divorced when I was seven and I was the eldest of three siblings. In general, I remember my childhood as a happy time.

Tell me about your family.

My dad is a Historian and my mother a psychologist so I grew up surrounded by books.

Do you think one of the reasons you were inspired to become a writer was because you were surrounded by books as a child?

Yes, I was fortunate to grow up surrounded by books and that made reading second nature to me.

Do you have a particular author that you enjoy reading?

I love to discover a new author and read his main works in chronological order to get a sense of their development. In this moment, I am re-reading a South African master, Coetzee (If you haven't read it, stop reading this and go and do it now!).

What is your heritage? Does it influence your writing?

I am Hispanic, Venezuelan to be more specific. The way I think, my values, even my sense of humor was shaped by the culture I grew up in.

What was your education like?

I guess I had a traditional formal education. I went to private school, which is not exceptional in Venezuela, and then studied journalism at college.

Did you attend college in the United States or in Venezuela? Where did you attend college?

I first studied journalism in my hometown, Caracas, at the Central University of Venezuela and then communications in London, at the University of Westminster.

Do you speak Spanish? Why or Why not?

Yes, I speak Spanish at home because I want my children to learn it but also because I live in Miami, a place where most people speak Spanish.

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

Absolutely, for me it's a lot easier to express my ideas in Spanish. My English has improved to the level that I even dream in English, but nothing can replace your native language.

Are you comfortable writing in both languages?

Very much, yes. Spanish comes more naturally but I enjoy writing in English. English is a flexible and dynamic language.

What inspired you to write?

Books have been very important in my life. I am what I am because of them. I guess it was just natural that I wanted to write my own.

Who is your audience? How do you think your writing impacts your audience?

I never think of the readers when I write. I think that if I start writing for somebody I will be somehow lying. But then my writing is literary, not commercial.

How would you describe your style of writing?

I appreciate clarity and simplicity. I hope that my books entertain and touch people at the same time and for that I need people to believe my stories.

What do you do besides writing?

I work at a television channel writing commercial stuff.

What is your favorite novel or short story?

The novel I like the best now is Anna Karénina, but only because I read it recently. I mean, there are a lot of novels I admire. As for short stories, for the sake of this exercise (again, it's not easy to pick one) I would mention A Simple Soul by Flaubert.

What's your favorite topic to write about?

It changes. My first novel was a coming of age. My second one was more of a satire. I am working on my third which has to do a lot about poetry.

Who were your influences on your writing?

The writers that influenced me the most are the boom writers from the seventies and eighties. You can find a lot of them in my work.

Is there a deeper meaning to your work?

I hope there is, but that is not for me to tell.

What advice do you have for new writers? Dos? Don'ts?

Write about things you know. Work hard. Be patient. Be disciplined, writing is like any other job in the sense that it needs dedication. Never be satisfied. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. Remember, books are made of books, so read a lot.

You said that books are made of books. Is there a particular book or group of books that you have remembered or been inspired by throughout your writing?

The work of the Latin American writers of the seventies and eighties, which is the authors of the so-called "Latin American Boom." They were daring, smart, intelligent, entertaining. They made me understand the possibilities of writing.

What advice do you have for your younger self?

I would have hoped to start writing earlier in my life.

How do you define success?

When you read your own work and you believe it as if someone else had written it, and you enjoy it, then you have succeeded.

Is writing your principal occupation?

Unfortunately not, but it is the one thing I care the most about.

If writing is not your principal occupation, what is?

I work in a Hispanic TV network, doing "utilitarian" writing. I mean, writing with a corporate intention. So, I guess writing is actually my occupation. The thing is that I make a distinction between work for hire and my own artistic work.