

Writing Is Not Her Profession, It Is Her Obsession

By Flor García

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Daína Chaviano began writing stories when she was nine years old. She liked to invent them, one could say she is a narrator by nature, or perhaps, as she assured, by genetics, if that is possible, since her maternal grandfather (whom she never met because he died when her mother was very young) was a journalist and poet.

"My father says that as soon as I learned my first words, I started to make up stories. I believe that fiction and I were a predestined marriage from the cradle," said the writer of Cuban origin, honored at FULTABASCO 2014, in an interview.

Because of that, when the Cuban government banned all fantasy and fairy tales, the small child suffered, but her response was to create more stories that mitigated a bit the hunger that the absence of fairies had left in her generation.

"After I left Cuba, my literature took a path more linked to historical issues, but still using the mythological and paranormal approach as tools that allow me to delve into the psychology of the characters and extrapolate situations of the present in other scenarios" , assured the writer.

That was one of the approaches he assumed in his first books such as *Los mundos que amo* (1980) or *Historias de hadas para adultos* (1986), following the ban established by the Cuban government.

Where do your literary influences come from?

As a child I used to tirelessly read books on Greco-Roman and Egyptian mythology. The Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the *Popol Vuh*, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, *The Vision of the Vanquished*, and whatever book about ancient legends fell into my hands were also fundamental readings of my childhood and adolescence.



Later I fell in love with Shakespeare, with the English romantic poets, and all Gothic literature. I also read a lot of poetry... I still have that fabulous collection of modern poetry with hundreds of booklets, grouped in five volumes, that the UNAM [National Autonomous University of Mexico] published in the 80s.

My prose influences have been very different: Margaret Atwood, Mario Vargas Llosa, Julio Cortazar, Anaïs Nin, Ray Bradbury, Ursula K. Le Guin, Mario Levrero, Marion Bradley, J.R.R. Tolkien...

Your works are not only for the young audience, but is it more complicated to reach the imagination of adults?

I started writing for young people and children, perhaps because I began publishing when I was in my twenties and I was closer to that point of view; however, I was always lucky that my books for young people were searched and enjoyed also by adults.

For me it is much easier to reach adults than young people. Younger readers are much more complex for an adult creator, because their perceptions are less burdened by the conventions of the mature mind. It is very difficult to place the adult imagination on the same plane as the young person or the child. That's why I never plan to write for people of one age or another.

I prefer to develop a story within the most propitious mental level, and then let the publishers decide for what kind of audience is better.

How much of fiction is a reality in Daína's life?

Many people read my novels believing that certain passages classified as "fantastic" are pure fiction, when they have been taken from personal experiences. This is because they are not incidents that people recognize as such.

For example, paranormal experiences are often relegated to oblivion because they are not comfortable to explain that our reality is continually being altered by laws and facts that are not socially or scientifically accepted, but I never forget those facts. When I have come across them, they remain there to continue marveling me and, in many cases, to be used as inspiration for my books.



You were a journalist. Has this influenced your literature?

I was a journalist for a while, although my bachelor's degree was in English Language. Journalism is an exercise that expands and develops some reflexes to shape certain types of stories. But in my case, after spending a few years in that profession, I had to put a distance between that profession and myself, to keep on creating according to my nature that has always been ruled by fantasy. Journalism, like essays and criticism, forces us to respect certain norms that are useful for the investigative or analytical work, but they are all practices that can attempt against developing fictions.

From your first novel to the most recent one, how do you consider that Daína has changed?

Very much, although I think that my essence as a creator is the same. I started writing science fiction and fantasy stories, or a mixture of both genres, where I aimed at social speculation or simply genre-related, frolicking with mythological and ancient history elements. My latest novels, specifically those of the series «The Occult Side of Havana», focus on the rescue of historical and social memory through plots where mythological, paranormal, or gothic elements, are mixed.

I think that what still remains in me is the hybridization of genres and a heterodox look on reality, a point of view that refuses to accept the conventionalisms of genres and thought.

What recommendations would you give to young people who have the desire to devote their lives to literature?

The only way to become a writer is by reading and writing obsessively. Those who want to write professionally should know that very few writers can live from their books.

Writing is not a profession, it is an obsession. One writes despite the circumstances, the eight-hour workdays, mates, friends, the rest of the family...



Writing is a full-time job, but if you really love literature, you must explore and read as much as you can.

And what about the tribute that will be dedicated to you in FULTABASCO?

It took me by surprise. It is a recognition that overwhelms me a little, but also makes me very happy because it will give me the chance to know a prestigious campus as Juárez University and its book fair, and to know a city full of traditions, with extraordinary museums about the pre-Columbian culture, of which I have heard a lot.

Without a doubt, it will give me more strength to continue working on my books, where I have always tried to ponder upon the difficult adventure that means to be human.

