

Cuba Is a Ghost That Feeds My Literature

Por Vicente Morín Aguado

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HAVANA TIMES – Daina Chaviano is kindness personified. I enjoyed the simple and sincere conversation I had with the author of *La isla de los amores infinitos*, the book by a living Cuban author with the most translated editions (26 until now), called *The Island of Eternal Love* in English.

At 62 years old, she shines with the radiance of new grass, bearing the light green of Hope. She has written 13 bestsellers which places her among the so-called Ibero-American trinity of female authors, writing fantasy and science fiction literature.

Criticas magazine (US, Jan/Feb 2004) had the following to say about her: “It’s as if Ray Bradbury had married Michael Ende and occasionally flirted with Anais Nin.”

HT: Three decades in Miami... how has this shaped you as a person, especially in regard to your spiritual relationship with your country, as a writer?

Daína Chaviano: Cuba is a ghost that feeds my literature. I was born there, I grew up there and I began friendships which I still hold dear: some stayed on the island and I’ve been able to recover others during my time as an exile... The seedling of what I am today took root on that island. But that Cuba no longer exists, except for in my memories and my generation’s collective imagination. This is why it is a mythical and real land at the same time, which continues to sustain my ideas and dreams. I hold onto it as a mental stage where the stories I create can come to life, and where others might take shape in the future.



HT: You have said that you have seen another Cuba, especially here in Miami, another historic version. Is there a key point that you then deal with in your writing?

DC: There aren't any key points. What I mean to say is that there aren't any other readings. The Cuba I knew when I used to live there, was a divided country, in half, with many corners fenced off for their own inhabitants. I didn't have access to certain books, testimonies, authors and documents, which I only found out about once I went into exile. Exile was where I was able to complete the amended or mutilated spaces that I was still missing to understand Cuba's history. My novels, riddled with ghosts, journeys in time, mythological reinterpretations, are how I try to give a coherent image so as to reconstruct that incomplete reality which I was shown.

HT: You were a successful writer before the digital age, and your writing has gained renewed success. Has your writing technique change? The way you come up with your books. Is the market different today? Are there any other demands you need to meet?

DC: The market is constantly changing, according to the here and now. The digital age has maybe made a difference in terms of global storytelling, but I'm not sure how much it has influenced my own work. There's no doubt that the immediacy that readers demand today (used to social media and a visual culture marked by film and TV), forces us to change the pace of our narration.

However, these changes have also come about in different periods, for different reasons. No author in the early 21st century was writing like an author in the early 19th century. Just like the literary avant-garde in the 21st century wasn't writing like the Romantics in the 20th century. You have to also include the fact that on a personal level, somebody who launches their career when they are 20, doesn't write the same way as they do when they turn 60, regardless of the era they were born in.

While my core themes have shifted a little, this hasn't been in response to the market, but to the fact that I have become more mature and had experiences that have shaped the way I look at things differently. Even when I was living in Cuba, the focus and perspective of my books used to vary a great deal from one book to another. The first one (*Los mundos que amo*) is totally different to the third one (*Historias de hadas para adultos*); and the fourth one (*Fábulas de una abuela extraterrestre*) has nothing to do with the fifth one (*El abrevadero de los dinosaurios*).



HT: Is your bestseller also the book you love the most?

DC: I don't love one book more than the other. They are all extremely important to me because I imagined and created them with the same passion, because every story is important at the time of writing.

HT: Man is a political animal, Aristoteles declared. If you apply this to humans, have you been able to distance yourself from this Aristotle-style maxim?

DC: Man is a political animal in certain societies, but it is also an emotional and imaginative animal in any context. Its spirituality is a lot more powerful and omnipresent than politics. My characters might be influenced by political events, but politics isn't what governs in their lives, but spirituality. A citizen in any Western country could describe themselves as a political animal"; but a druid priest, Masai or pygmy in Africa, an indigenous person from the Caribbean in pre-historic times or even the Amazon today, doesn't follow these parameters. According to these cultures, the spirit and emotions are a lot more important.

Epilogue:

During the live presentation of her book *Los Hijos de la Diosa Huracan* at the 2019 Miami Book Fair, I greeted Daina before taking up my place in a long line of readers, waiting to get her autograph. I didn't ask her why she had left Cuba 30 years ago, because if you take a look at some of her previous interviews, you will find that she's pretty much covered it: *Most Cubans living on the island, dream about leaving it. Most Cubans already living abroad, dream about returning to their country after everything changes.* (Daina, answering Milan Resic, Serbia 2017).

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