

Interview w/Graham - by Sofia Kravariti

Mister Masterton, I welcome you with great joy to our blog and I to wish the new year to help you fulfill every goal you have.

1. First of all, I would like you to tell me what is your relationship with Greek literature. Is there a Greek writer or poet that had an impact on you? A book that you thought "Wow, I will recommend it as a masterpiece".

I am afraid that my knowledge of Greek literature is comparatively limited. But then I find it hard to read other writers' fiction these days, no matter what nationality they are...I am so critical of my own work, let alone the work of other authors. For instance, I have never read anything by Stephen King. But I have read *Why I Killed My Best Friend* by Amanda Michalopoulou which was lent to me by a Greek friend of mine, and I would recommend it to anyone for its powerful emotions.

2. You are one of the most popular writers in the world. How much this fact burdens you towards your readers? Have you ever thought that there may be one moment that all this will end or are you one of those writers that believe that breathing and writing are co-travelers in this life?

The only reason I enjoy success as a writer is because I know I am entertaining a great many people, and their response is very heartwarming. It has also enabled me to make a great many friends in many different countries, including Greece. I cannot help writing: it is like a chronic disease. I wrote my first short story when I was seven (about a bad egg that falls in love with a bad centipede) and my first novel when I was 10 (a bit like Jules Verne's novel *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*, with a submarine and giant squid.) I have lost count of how many novels and short stories I have written. I just can't help it. I am currently writing short horror stories with my friend Dawn G Harris and that is very refreshing because she is young and a woman yet somehow our thinking and our styles click closely together. Our first story *Stranglehold* was published this year in Greece as the title story for an anthology by Likofos.

3. I want you to travel back to the day when you got the first positive response by your publisher that published your first book. Have you ever imagined that you would be the writer you are today? I am asking that because many writers claim that they write just for personal joy. Was your goal to conquer the world? Did you believe from the beginning that your writing was that powerful?

Having my first book published was not particularly dramatic because I had been a newspaper reporter from the age of 17, and then an editor of two different magazines for men, *Mayfair* and *Penthouse*, and so I was quite used to seeing my name in print. In fact I was asked by an American publisher to write my first book, which was a sex guide, *How A Woman Loves To Be Loved*, under the nom-de-plume of 'Angel Smith'. I wrote 29 sex guides altogether, all of them very successful, but in the mid-1970s the market for that type of book began to be overcrowded so I offered my publisher a horror novel that I had written for my own amusement in between sex books...*The Manitou*. It sold nearly 50,000 copies in six months and that is when I started my career as a writer of horror fiction. I didn't have a goal to conquer the world but obviously if you sell a lot of books it makes financial sense and it gives you a great sense of professional and personal satisfaction. I learned through my experience as a newspaper reporter and a magazine editor how to write in a way that is easy to read and at the same time commands a reader's attention. It is not as easy as most people seem to think! It requires a comprehensive knowledge of language and grammar, a huge amount of research, and an understanding of human emotions and ambitions. As well as a large dose of imagination.

4. Let's talk about terror...can you define terror according to your point of view? Where does someone experience fear? Among the pages of a books or in everyday life?

Terror is strange. While fear can make us miserable and depressed, it can also excite us. Fear of being attacked in the street or of illness or bankruptcy or losing our home is horrible, but at the same time we also crave the excitement of roller coasters at the funfair, or jumping with parachutes out of aircraft, or bungee jumping. Although we have a tingle of fear while we are doing such things, we know ultimately that we are safe. Horror novels are the same. They can frighten us while we are reading them, but we know when we close the book that no real harm is going to come to us. So with horror we can enjoy the adrenaline rush without being hurt.

5. We live in the age of abundance in the book industry. Writers are becoming more and more and the readers find it hard to choose what to read or trust a new writer. Many readers choose the most famous writers that co-operate with the big publishing companies or follow the advice of friends about books they have already read. Moreover, people that work in this field are talking confidently about a downsizing of book industry. What is your opinion about the future of literature?

You are right. These days, everybody seems to think that they can write a novel! But I am confident in the future of the book industry. Although it was predicted that e-books would see an end to printed books, people still like to buy a real paper book

that feels good and smells good and they can display on a shelf when they have read it. But the great thing about e-books for me is that almost all of my considerable backlist of novels is now available online. I very much doubt that publishers would have taken the risk of reprinting so many of my novels on paper and storing them in warehouses in the hope that people would buy them. I appreciate that it is difficult for readers to choose which authors to read. Unfortunately some well-known authors are producing some books that in my opinion are very badly written (naming no names) but the reading public are not all that critical of slipshod writing if they enjoy the subject matter and find the heroes or heroines appealing.

6. Between the writers that “create” literature and those that sell more, what is the defining line? And naturally I am talking about masterpieces that do not enjoy the success some books that are considered as best sellers do, even if they are not as good as the first ones.

It is easy to define the line between beautifully-written prose and poor but best-selling writing. But that is the nature of the business. In writing it's the same as the music industry. Some ghastly songs go to the top of the hit-parade and earn a fortune while some inspired and beautifully-composed songs are virtually ignored. But that's just the way it goes. If you are lucky and your novel strikes a chord with current public taste you may become a best-seller. An equally good novel may sell hardly any copies at all. I'm afraid you just have to grin and bear it.

7. Which is your all-time favorite book?

Lolita by Vladimir Nabokov is exquisitely written, although it is not very fashionable these days to promote a novel about a paedophile. Coming close, though, is *The Process* by my late friend Brion Gysin, which describes a journey across the Sahara. I have never actually finished reading it, even though he gave it to me in 1970. The writing is so stunning that I have to stop at every page just to relish it. For instance, he says that a box of matches ‘chuckles’. I don't know if that will have the same effect when translated into Greek, but it is only one example of some extraordinary prose.

8. If you had a time machine, I would like you to choose the time and place to travel and tell me what would Graham Masterton do there besides writing.

I would go back to the mid-1980s in San Diego, California, where my late wife Wiescka and I used to spend a great deal of time. And of course I would like to go back to a time when she was still alive. As far as a career is concerned, I would have enjoyed being a comedian. I love making an audience laugh. I think it goes back to my Polish great-grandfather who was a theatre manager in the days of Victorian

music-halls. I organize an annual short-story contest for the inmates of all of Poland's prisons, and every year I present the prizes at the maximum-security prison in Wołow, near Wrocław. I give a talk each year to 100 or so prisoners, and there is nothing I enjoy more than hearing them laugh.

9. On a daily basis, we are being bombarded with news about the path that earth has taken, which is not a pleasant one. In other words we must endure as a human race just to see the end of it. What is your greatest fear and what do you believe could save the world?

I think we have to accept the fact that this planet has been through many catastrophic changes in the time that it has been whirling around in space. There is no point in being afraid of the end of the human race because it will eventually happen, although gradually rather than dramatically. At the same time it is sensible to keep our emissions and our use of plastics down to the lowest level that we can, although I am not about to give up eating meat!

10. Let's talk about the current world situation...do you believe that the passivity towards tragedy comes from the inaction of each person or is it something that has been created deliberately by those in power? Many of us consider ourselves weak. Is this the truth or we just allowed ourselves to become puppets in a well organized show? Would you like to pass on your own message about grief and poverty that is dominating in our world nowadays?

I do believe that our response to tragedy is incredibly muted, especially when (a) it doesn't affect us personally; and (b) we have a financial interest in ignoring it. For instance the mass killings of children in Syria and other Middle Eastern countries, and the genocide of the Rohingya in Burma. So in many ways it is our personal inaction that allows powerful leaders to impose their will on innocent people. Yet there are signs that ordinary people are beginning to make their voices heard, partly with the help of social media, and that is a good sign. What I do deplore, though, is people who use social media to be threatening and insulting and use foul language. We are all stuck by our feet to the same planet and we need simply to be kind and understanding to each other.

11. Is there a dream that you have not yet fulfilled?

I would very much like to see more of my novels made into movies. I have sold film options to 11 of them, but every time the project has fizzled out before the film has gone into production, usually for financial reasons. Horror movies with special effects are very expensive to make.

12. Do you believe in fate?

It is easy to look back at your life and think that you have ended up where you are because of fate, but I believe that life is simply a series of accidents, some happy and some unhappy.

13. Since we are in a holiday period, I am sure that our readers would like to know what Christmas means to you. How did you experience Christmas as a child and how different is it now?

Christmas when I was a child was fairly unexciting since my parents didn't have a lot of money. When our own children were little we had very extravagant Christmases with lots of presents and good food. I am not religious so Christmas these days has no significance for me except the pleasure of giving gifts to my grandchildren.

14. Santa Claus myth...innocence or curse?

A good source of some very scary horror stories!

15. What is your message to the world for 2020?

Be kind, and when you can, be generous. Be strong, and adventurous, and take risks, because you have only one life and that life is very short. And if you feel like saying something abusive – don't. Keep your mouth shut and walk away.

And some brief extra questions...

1. Which is your favorite season of the year?

Summer (in Poland).

2. If you were a color, what would that be?

Green.

3. If you had to gamble to a number, what would that be?

23

4. Which spot of the horizon does your compass show?

SE

5. Water or air?

Both. Don't want to be thirsty and don't want to suffocate.

I would like you to close this interview with your own wish for the literature universe.

My wish won't affect the literature universe. But I would like to see more of my novels published in Greece!

Mister Masterton, I would like to thank you for this great honor to have you in our blog!