



University of Iowa

International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work

10-13-2004

Why I Write What I Write

Sami Berdugo

Panel: Why I Write What I Write

Rights

Copyright © 2004 Sami Berdugo

Recommended Citation

Berdugo, Sami, "Why I Write What I Write" (2004). *International Writing Program Archive of Residents' Work*. 636.

https://ir.uiowa.edu/iwp_archive/636

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](https://ir.uiowa.edu). For more information please contact: lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Why I Write What I Write Sami Berdugo

Perhaps the question "why do I write what I write?" shouldn't be raised at all. For me there is only one answer to this question. There is one understanding, as if a physical law of nature was in operation, and the answer is obvious: I write what I write because of who I am. I don't know if the meaning "I am" refers to me (Sami Berdugo the person), but maybe more to "myself," to some basic existential being that rests inside me. This being is a sort of "I" and because of him and only from him I write what I write.

In the past I used to think that writers were gifted with an unusual talent of imagination as well as with the gift of writing. I thought they carried with them an enormous amount of stories they had invented, endless plot and character ideas. As years go by and I practice writing more, I tend to assume that this is not the case. Generally speaking, you could say I have no imagination at all, maybe an average one. Even so, the draw of words upon me was inevitable. At the age of 26 I had an emotional outburst which I had to find words to describe. Back then I thought that this was the most immediate form of expression, a way that didn't require didactic and analytic learning. Writing was my own private place, a kingdom with rules I was in charge of.

Sometimes there are situations and events that cannot be explained. Perhaps the way I encountered writing was totally coincidental and emerged from one short story. I can't explain exactly what happens when I write the things I choose to write about and why I do it at all. Many people have asked "why did you choose to write a novel in first person female?" in regards to my novel And Say to the Wind. Well, certain decisions happen in one moment or even in a fragment of a second, while sitting in front of your desk and simply understanding: that's the way it should be done, like hearing a metal token inserted into a telephone machine. Of course the decision to devote your life to writing is much bigger and carries with it a never-ending responsibility, but it comes out of me, from my private "I" that doesn't allow any other way. It is as if he is talking to me from inside and having a conversation with me, many times even locking me away to enable freedom in my thoughts.

Today I tend to believe that the basic substance that emerges from within writing must be out of the "private writing man," otherwise it will be defective in a certain way, it will have failures of truth, failures which will make it spineless. I have no one to go to and nowhere else to search for but within my own place. I am the source of all stories, plots, characters, etc. These stories are written from personal experiences that I have been through, from literally touching some of the characters, experiences that I saw near me and kidnapped for my plots, to create a mixture of one truth with another truth that always is drawn from reality.

The basic source of my well of writing is a life of routine that I have lived and continue to live today. I think it was Aristotle who said that the main purpose of art generally, and specifically in literature, is to provide a mirror image of real life, to compose a reflection for it. I don't know how close I am to realizing that saying, but I definitely fill my life by placing myself within a vast working material of encounters and events, a wide meadow that magnetizes me to walk in.

Unfortunately (and I am not the first to say it) the foundation of personal writing experiences are wounds. In my opinion, valuable literature emerges from wounds that burn in the writer's soul. I am glad for these scars, which are not only painful subjects or issues. Good memories, happy and delightful experiences are also kinds of scars for me. Sometimes there's a combination of both good and bad experiences. Perhaps my father death's when I was thirteen is one of those examples. Surly his death was one of the catalysts for my writing, and still today it stands as one of my main sources for examining topics such as family structure and relationship, death, longing, god, love, orphanhood, search for comfort, and pain of the body and soul. I don't know if I should be happy about this or not.

I can say that recently my writing has tried to expand its individual circle, to confront the political and sociological topics of my state that are well-known all over the world. Seven years ago I wouldn't have dared deal with politics at any level. It was me and me alone. Now, as an Israeli citizen, who lives in the Middle East, I can feel how the constant tension of terror, war, army service, peace talks, Judaism, Zionism, Anti-Semitism, Arabs, Palestinians, Americans, Europeans – are slowly pushing themselves into my computer pages. I'm not becoming a political writer; I try to avoid taking a side in the stories. However, being in the center of news can sometimes make you indifferent, sinking you into irrelevant domestic details. I know it's a bad thing, especially if you're a writer who's coming from a small place and have the chance to stand up for your opinion and maybe influence others.

But it's my emotions that are trembling and creating a fusion of private-personal and public-universal themes that I'm trying to express. It's a cliché, but maybe age makes you more aware and allows you to be afraid of the serious issues that suddenly seem to be knocking on your house door and increasing your anxiety. I guess I gave up. My country won: I'm a part of it and I must respond appropriately.

These and other inner signs feed me and create for me a kind of freedom, one of comfort and maybe even peace at certain times. It might be that in five years I'll say totally different things. It's hard to say it, even absurd, but I do hope that my need to write will not end. For me the question of writing is a constant struggle and challenge. It's an effort to think about what good comes out of it and whether it should be the significant thing in my life, whether I should dedicate so much time and make sacrifices for it. In the meantime I don't have any other path and the questions keep rising. Only one thing is sure – words are written because of me and they come from the depths of my heart.