

AUTHOR Q & A *Restless Heart* by T. William Phillips

Can you give a quick summary of *Restless Heart*?

Restless Heart is an epic story that takes place in 1840s America. It follows Konrad Quintero de Leon on his decade long journey of self-discovery. His journey begins in Europe at Oxford University. Upon graduation and his return home to New York, he decides to abandon the aristocratic life that had been planned for him, and he embarks on a series of adventures across the wild, expanding American West. He joins John C. Fremont and Kit Carson's second expedition. He rides with the Texas Rangers, and fights in the Battle of Monterrey in the Mexican-American War. Every adventure, every experience is an attempt to satisfy his "restless heart", to gratify his wanderlust. In New Orleans he begins a different kind of adventure with Anastasia Carriere; the adventure of love. But as his love-filled heart begins to grow restless again, he must choose between his love for a woman and his lust for adventure.

How long did it take you to write *Restless Heart*?

I had a very general idea of the story I wanted to tell about 2 years before I began writing it. I knew it would be historical, and I knew the themes I wanted to explore. In those two years I began doing the research, studying the time period in which it would take place, and the philosophers whose ideas mirrored the themes I wanted to explore. Once I knew the story and its message, it took me about 4 months to actually write it.

Why did you choose the 1840's as the setting for *Restless Heart*?

This story could have been told in any century... any decade. Once I had the themes I wanted to explore, I thought about setting it in 1790s Europe, Medieval Europe, early Renaissance Europe, 1900s America, modern America. When I began researching early to mid-19th century America, it really felt right to me. The spirit of Manifest Destiny and America's restless expansion; the desire to stretch America from the Atlantic to the Pacific at any and all costs, really rang true with the heart of the character I had created, and his desire to follow his restless heart at any and all costs. The time period sort of became a metaphor for the character, and the character became a metaphor for the times.

How did you come up with the names of your characters?

Just before I began writing *Restless Heart*, I had read *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. I just loved the sound of that iconic, legendary name, and I wanted to give my main character the same kind of epic ring to his name. And so, Konrad Quintero de Leon was born. I also wanted to show his mother's German heritage in his first name, and his father's Spanish heritage in his surname. For Miriam Monroe, I wanted a very catchy, aristocratic sounding name. For Charles Deveroux, I wanted the name of a New Orleans

gentleman of status. As for Anastasia Carriere, I wondered what would be the name of a French angel, and that's what I came up with.

How did you come up with the title, *Restless Heart*?

The title was actually the first part of the story I came up with. Before there was a setting, a plot, a character, there was a title. The theme and the title came at the same time. They're one in the same, really, and I just built the story around that.

Is there a message you would like your readers to come away with after reading *Restless Heart*?

I think the message will differ for each reader, and I don't want to influence what they take away from this novel. It's not my place to say what message they should be left with. However, I will say this... I wanted to romanticize an idealistic character who was unafraid to follow his heart, and unhindered by the rules of conformity, while also portraying his restlessness, his search for knowledge and self and adventure, as an addiction that caused him and those who loved him pain and sorrow. His restless heart is both a blessing and a burden.

Do you plan a sequel?

No. I think I explored the depths of Konrad's soul as much as I possibly could. I could easily come up with more adventures for him, new characters for him to meet, but I don't think there's anything left to explore in the character of Konrad Quintero de Leon, and that would be the only reason to continue his story.

How did you decide when to end the novel?

When I knew I had fully explored the deepest, darkest depths of Konrad's soul. There were a few points when I felt like it was time to start wrapping it up, but I couldn't convince myself to let go. I was completely invested in Konrad's character. Every time I felt like ending it, I'd realize there were still places I needed to go with Konrad. They weren't necessarily places I wanted to go, but I knew I needed to explore them further. It was very obvious to me when I finally reached the bottom of Konrad's soul. There was just nowhere left to go.

What else are you working on?

I just finished writing a short novella called *The Season*, and I'm currently working on another novella that will be a prequel to *The Season*. I'm also about halfway through the first draft of two more novels; *The Brothers Kavanagh*, and *The State of Waking*. *Brothers* is set in 1920s New York City, and it explores Nietzsche's theory of the Apollonian and Dionysian dichotomy between two aristocratic brothers. *The State of Waking* is taken from a line in Descartes' *Discourse on Method*. It takes place in modern

times, and is a psychological, philosophical, surreal novel that even I have trouble describing.

Who do you like to read?

Hermann Hesse is my favorite author. His philosophical novels and poetic prose really made me realize the kind of writer I wanted to be. I enjoy reading a lot of the early 20th century “greats”; Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Joyce, Kafka, Camus, Proust. I also read a lot of philosophy, which I think is very important for a novelist. My ideas for stories are formed by the ideas and questions pondered and studied by Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Camus, Kant, Schopenhauer, and a handful of others. And just as philosophy helps shape my ideas, I read great amounts of poetry to shape and craft my prose. Rimbaud, Baudelaire, Laforgue, Rilke are all poets I read over and over again. I enjoy reading poetry more than anything. While novelists and philosophers tend to seek the right answers, poets, to me, seem to be seeking the right questions, and I find that very intriguing.

When do like to write?

All the time. Day and night, as long as I'm alone. Completely alone. Writing at night, the middle of the night... 2, 3, 4 in the morning, I find is the most relaxing and the most productive hours for me. But I enjoy writing all the time. I *have* to write all the time. Just like a long distance runner gets a runner's high as they settle into a good stride and a good pace, I get a writer's high when I settle into a rhythm. Suddenly, there's no concept of time, my body and mind have no concept of exhaustion. I can work for hours upon hours in a euphoric trance. It's very addicting.

Do you spend a lot of time researching and how do you go about it?

I spend a great deal of time researching. I spent two years researching for *Restless Heart*. I just read as many books as I can find on the subject and the time period, and I inform myself. I'll make notes and apply them to the story accordingly. Especially with historical fiction, I think it's good to not only entertain the readers, but to teach them something. That way, if they don't like the book, at least they learned something new and it wasn't a complete waste of time. The trick is not to fill the book with trivia, and to know what facts and events are important in moving the story and giving it depth. I don't know how many times I've stumbled upon some piece of information in my research and thought it was the most interesting thing in the world. However, when I'd try to apply it to the story, it became obvious that it did not fit, and only cluttered the page.

How does a story come to you, how do you develop it?

Before the story, I develop a character, and the psychology of the character I want to explore. Before the character, I develop a theme and pick a philosophical ideal I want to explore. Then the story just sort of forms itself around that. By the time I actually start the process of writing the first draft of the novel, I know exactly where the story begins

and ends, and all of the events in between, and I write it chapter by chapter, linear. The real adventure for me, as the writer, is getting the character to each event and seeing how he or she develops, and seeing how the theme and the philosophy develop. While I know the outcome of the story and the events before I write it, I don't know how the character will develop or how the theme will present itself. But the fact that I already know exactly where the story is going allows me to explore the character and the philosophical ideas as I write without slowing me down or plaguing me with writer's block. I don't even know what that is.

Did you write the poetry in *Restless Heart*?

I did. The three poems in *Restless Heart* were actually the first poems I ever wrote. The poem at the very end was the first one I wrote, and I wrote it right before I began the novel. It set the tone for me. Since then I've written dozens of poems, and writing those first three made me realize my love for writing poetry. If I'm not working on a novel I'm working on a poem.

In your biographical sketch, you talk about pursuing your own self-education to prepare for being a writer. You have forsaken a more traditional education in order to pursue your writing. Can you tell us a little about how you have set upon your self-education?

After high school, like any rebellious teenager who had an unwarranted disdain toward authority and conventional ideals, I had no desire to put myself through another 4 years of adults telling me what to do and what to learn, giving me deadlines and eating up my days with homework and projects. I hated high school for those reasons and was dead set on hating college when I began my first semester at Montana State University. I was pursuing a major in filmmaking and screenwriting, and found out in my first few classes that I wouldn't even get to touch a camera or do a writing exercise until my sophomore year. This was disturbing to me. I sought out the screenwriting professor who taught the senior students and told him how anxious I was to pursue my dream as a screenwriter. He read some of my work. I had already written 9 screenplays before I even began college. He gave me private lessons, and I'd stay up all night applying his notes to my work so I could give him a revised draft the following morning. He was impressed by my ambition, dedication, and persistence, and he finally advised me to drop out of school and move to Los Angeles to pursue my dreams. So, I did. I attended a one-year filmmaking program at a vocational school in L.A., tried to sell my screenplays, did the whole Hollywood bit. Had no luck. I started getting bored with screenplays. I found no artistic satisfaction in them. I had written two novels in high school just to see if I could, and I decided to go back to prose fiction.

As for my "self-education", Louis L'Amour's novel, *The Walking Drum*, and his memoir, *The Education of a Wandering Man*, really inspired me to go back to writing novels and to really educate myself in literature, philosophy, and history. I began reading what is considered "classic literature" where I realized the kind of novelist I wanted to be. I read the works of all the great philosophers, which made me realize the kind of ideas and

themes I wanted to explore in my writing. In the back of his memoir, L'Amour lists all of the books he read over his years of wandering, so that was my foundation, and from there I just developed my own course in literature, philosophy, and history. I certainly had a better syllabus than any college professor could have come up with, and I followed it on my own accord. I studied what was interesting to me and didn't have to worry about anyone telling me what I *had* to read or what I had to take away from what I read. It was very liberating and my prose improved tremendously in a very short amount of time. Sometimes I wish I had this knowledge-hungry mind when I was younger, so I could have pursued a proper education in literature and philosophy, but I think my way worked out just fine. It's still working just fine as far as I'm concerned.

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Restless Heart

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