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## 5 Questions With Author Bradley Spinelli

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BRADLEY SPINELLI is the author of the novel *Killing Williamsburg*, and the writer/director of the film *#AnnieHall*, which the *Village Voice* called “fascinating.” He contributes regularly to *Bedford + Bowery* and lives in Brooklyn. *The Painted Gun* is his latest novel. Visit his website at [13spinelli.com](http://13spinelli.com).

**1. *What was the title of the first book you fell in love with that turned you into a life long reader?***

It wasn't one book for me; more of an evolving process as I read outside of what schoolteachers were making us read. By all accounts I read voluminously from early on, and I remember trying to read above my level. Around the same time we were having *A Wrinkle in Time* read to us in class—which I loved—I checked out a book from the Bookmobile called *Hell is Too Crowded*. I didn't get very far. You could get away with that in the '70s—I was eight or nine, checking out an adult thriller with “Hell” in the title. Someone probably should have stopped me from reading *1984* in 1984, but I loved all the sex. I bought into the escapism of reading, a way out of the limitations and frustrations of pubescent life. As perverse as it sounds to read *1984* for escapism.

**2. *If you could host a dinner party for three literary characters or authors, who would you invite, and why?***

Anton Chigurh from *No Country for Old Men*, Murphy from the Beckett novel, and William Seward Hall, the Burroughs character from *The Western Lands*. It would be an intense conversation about life, death, what's in between, and what's beyond. Right up until Chigurh gets offended by Murphy and murders all of us.

Picking authors is harder—sometimes the writing you adore is by people you couldn't stand to be in a room with. I'd do a dinner with Denis Johnson, James Ellroy, and, of course, William S. Burroughs. I have similar infatuations with addiction, characters on the fringes of society, and the bizarre and inexplicable crossroads of fiction and reality. The way Ellroy dissects history, or Bill's examination of his own history, or Johnson's tender rendering of even the most horrifying personal moments... how that's done or why one would bother is my idea of great dinner conversation. I would serve steak.

**3. *What is the power of story? Describe some ways in which fictional narratives***

*have impacted you and your life.*

I recently saw *The Empire Strikes Back* on the big screen with the New York Philharmonic playing the soundtrack live. I realized that seeing it as a kid was probably the first time I went to the movies and experienced a *bummer* ending. It was so upsetting—yet it became my favorite. I’ve been shaped by tragic endings, drawn to a deeply upsetting journey, even if it ends on a high note. The gurgling narrative in my brain is forever running scenarios even within my own life. If all our stories end on the same note—death—maybe we’re trying to find imaginary “endings” in the middle that are more pleasant, and ways to ultimately put our final ending into a bearable context.

#### **4. What was the most challenging thing about writing *The Painted Gun*?**

Because this book is so heavily plot-driven, I got “plot headaches,” like trying to do complicated mathematical equations, but with no remainders. And if you move one variable, the whole thread has to be adjusted all the way through. This was my first genre work, and any genre comes with its own rules or expectations that must be either upheld or overthrown.

#### **5. Do you have a current – or “forever” – favorite book?**

*Tropic of Cancer*. That book ruined me, made me want to write a book, knocked my entire life in a different direction over twenty years ago. And I still quote it regularly. I’m probably due to re-read it again. If I hate it this time, maybe I can start a different career.

1 Likes

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Book of the Week: *The Sleep of the Rig...*

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