



The Letterpress Project

# An Interview With Ahmad Amani

## **Q1. What are your earliest memories of books and reading? For example, did you have a favourite or inspirational book?**

Thank you so much for the featuring me and [Math City](#) on this site, I really appreciate because for me in the hell of the Middle East that is a great opportunity.

Some time ago, I read another book by Jostein Gaarder in the name of "The Solitaire Mystery: A Novel About Family and Destiny". I think the novel is so great. I like Hans Thomas and his father in this story. You know the book is about Hans and his father, they want to find Hans's mother who left them many years earlier.

Please let to say that my mother had never left me and our family, also the relation between me and my father is not like Tomas and his father. In fact, relations in the Middle East are so different with other places. Surely my father likes me and me too, but we show it in other way, we speak seldom to each other, despite I know that my father will help me anytime I need him.

Nevertheless when I read the book I think that I am Hans and his story is about me and so on, why? So we could read the great novel and see why one in the Middle East think that he is Hans, am I crazy or the book is so great and fit to all people in the world? But I am sure about that; Jostein Gaarder is an author who needs us all to read him.

Also many other people have influenced my writing life. Like George Orwell, William Faulkner, Gabriel García Márquez, Albert Camus, Anton Chekhov and Friedrich Nietzsche. And of course my teacher, Farshad Walizadeh, in my high school, who threw me into the world of literature.

## **Q2. What inspired you to become an author/ illustrator?**

For writing we have many reasons, like war, love, our family and so on, but I think the world (especially the earth) and humanity is so important, I think we need speak and write

more about two issues, we need to improve a man (woman) of deep humanity about all of problems, and in this time about our earth.

For example, when I look at the picture of the last male northern white rhino, I see human fate, too. In fact, this is our fate under armed guard 24/7, who has made this situation and now the same one who made the terrible situation want to save us from unknown attacks, this is true for all our communities.



Eugène Ionesco in his play Rhinoceros (written in 1959) shows us how people turn into rhinoceroses, I think this is first game and next game is that: in our time we could see how animals have to turn into human.

Please think about this stupid phrase if you could: 'in the end of the world, all things have changed into humanitarian issues'. Oh yes the other meaning of this phrase is that; you (lions, rhinos, stars and so on and so on) have to face extinction, because we want to continue our generation.

There is no way, you must change into a human issue, you have to turn into human, in fact this is the same thing that religious extremists want to do it, you know they have a terrible ideologies and want all of world accept it, and for making it they are ready to do anything.

But we should accept that we as a human are just a little part of this world. Unfortunately we think humans are so much more important than others, but really a tree or a flower never less than we are, that is so terrible why we think and are sure that we are important than a flower and so on. I suppose that humans yet think that they are central of the world; we could not still get rid of ideologies that were at "Medieval Thought", we have just changed its forms, but not its contents.

### **Q3. For you, what makes a successful book or illustration?**

I live in the Middle East where mathematics is as important as it was in ancient Greece. I have been interested in mathematics, too, and I have a diploma in Mathematics.

I have always enjoyed playing with numbers and mathematical symbols in my mind; I drowned in mathematics but, of course, I didn't die. Instead, slowly numbers and mathematical symbols have come to life as characters in my mind such as Mr. Six, Lady Thirteen, the Lying Line (minus) and Mr. Broken Line (from my next book). With them and a little interest in writing I could write some short stories which have a mathematical structure.

Now, you know that mathematics is important in the Middle East, but philosophy unfortunately isn't. Instead, religion is very important and we know most religions were born in the Middle East. Unfortunately, after thousands of years, these religions have not yet reached a compromise. You can see this chaotic situation in the Middle East. Well, I have grown amid the commotion of the wars, too, for this reason I thought I could may write about these wars and the culture of the Middle East's people in fantasy style, in the world of mathematical symbols like Poor Zero, Ms. Fifty Thousand, Mr. Upward Lying Line (plus). I think fantasy has a major influence on the people. In fantasy, you never have to point out or criticize anybody or any certain culture. I never like to point at a certain culture because all cultures have some strong points and some weak. Therefore, through fantasy, we are able to challenge our culture to reach peace.

Also I graduated from Art University in Iran so I would like to illustrate my stories if I could and have enough time.

### **Q4. Do you have a specific audience in mind when you write your books/ plan your illustrations?**

Oh yes, I always write my books with children, and now with my daughter, Dania. I think adults could understand the world of any child, but often we do not like think about that because we are so busy and maybe for other reasons. We use to be a child for this surely we could understand them but maybe now we do not have enough time for them, for this many people think that adults could not understand children, please let me light up that there is a big different between "understanding" and "do not have enough time or any other thing like that".

So when we write a book with children in our mind, surely adults could get it, but with adults we do not have children.

### **Q5. What future do you think the physical book has? For example, do you think the electronic book will replace the physical book?**

I think that the electronic book is the biggest discovery in the 21th century. I cannot understand why we still cut the trees for books and magazines or print works or our other works. That is so painful: for creating a better world with books, we have still destroyed trees.

I have a daughter in the name of Dania, now she could read both physical books and electronic books, why not? I could understand the readers who say that they

could not communicate with an electric book because there was not any electronic book when they were kid, so now they are not able to get an electronic book, even we (last generation) enjoy the smell of our physical books, the smell of papers is so enjoyable, is it not? Yes I could understand it.

But really could not understand, who say that the physical book is better than the electric book, why? Please look at our earth; we need to stopping (even not to diminish) cut trees. At least, we could stop to destroy trees as we use oil produces in this massive volume. I am sure our future generation could enjoy the electronic books for that they had grown with the books.

**Q6. Are you a book collector? Is there a special book you'd love to own?**

Really no, I live in a place where people, for various reasons they could not read books, more because of poor economic conditions so we (I & my friends)made us swear to give our books to others when we were in high school. Yet I have so many books, but I have sworn, and I will give any book if anyone wants to read it.

More than several times some newspapers or websites emailed me and want to write a note about a book, I would like to do it because I knew that I used to read it, but I go to my library seeing that I did not have the book anymore. At the same time this is so enjoyable for that I would be sure another reader could read the book.