



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

An interview with Myfanwy Fox

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

I was a shy, awkward child and I lost myself in books as soon as I could read. Books are magical doors to other fabulous places. Both my parents loved reading. My father liked non-fiction and poetry, my mother novels. Birthday and Christmas presents were often a book or a book token. I remember being disappointed at being given a book about rabbits – how childish! – for my seventh birthday. Eventually, bored one wet afternoon, I flicked it open and *Watership Down* was one of those books I fell in love with – along with *Stig of the Dump*, *Swallows and Amazons* and *The Wierdstone of Brisingamen*. Reading *The Child that Books Built* (Francis Spufford) a few years ago took me back to all those childhood discoveries.

At eleven (and bored, again) I picked up *Star Rangers* (Andre Norton) at the local library and fell in love with sci fi. I'd read *War of the Worlds* and *The Time Machine* but they were of some previous era: the stories were good but the settings made no sense to me. From then on I read more eclectically including my mother's favourites (including Austen, Hardy, Dickens, Josephine Tey, Mary Stewart, Dorothy Sayers, Mary Renault) and almost everything our tiny local library could offer.

My earliest memory of reading is from infants school when we'd take turns to read the set book in class and I'd always end up several pages ahead and be embarrassed when my name was called because I'd have no idea where I was supposed to be. It was painful. I hated school.

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

Wanting to create the same excitement for others that special books gave to me and having the characters and stories demanding to be written inside me.

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

Feeling so completely for the characters that I can forget the outside world and believe utterly in their universe. Favourite authors include Joanne Harris, John le Carre, Terry Pratchett. Young adult fiction is often far more tautly crafted than adult fiction; I love the Hunger Games and anything by Malorie Blackman or Meg Rosoff.

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

I've not had a novel published yet but, yes, when I write I have an audience in mind – me, younger, eager for words. My eighteen-year-old daughter is a good first reader for me as we like a lot of the same films and books and she doesn't mince her words when commenting. I'm amazed and delighted that she's keen to meet each instalment of writing; when she admits to crying over the death of a character or falling in love with one I feel I've cracked it.

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

Vinyl was supposed to be on the way out but now it's hipster heaven so I think books will be mainstream for a long while yet. Ebooks may be convenient but it's lovely to have something to cherish – and to loan to others. I'm guessing the length – word count – of books is widening already as ebooks don't have the spine-snapping problem of massive sagas and novellas are a convenient read for those who can't face a full novel's complexities. As to the future? I think there are more pressing worries the way things are going politically and environmentally.

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

I collect poetry books because – as with any writing – it's necessary to read widely and deeply and local libraries don't have much in the way of poetry except for "the greats" and, perhaps, local poets' donated collections. I'm a Ledbury Poetry Festival volunteer steward and it's a great way to get to as many events as possible. Meanwhile, I recently won a signed le Carre first edition in a raffle which is rather wonderful. I still have some of my late mother's childhood books.