



The Letterpress Project

Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this series of Letterpress Project e-interviews that we are undertaking over the coming months. The Letterpress Project is a not-for-profit initiative that exists to promote the value and pleasures of the physical book and we are keen to get the thoughts of authors and book illustrators about their own influences, experiences and love of books. We are happy for you to make your answers as long or as brief as you are comfortable with and we will undertake not to edit or paraphrase any of your comments without your explicit permission.

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

I was a very pale, little boy so my mother decided her translucent child should be examined by a doctor in case he was gradually vanishing. Honestly! Anyway, I was five and there was the Donald Duck Annual 1958. I pored over it and the nurse let me keep it. The books that hooked me as a primary school kid were Children of the New Forest, Treasure Island and The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Treasure Island was my favourite.

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

I had trained initially as a teacher of French, but I was a restless young man and dropped out. In my thirties, I retrained as a primary teacher. On our course, my tutor, Waltraud Boxall, told us to write some poems about the Albert Dock. That was it, I couldn't stop scribbling.

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

Quite simply, it engages one reader. I have read lots of 'in books', 'must reads' and 'prize winning bestsellers' that left me cold. Then I will come across a book nobody has heard of and I love it. People sometimes get snobbish about plot, but I like a book where something happens. I am allergic to tremulous sensitivity!

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

Yes, me at the rough age-range for which I am writing. I don't write for myself. That is selfish and will never sustain a career. I write for kids with my kind of interests. I don't write for all kids or even the majority.

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

The good, old codex is proving very robust. After an initial surge of interest, the take up of electronic books has subsided. When it comes to young people, the attachment to the physical book is strong. For convenience, I read a lot of books on my laptop, but I still love to curl up with a nice, heavy tome. It is a great and enduring piece of kit.

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

I am not a collector of anything. I don't like stuff. I am not interested in fashion, ornaments, pictures or mementoes. I have hundreds of books up in the loft because I read so much and the charity shops won't take them. I hate the idea of them being pulped. That would feel a bit Fahrenheit 451. I have a copy of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist signed by Ricky Tomlinson which is fun and a Michael Rosen signed by the man himself to my kids. That's about it. If there is a book I would love to own it would be a signed copy of Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath or King's On Writing.

Thank you very much for taking time to do this for us. We will advise you when we publish it on the website - www.letterpressproject.co.uk. Please return the completed interview to:

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