



The Letterpress Project

An Interview With Tony Bradman

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

My teacher in the last year of Junior School, Mr Smith, read *The Hobbit* to us... I absolutely loved it, and soon became obsessed with reading. That led me to *The Lord of the Rings*, books by Rosemary Sutcliff and lots more.

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

It was definitely reading great books! I loved that sense of being lost in a wonderful story, being gripped by the suspense and wanting to know what was going to happen, finding yourself in a completely different world that was so different from the veer ordinary south London I was living in. By the time I was in my mid-teens it was pretty much all I wanted to do.

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

'Successful' is a tricky term... The question I always ask - both of my own books and those of other people - is a simple one, ie does it work? What is a writer or illustrator trying to do here, what kind of story or picture is it, what are the rules of this particular game? You then assess it on the basis of how skilfully it's been done, whether it's original, different, says something interesting/relevant/new about people and the world we live in. Often I think you know whether something is 'successful' in this sense within the first few pages (or even first few sentences/images). That's how I approach what I do, too. I try to make it original, different, interesting, relevant - and as good as it can be.

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

A lot of what I've done over the years has been commissioned for specific age groups, so the answer to the question is 'yes'. There are differences between writing something for a 5 year old, and a novel for older children, if only in terms of level of understanding, grasp of language, themes that might not be right for younger kids etc. That said, all the same principles - of making it as good as I can, telling a great story that's gripping - apply equally.

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 the predictions of the death of the physical book are all completely wrong, and no, I don't think the e-book will replace it. E-books have their place in the market - they're very useful. I have a Kindle that I take on holiday, and that's certainly easier than filling a spare suitcase with two dozen paperbacks (which is what I used to do). But I still buy loads of books - the experience of reading an e-book is very different and not quite so satisfying - and there's nothing like reading a beautiful hardback (or paperback either!). Publishers have really responded to the rise of the e-book by improving the quality of the physical book - they're amazing. Plus, the e-book hasn't really had the same impact in children's books - for young children it's still all about physical books, and even up to and beyond MG level the physical book still dominates. I really don't think that's going to change (even taking the current crisis into account!).

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

As you can probably tell from my answers above, I'm a pretty obsessive book buy. I have a house full of books, and buy and read books all the time. I'm not a collector in the sense that I'm collecting lots of first editions, although I have a few special books by authors I really admire (a first edition of Rosemary Sutcliff's *The Eagle of the Ninth*, for instance), and after a lifetime of being in the business I've got a lot of signed copies of books by friends. One of my current online wish lists has 131 items in it... so it doesn't look as if my obsession with books and reading is going away any time soon!