



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 don't remember many of the books I read early on, though I know I read about anything I could get my hands on (my local library issued me with extra tickets so I could take out more books each week). The first book that made a really big impression on me was Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mr Tom*. It was the first time I remember being entirely immersed in a book. I remember lying down on my bed (it was the top bunk in the room I shared with my brother) and then I remember closing the book, and in between I had no memory of reading the words on the page. I was there with Willie Beech every step of the way and I emerged from the book with tears running down my face, utterly confused and shell-shocked. That was the point at which I realised how powerful words could be, and that moment has stayed with me since then and it serves as a reminder of what I want to achieve through my writing, to give readers that immersive experience of the world they are reading.

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

I first remember wanting to be an author when I met Robert Westall, author of *The Machine Gunners*. It was the first time I associated the words on the page with a real person. He talked to me for a short while about the book and then signed my copy and I remember thinking 'if he can do it, perhaps I could too', though it's taken a fair while for me to actually get round to finishing a novel.

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

A successful book, for me, is one that drags me into its world and holds me there for the whole time I'm reading. It's the book that makes me do half the work, that doesn't spoon-feed me, but gets me working as a reader. And the most successful books are the ones that continue to live beyond the actual reading, but come back to you over time, because of

some core narrative truth they convey. The books that you never quite get out of your system.

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

I don't write for a specific audience. I focus on writing the best story I can. I wouldn't like it to come across as solipsistic, but I try to write books I would want to read and hope if it's something I would want to read, others might like it too.

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 physical books will be around for a long time yet. While it's convenient to carry around hundreds/ thousands of books on a small computer, I don't own one and unless someone creates one that starts to compete with the reading experience of a physical book, I probably won't for some time.

I spend a lot of my working day staring at a screen and for my leisure time, I want something different. And if the device I'm reading on has access to the internet or email it's just something else that will pull me out of the reading experience. There's definitely something wonderful about a book having a single function.

And my bigger concern is around the simplicity with which an electronic book could be tampered with. I know my physical book will still have the same ending, the same edit, the same characters each time I pick it up. With an electronic book, there's always a nagging suspicion someone could alter it in some way without me knowing and that makes me nervous.

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

Yes. My 'to be read' pile is huge and increases daily (I added five new novels to the collection today) though I do plan to read everything I buy.

I'm not sure about special books I'd love to own, though there are some books that are incredibly beautiful objects and if I had more money than I knew what to do with, I'd probably start buying first editions of beautiful books. I saw a first edition of 'Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas' in a bookshop in Dublin a few years ago and it was a thing of real beauty. I'd probably start with that.

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:

Karen Argent

Project Director Karen.argent@btinternet.com