



## The Letterpress Project

### Author and Illustrator E-Interviews

# AN INTERVIEW WITH HUNT EMERSON

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

*I think I could always read. I was the sort of compulsive child reader who read the jam labels and cornflakes packets at breakfast. But my reading was never very structured or directed as a child. I read Biggles, William, cowboy novels, Hornblower. I don't remember what else – a huge mish mash. There were always lots of books around, but nothing highbrow.*

*I also read any comics I could get my hands on. By some chance I got to know MAD comics at the age of 9 or 10. The American humour magazine MAD was originally, in the 1950s, a comic book spoof of other comics, films and culture, created by a comics genius editor called Harvey Kurtzman, with a set of equally genius artists, significantly Wally Wood, Jack Davies and Bill Elder. These comics were very modern, detailed, clever, and hysterically funny.*

*For the British market, they were published by Ballantine in anthologised paper back format, and it was these paperbacks that I saw as a child. A kid in my class at school had got hold of a copy of Utterly Mad, and there was a pile of kids on his school desk, looking and laughing at the book. I fought my way through the mob and was thrilled and entranced beyond belief at what I saw. Beautifully drawn, very funny comics about US TV and horror films and rock and roll and outer space and GIs and Girls! I became an instant convert to MAD, and worked hard to find the series of books. I used my own pocket money to buy them! They were my constant study and entertainment for years – probably my Most Inspirational Book.*

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

*Drawing was always the only thing I was good at, and comics were, for me, the language of drawing.*

*Once, when I was about 8 years old, I was playing with a friend in his house – a small miner’s cottage. This would be around 1960, north east of England. My friend’s brother came into the house with his girlfriend. He was a teddy boy – greased hair in Tony Curtiss style, narrow jeans, drape jacket, crepe soled boots, and his girl was a female match, with bouffant hair, tight skirt and pointed shoes. Eye-bogglingly Impressive!!*

*They sat on the settee, and he picked up a 12 inch thick pile of comics – Beano, Dandy, Topper, Beezer, Knockout, Victor, Hotspur. He passed her half the pile and they both said nothing, just sat and read the comics. I so much wanted to get my hands on those comics, and "Comics" was branded in my mind from then on as "reading matter for teddy boys".*

*What further inspiration could I need?*

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

*Usually it must make me laugh. I also have to enjoy the drawing style, but I can’t explain to you what my criteria are – they are fanciful, fleeting and fickle.*

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

*I hope my audience has a sense of humour, of irony, and of the absurd. What makes me laugh most is theatrical music hall humour, and if I can make other people laugh at silly puns and daft jokes, then I feel I may have succeeded in a story.*

*I can’t do Politics, and people who try engage me in that sort of work are always disappointed.*

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

*I hope it doesn’t do so until after I’m dead. I try and keep abreast of technology, but I just don’t like reading comics on a screen. I use my Kindle reader a lot, but I only go for cheap books on it – so it’s a lot of pulp science fiction, history books, and rock biographies. For real reading I still prefer a brick of paper in my hand.*

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

*I've got some... no, let me rephrase that – I've got far too many lovely, fascinating books, the majority of which haven't been looked at for more than 15 years. It's so difficult to let them go. I don't "collect" but I can't help finding interesting books. And as for comics.....*