



Authorgraph 209: Marcus Sedgwick

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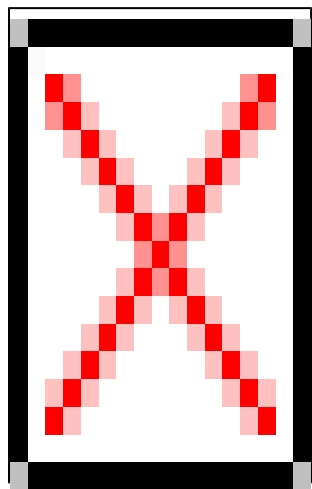
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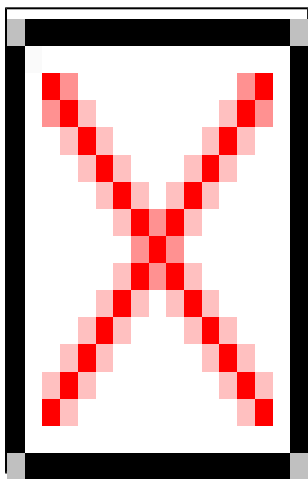
The author of **The Ghosts of Heaven** interviewed by **Nicholas Tucker**

Any book by Marcus Sedgwick holds out rich promise. His light-hearted stories for younger children are always funny. His novels for older readers increasingly mix suspense and a high sense of atmosphere with explorations into whatever intellectual conundrum is most occupying him at the moment. He suffered from M.E. for some time, but has now recovered sufficiently well to write two truly ground-breaking works, **She Is Not Invisible**, published last year and **The Ghosts of Heaven**, just out now. There is also a new dark thriller for adults, **A Love Like Blood**, published in sprint this year.



We are meeting, suitably enough for a writer attracted to all things Gothic, in the cavernous and dimly lit cellar of Cambridge's Hotel du Vin, near enough to the small village where Marcus lives. Slim, quietly spoken, consistently thoughtful but with an engaging sense of humour, he makes an ideal subject for any interviewer. So what comes first when he is planning a novel for young adults, the story or the philosophical speculation that so often accompanies it?

?Whatever is particularly interesting me at the time comes first. In the case of **She is Not Invisible**, my fascination

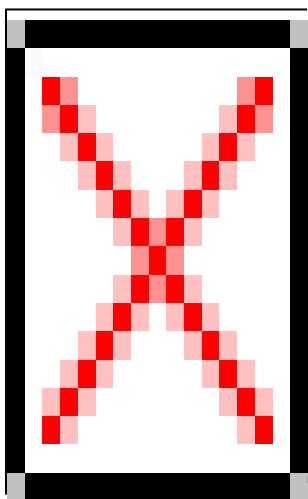


with the whole subject of coincidences which underlies the main plot had been knocking around in my notebooks for at least ten years. When I finally decided that this would be an interesting topic to write about I then had to find a story which will allow me to discuss what I wanted to discuss. In the case of coincidences, bad writers have used them so often that no-one ends taking them seriously. But no authors have ever tried writing about them as a main topic, which is what I have tried to do.?

This novel also has some discussion of Jung's theory of synchronicity. Do the sort of coincidences he discusses mean much to you?

?I certainly have had experience of them myself which started me thinking. The number 354, which crops up a lot in the story, has always had a particular fascination for me. Long after this interest materialised I travelled to New York. The taxi that met me was number 354 and so was the hotel room reserved for me!?

Marcus continues to feature this particular number in his fiction. The 354th word in **She is Not Invisible** is ?coincidence? and the book finishes, as you may already have guessed, on page 354. There are other connections too for eagle-eyed readers to work out for themselves.



The Ghosts of Heaven focuses instead on the significance of the Fibonacci Spiral and the way it is repeatedly found in nature. It also crops up in the book's four interlinked stories, stretching from the Stone Age to life in a sinister American Lunatic Asylum, as they were then called, during the 1920s. There is also mention of the possible significance of other mathematical formulae. Where does this particular interest come from?

?I have always liked numbers and read maths at university, though only for the first year. But I have retained a lingering interest in it ever since. Although maths can be quite good at supplying definitive answers, I prefer to let readers come up with their own take on what I am writing. **The Ghosts of Heaven**, for example, is made up of four separate parts set in a different time and in a different place. These can be read in any order. I know which order makes most sense to me but I haven't told my readers about that. They must find their own way themselves.?

You also write about witch trials in your latest novel and have visited that topic before in your story **Witch Hill**. Is this another special area for you?

?Well, it's such a fascinating topic. I always do lots of research before I write, until I get to the point when the story I want to tell is almost bursting out. For the purposes of my last novel I read a great deal about the Salem Witch Trials which are quite fascinating in their combination of hostility and claustrophobia.?

You seem happy at times to push your readers quite a bit in your fiction. Is this deliberate?

?I can only write what I want to write and in the way that I do. As I like challenging myself when I write it follows that I will probably be challenging young readers too when the book comes out. It may be that I would sell more copies if I sometimes made things easier. But I also think we underestimate young people and their capacity to take on new ideas.?

But what about your comic adventure stories for young readers? They're great fun but they're not exactly challenging.

?They are more like saying to a small child, ?Come and sit next to me and I will tell you a story and we will have lots of laughs along the way.? The actual writing involved may not be as fulfilling but it's a lot more enjoyable to do. But I've stopped at least for a bit with younger stuff. There's one more coming out next January. Otherwise I am going more in the direction of somewhere between young adult and adult fiction, alternating between the two with each book.?

You have sometimes illustrated your books with you own woodcuts or stone carvings. Is that something you are going to continue?

?I don't think so. I never have enough time. I have been doing quite a lot of school visits over the last three years as well as writing full-time but I have reined back on these too now. Last week I addressed about 350 Year 9 pupils and what with still recovering from M.E. felt totally wiped out afterwards.?

That sounds tiring enough even without M.E. Do you think you will ever write about your own encounter with this still-mysterious illness?

?Possibly. But if I do it will be an unconscious process coming out in its own time. The main character in **She is Not Invisible** is blind. But it only struck me the other day that all the time I was describing her I was also drawing on my own experience when I had sight problems some years back, thankfully all cured now. Bringing this personal knowledge into the book was an entirely unconscious decision.?

Marcus is now aged 46 with a substantial body of work already behind him. It will be fascinating to see where he will go next. One thing is certain: whatever he does it will be different from the bulk of whatever else is going on in British children's publishing today, and many would say all the better for that.

Nicholas Tucker is honorary senior lecturer in Cultural and Community Studies at Sussex University.

The books

She is Not Invisible, Indigo, 978-1780621340, £7.99 pbk

Ghosts of Heaven [3], Indigo, 978-1780621982, £10.99 hbk

A Love Like Blood, Mulholland Books, 978-1444751925, £7.99 pbk

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