

Interview with Oliver Eade, author of *Moon Rabbit*, by Mark Waterfield of www.mossgreenchildrensbooks.co.uk. *Moon Rabbit* was a winner of the Writers' & Artists' yearbook New Novel Competition and long-listed for the Waterstone's Children's Book Prize.

- Would you please help me understand what motivates you and inspires you to write children's books?

A: I began writing for children after telling stories to my Texan granddaughters. I soon found I was actually writing for the child in myself. I firmly believe there is still, deep within each of us, the child we once were. Writing both for my adult self, often dark and disturbing, and for my inner child, optimistic and open to the many wonders around me, I seem to achieve a sort of balance.

- How has your career as a hospital doctor influenced your writing?

A: My medical career has had an enormous influence on my writing, for the doctor-patient relationship is such a special one. There can be few other walks of life that give a person so much insight into the human experience. Although, as a doctor, I would never ever write about my patients or their personal stories, which, as a doctor I've been privileged to share, it's the passion, the sorrow, the grief and the resilience of the human spirit I saw over all those years as a doctor that continue to inspire me. I understand how Chekhov got his own inspiration.

- Can you please tell me a little bit about the creative process in *Moon Rabbit*?

A: I've always been fascinated by mythology, man's first attempt at story-telling. In Chinese mythology, which stretches back over many thousands of years, I was intrigued by its amazing tales and colourful characters. I asked for a child-friendly book on Chinese mythology at Waterstone's for my quarter-Chinese granddaughters and was told the closest thing they had was about Greek mythology ... and not very child-friendly at that. So when we were staying with my Chinese sister-in-law in China in 2006, I wrote my own story about a Scottish boy and Chinese girl who find themselves in mythological China. It was an opportunity to incorporate into a fun story many of those ancient myths, and give life to a few of their wonderful characters.

I felt strongly about the use of illustrations for the story I'd created, for many children would have little idea what a Chinese dragon, the Monkey King, the Jolly Buddha etc would look like, and colour because China is such an incredibly colourful country. I loved the work of Alma Dowle, a local artist, and we worked in collaboration over the images ... unusual for most young readers' books nowadays. Maybe my photographic background has influenced my views on children's book illustrations.

- How has your Chinese wife influenced your Western based values in life / thinking and your thinking about children?

A: My Chinese wife has been the yin of my yin-yang journey through life over the past forty-five years, her tolerance balancing my tendency towards intolerance, her optimism an antidote to my Eeyore-like pessimism, her lively personality a check on my introspection. If it wasn't for my wife, I'd never have delved into not only the history and mythology of China, but also her religions and philosophies, including Daoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, the beautiful poetry of the T'ang dynasty, and the wonders of Chinese art.

The Chinese, including my wife, a retired primary teacher, love their children and I'm always struck by how well children in China play together, how disciplined they appear, showing little, if any, aggression. Juvenile delinquency and yob culture do not seem to be of the same order as seen here in the U.K. Perhaps children there feel more tolerated ... more accepted for who they are.

- In what ways do you think your children have benefited from having a Chinese mother i.e. a mother from "the East" than "the West?"

A: My wife's own influence in our own children's upbringing is the chief reason behind our very special relationships with our son and daughter, and our three granddaughters.

Much of my wife's Chinese tolerance rubbed off onto our children. Also, a mixed cultural background has widened their life-experience and horizons and helped them to be more objective in their general approach to things.

- What aspects of Chinese culture / way of life do you admire?

A: Above all else, the importance of respect for the family, the stress on aesthetic values and, not least, the place of food in day to day life. As mentioned in Moon Rabbit, a polite address to an acquaintance in China is ‘have you eaten?’ Preparation of food, the balance of flavours and textures in Chinese dishes, is an art form that permeates the very soul of Chinese culture.

- For a parent /parents who have a child only interested in watching TV what advice would you give them in their quest to interest their child in reading children’s books?

A: Sounds like the damage has already been done! Younger children need to be set time limits for TV viewing, with quality time set aside for book reading. Trying to impose these later could cause friction, battles ... and even antagonism against reading. A wide variety of books should be made available for the child ... like adults, children’s tastes differ. If the parents have done the right things and the child is *still* a reluctant reader they should encourage library visits and think about children’s book clubs. There are some helpful websites.

- What advice would you give a young adult trying to make their way out into the wide world?

A: Learn from the experience of others, and listen to what people tell you about yourself. In that way you can find out so much about your strengths and weaknesses, build on your strengths and strengthen your weaknesses.

- How would you persuade kids that green issues are important and something needs to be done by them?

A: Most importantly, through the educational system, and information passed on to the future generation through parents. Already schools focus on green issues, and community-based projects, such as ‘plant a tree’, could help to make children feel involved. Perhaps there should be more BBC programmes designed to tackle green issues at a child’s level. I believe children’s book publishers and agents also have a duty to begin ‘thinking green’. In one ‘how-to-write-for-children’ book I read I learned that we should not attempt to teach children anything in their fiction ... only entertain. What a missed opportunity to save our planet! Thankfully there’s some wonderful fiction that *does* teach the child about the importance of looking after our world: e.g. Isabel Allende’s teenage novel, *City of Beasts* in which a boy and girl strive to save Amazon

Indians from greedy land-prospectors. More of that, please, if you care about the future!

- Would you tell us about your causes or charities that you are involved with? Why these particular causes / charities?

A: •A founding and committee member of the **Scottish Borders African Aids Group**, I am much involved with this charity which raises money for specific projects in sub-Saharan Africa to help people suffering from, or as a result of, HIV/AIDS. We only support projects in which ‘middle men’ play no part, and several of our members travel regularly to Africa to ensure funds are spent properly and not squandered. We tend to give priority to projects that favour women and children for we feel this is the most fruitful way of tackling the AIDS epidemic. We raise about £20,000 annually through pay-roll giving, donations and events. I feel the developed world has a duty to care about Africa since many of the problems there are a result of past European imperialism and third world debt.

•**Amnesty International**. Their apolitical approach to human rights has always appealed to me. In 2004 I sold off many of my late father’s art works (he was an artist) and raised £5000 for AI. It made me proud of my old man.

•**The Art Fund**. I love art ... and the idea of contributing to a fund that helps to keep some of our greatest works in the country for all to enjoy, preventing them from disappearing into the private collections of the super-wealthy.

- Perhaps, you would tell us a little bit about your next publication.

A: Normally I am writing several things in parallel, for adults, young adults and for children:

•My next **adult** novel is a crime story set in Song Dynasty China, ‘*One Short of a Thousand Petals*’. The daughter of a widowed provincial teacher discovers the body of her father’s merchant friend near the local monastery. Is his death somehow linked with the mysterious disappearances of girls from the local Miao community village?

•My latest **teenage** book, *The Terminus*, just completed, is an apocalyptic time-travel tale of love, intrigue and betrayal in the last few days of a submerged, twenty-third century London.

- For **young readers** I've started to outline a sequel to *Moon Rabbit*, in which the Monkey King kidnaps Pretty Flower from Peebles to dance at his court in ancient China. It falls upon White Tiger and his friends to rescue her ... a seemingly impossible task.

- I am revising my surreal comedy **play**, *The Gap*, which was recently short-listed in a one-act play competition.

Moon Rabbit by Oliver Eade released 1st November 2009

Available now for pre-order from Amazon – [click here](#)

<http://www.mossgreenchildrensbooks.co.uk>