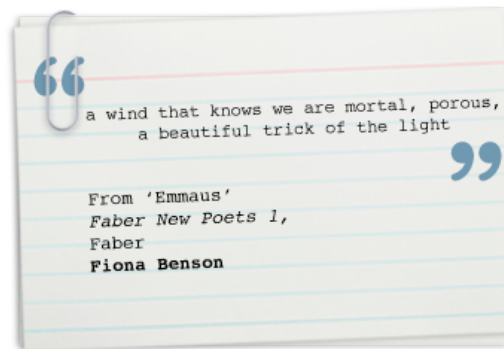




Good Afternoon! It's Wednesday on February 01, 2012.

Literature for everyone in the South West

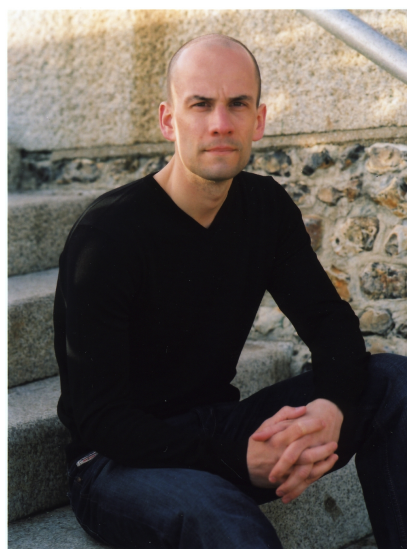
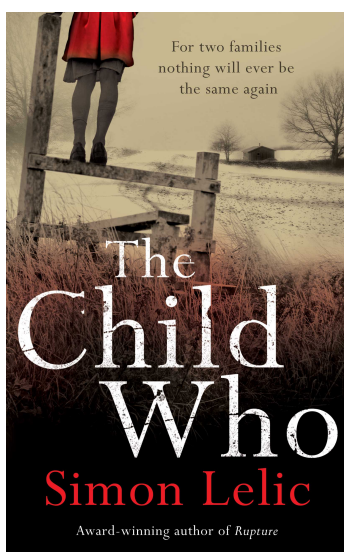


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book of the month

The Child Who
by Simon Lelic



Simon Lelic was born in Brighton in 1976 and, after a decade or so living in London and trying to convince himself that the tube was fine, really, because it gave him a chance to read, he and his wife moved back to Brighton with their two young boys. That Barnaby and Joseph's grandparents happened to live close enough by to be able to offer their babysitting services was, of course, entirely coincidental.

As well as writing, Simon runs an import/export business, though he admits to being more Del Trotter than Howard Marks. His hobbies include reading, golf, tennis, snowboarding and karate. His weekends belong to his family (or so his wife tells him), as does his heart.

Simon studied history at the University of Exeter. After graduating he was qualified, he discovered . . . to do an MA. After that he took a post-grad course in journalism. After working freelance and then in business-to-business publishing, Simon now writes novels.

The Child Who is Simon's third novel, published by Mantle and released this month. Cyprus Well caught up with Simon to find out about his writing techniques.

Have you always wanted to be a writer? Can you pinpoint the time when it suddenly got serious, and you sat down in earnest to write your way towards publication?

I have, on some level, always known I would end up writing. My first 'book', written when I was about eight, was a story about a teddy bear who escapes his owner and visits a funfair. It was entitled, imaginatively enough, 'Ted Visits the Funfair'. It came complete with illustrations and a cover and totalled, I imagine, something like 500 words. During a couple of months of illness I in fact settled on turning the idea into a series. I wrote a prequel and

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What's On



Book of the Month Clips

The Redeemed by M.R. Hall



Dissolution by C.J. Sansom

Pan Macmillan



Innocent by Scott Turow

Hachette Book Group



Dark Matter by Michelle Paver

Pan Macmillan

The Death of King Arthur by Peter

Ackroyd

Penguin

had two ideas for sequels – but then got better and went back to school.

After that, in my teenage years, I attempted numerous knock-offs of *The Lord of the Rings*. None, it goes without saying, was any good. Finally, I settled my aspirations on becoming a journalist. It was, after working for eight years or so in business-to-business publishing, that I became weary of the Style Guide and decided to try something more . . . novel. My first attempt resides (and will remain) in a bottom drawer. I started writing *Rupture*, my first published novel, as a way of distracting myself from that initial failure.

The Child Who deals with dark subject matter. Have you always been interested in writing crime stories?

In a word, no. To be entirely honest, I wasn't drawn to any genre in particular. With *Rupture*, for example, I certainly didn't set out to write what many now regard as a crime novel. My intention, rather, was to write a novel with bullying at its core. The crime has occurred even before the novel gets underway, and the investigation that follows simply seemed to me the most effective way to construct an engaging story around my central premise. That said, I certainly don't have any problem with people describing my writing in these terms. Quite the opposite: I actually feel very flattered. Crime, it seems to me, is a rich and diverse genre, with a dedicated and hugely knowledgeable readership. To be shortlisted for a Crime Writers' Association Dagger, in particular, was a massive thrill and, again, tremendously gratifying.

Can you tell us a bit about your writing environment and habits – is there a particular place or time of day you like to write, do you write a set amount of words a day, for example?

My ideal writing day begins at ten, after a leisurely breakfast of something freshly baked and an hour alone with the newspapers. After that, I settle in with a pot of coffee and dash off a thousand words or so, before heading to a local brasserie for a leisurely lunch. Then it's home to sleep off the wine, before a short walk and home again for a leisurely – OK, OK, maybe not. The truth is, I write when and where I can. We have two kids, with another on the way, and I also run my own business. If I've written 500 words in a day, I'm reasonably happy, but more important than the word count is to feel I'm progressing. A big insight into a character, a plot development, or a structural conundrum, for instance, is worth five, ten thousand words. Particularly given the way I write – for which, see below . . .

How do you plan your novels – how much do you know about the likely timelines and connections between different parts of the plot?

I hardly plan at all. I've tried, but either I get bored or I find, when I try to manoeuvre a character along a particular pathway, they rebel and walk off at a tangent. For me, the writing is the planning. I find that the more I sit and type, the more a novel will reveal itself. It can be wasteful, doing it this way, and often involves extensive redrafting. I've more than once written 40,000 words or so before realising a novel simply wasn't working. But for me, this is the most interesting, most engaging way to write. Someone – I can't remember who – described it as like driving at night with just your headlights. You can see the road immediately in front of you, and you have a vague idea where you're heading. But you only spot the twists and turns, the peaks and troughs, when you reach them.

Are there writers you particularly admire and books you'd recommend to our readers?

I love Cormac McCarthy but I have to ban myself from reading (re-reading) his books until I am between drafts. I find his style so compelling, so consuming, that I subconsciously attempt to imitate it – and inevitably, needless to say, fail miserably. Other contemporary writers I particularly admire include David Mitchell, Don DeLillo, Rupert Thomson and Hilary Mantel but I try to read as widely as possible. The problem, when I am caught up in writing, is trying to lever in the time.

At Cyprus Well we're keeping an eye on what seems to be a digital publishing revolution, with iPads, Kindles, etc. How do you view these developments, both as a writer and a reader?

As a reader, I've not so far been massively affected – which is another way of calling myself a Luddite. I was given a Kindle for Christmas last year, but after playing with it for a while on Boxing Day and buying myself a case, I consigned the whole lot to a drawer. Ten months later, I finally admitted I would never use it and stuck the thing on eBay. I read on my iPad, but only the newspaper (the Guardian's new app is terrific) or The Economist. When it comes to books, I'm strictly old school.

As a writer, my perspective is slightly different. Any development that expands a publisher's (and therefore a writer's) potential route to market is to be welcomed, I would say. In the publishing industry as things stand, a lot of power rests in alarmingly few hands, and digital



publishing will at the very least shake things up a bit. And every industry needs a good shake once in a while.

Finally, what advice do you have for any of our readers who want to be a published writer?

I am not sure I have earned the right yet to dispense advice but, if pushed, I would tell aspiring authors to be selective about what advice they follow. I know from experience how tempting it is to latch on to every utterance you come across concerning 'how to write', to the point where you are frantically trying to accommodate conflicting, contradictory counsel. Find what works for you; forget about how other writers do it.

Thank you Simon!

Book of the Month Archive

June 2010 Derek Landy: *Skulduggery Pleasant Dark Days*
July 2010 Scott Turow: *Innocent*
August 2010: Julia Green: *Drawing With Light*
September 2010: C J Sansom: *Heartstone*
October 2010: Of Love and Hope
November 2010: Michelle Paver *Dark Matter*
December 2010 Peter Ackroyd *The Death of King Arthur*
January 2011 Andrew Taylor *The Anatomy Of Ghosts*
February 2011 Jill Mansell *To The Moon And Back*
March 2011 Aminatta Forna *The Memory of Love*
April 2011 M.R. Hall *The Redeemed*
May 2011 Jussi Adler-Olsen *Mercy*
June 2011 Philip Marsden *The Levelling Sea*
July 2011: Imogen Robertson *Island of Bones*
August 2011: Simon Scarrow *The Legion*
September 2011: Rachael Boast *Sidereal*
October 2011: Jorn Lier Horst *Dregs*
November 2011: Stephen King *11.22.63*
December 2011: Lorna Thorpe *Sweet Torture of Breathing*