**Joseph Coelho Interview**

*The interview below with Joseph Coelho is available to be used in all media, edited or unedited, to promote coverage of Fairy Tales Gone Bad.*

Performance poet Joseph Coelho was recently awarded the CLPE children’s poetry award for his first poetry collection *Werewolf Club Rules!* Previous winners of the prize include the poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy and John Agard. Coelho has written plays for theatre and has appeared in various poetry anthologies. A huge fan of Coelho’s creative and energetic poetry, I was delighted to learn that he was willing to participate in an interview and reveal more about his work.

**Do you only write children’s poetry? Have you ever considered writing for an adult audience?**

I actually started out writing poetry for adults back in 2002. I would perform on the performance poetry circuit in London performing in theatres and cafes. It was great fun but I found that I was continually being asked to perform poems for children. As I was working a great deal in the Theatre for Young Audiences sector it felt natural to write more poetry for young people.

**Where do you draw your inspirations from? Who was your favourite poet as a child?**

Mainly from life experience. However, I think that art should be more than just regurgitating what has happened to you. The key is finding a commonality between your experience and the wider world and presenting that. I love going to museums and art galleries and am often inspired by small objects or painted characters that might end up in a poem or story. I have many fond memories of watching Michael Rosen on TV when growing up. I still think he's amazing and love his ability to bring to life those little familiar family moments with astute powers of observation and comedy.

**What would be your advice for aspiring writers?**

Write what you want to read. Aspiring writers often get caught up in the idea that their writing must be good; this often stops them from ever putting pen to paper. I would advise aspiring writers to forget about it being good, that comes with reshaping and redrafting. If your writing is ever going to be good, it must first exist to be allowed to be bad! We don't expect a sculptor to turn out a perfect statue on the first moulding of clay. We expect them to create a vaguely human shaped lump and then to work on that lump until it blossoms into something we recognise. It's exactly the same with writing.

**What has been your proudest achievement as a poet so far?**

Winning the CLiPPA Childrens Poetry Award is one of my proudest moments to date - it has been wonderful and humbling to join a list of fantastic and distinguished past winners. This year’s prize also included a shadowing scheme which meant that pupils in schools up and down the country learned and performed some of the poems from the short listed collections. I was over the moon to see primary students recite some of my poems off by heart and to hear how the project had inspired them to write their own poems.

**How do you calm your nerves before you are performing in front of large audiences?**

Lots of deep breaths! I don't get as nervous now as I did when I first started out but I have had lots of practice. That said, I performed at The Hay Festival earlier this year to a crowd of 1500 people. I was wearing a head mic and there were cameras trained on me that threw my image on to a huge floating screens so that people could see me clearly at the back of the auditorium. I was a little nervous then.

**How do you handle negative criticism and rejection?**

I think any criticism that comes from a good place is a hugely positive thing, it only becomes negative if it is fuelled by negative emotions. On the whole I find critique hugely helpful as it enables you to improve your work and to see it with fresh eyes. Rejection can be difficult but I strongly believe that rejection is a process we go through between every acceptance. Inspired by Stephen King's *On Writing*, I keep a nail in my wall with all my rejections for various submissions. I see them as footsteps towards a success. At the moment I have my CLPE Award certificate hanging on that same nail - the success is a direct result of all those little rejections. They were all hugely important steps on the road to that success.

**Can you tell us a secret about you that no one else knows?**

I've eaten a Guinea Pig! It's a bit of a staple in highland Peru where Guinea pigs are raised for food. I was staying in a small highland village and the family I was staying with had a herd of guinea pigs in the kitchen. You don't get much meat on a guinea pig but they taste nice!

**FURTHER DETAILS**

**For further information, interviews and press tickets please contact Stephen Beeny on 020 7709 8907 or** **stephen@halfmoon.org.uk**

A selection of images can be downloaded from the Dropbox links below:

***Fairytales Gone Bad*: *Grannylocks* / *The Monstrous Duckling***
[**https://www.dropbox.com/sh/g7v8gmw8wh4m864/AAB2WGlYXhCIY0me9SX9mZZva?dl=0**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/g7v8gmw8wh4m864/AAB2WGlYXhCIY0me9SX9mZZva?dl=0)

***Fairytales Gone Bad*: *Zombie-rella* / *Blood-red Hood***[**https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lbhsnvwq3dn25x9/AAAGCYy520kbXJmqdvzamOK7a?dl=0**](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/lbhsnvwq3dn25x9/AAAGCYy520kbXJmqdvzamOK7a?dl=0)

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