

# ‘If you want to be a writer, give up any hopes of a social life’

Writer Tair Rafiq is featured in this month’s *Chase* magazine. **AMY FORDE**, marketing and communications assistant at *Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance (ROAR)*, met him and found out more about his work.

**I WAS quite eager to sit down properly with Tair Rafiq, a local writer who has just published his first novel, *Daisy and the Dwarf Dragon*. A combination of his refreshingly honest character and the discussing of the writing process in such detail made it an insightful and hilarious interview.**

We started on solid ground, his influences, and it is clear that his wanting to write was imprinted from an early age: “The author that got me interested in writing was a German writer called Offried Preussler. He wrote a children’s book called *Little Witch* which I read when I was about eight and as soon as I started reading that I knew that’s what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.”

There are many writers out there with a similar passion to Tair, but his dedication is extraordinary: “If you want to be a writer and you’re really serious about it, give up any hopes of a social life.” He laughs, but it becomes clear to me that this is no flippant comment. On top of holding down a day job he schedules in writing every day, starting at 8.30am and writing solidly until noon. He even tries to fit in some writing after work if he is not too tired.

The schedule of creative minds is quite frankly a fascinating area which we dance around and his creative reworking is also noteworthy to his practice. He discusses a shed brimmed full of boxes of his work, his “archive” as he describes it, a place where he keeps everything he has written since he was 14 years of age.

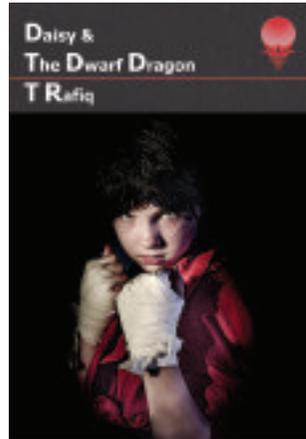
I ask him if he goes through this work and it’s an emphatic yes: “It is almost a pathological obsession. This latest book I have rewritten it at least a dozen to 20 times. I started writing it in August 1997, finally finished it in July this year.”

We delve a bit deeper into the creative writing process: “There were instances in this story which surprised me, even as the author; there were plot twists I didn’t expect were going to happen.”

This creative removal of the plot of the story and the author is something I had never comprehended.

On discussing main protagonist Daisy in his recently published novel he elaborates: “As the character grew, well she grew in ways I didn’t expect. Half way through the book she comes out, something I didn’t expect and was surprised when it happened on the page. It was basically like she was coming out to me.”

Tair tells me this was something Steven King described as digging up a fossil: “The story already exists



complete and perfect as it is. You have to, as the writer, do your best to dig it up very carefully and make sure you don’t disturb its integrity or do anything that would ruin it.”

Through talking to Tair it is clear that his passion for his art is rooted deep within him. He tells me he can’t imagine doing anything else with his life.

We touch upon his school life, which wasn’t great. Because of bullying he escaped into his own world. Reflecting on the experience he now says it impelled him: “When someone holds a hot iron close to your face it motivates you to move away from it.”

Describing himself as a naturally insular character, Tair’s confidence grew once he started getting involved with ROAR back in 2009.

He explains that becoming a member meant he finally met other people who were creative and through them built up contacts.

His writing also developed and he started writing sketches, something which culminated in an Arts Council-funded play *The Secret History of Cake*: “Since I started my association with ROAR things have just snowballed from writing plays to this stage now. If I hadn’t been with ROAR I don’t think I would have been in the position I am now.”

Having just published his first novel, having a book launch at The Trades here in Rotherham in October, and for the first time opening up his work to the big wide world, I wonder how he deals with others’ criticism of his work, something that is so integral to who he is. With an equal measure of seriousness and hilarity he comments: “You look as if you don’t care but really inside you’re dying. It’s killed you.”

I wonder then why he has decided to publish his work now and if there was a particular moment when he knew it was the right time.

With his usual wit he comments: “It’s sort of like asking a parent when do you know your children no longer need you? They never stop needing you but at a certain age they have to go off on their own. This book is 21 years old, I think it’s about time it went out, got a job and earned its keep.”

You can help *Daisy and the Dwarf Dragon* earn its keep by ordering online at [https://www.amazon.co.uk/Daisy-Dwarf-Dragon-Crumb/dp/1723980005/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1540417796&sr=8-1&keywords=daisy+and+the+dwarf+dragon](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Daisy-Dwarf-Dragon-Crumb/dp/1723980005/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1540417796&sr=8-1&keywords=daisy+and+the+dwarf+dragon)



Tair Rafiq with Mayor of Rotherham Cllr Alan Buckley and a young fan.

## COLLECTED GHOST STORIES

Author: M R James  
Publisher: Wordsworth Classics



**I T is that time of year when the tradition of telling a ghost story by the fireside comes to the fore, and who better to tell a spooky tale than M R James?**

His short stories are a lesson to all writers on how to build up suspense, create an unnerving atmosphere and then whack the reader for six when the bad thing happens.

The scary denouement might be just a single sentence in the whole story, or a shocking brief description of a thing or horrifying situation, but M R James is by far the best at giving you the chills.

Many TV versions have been made of his stories, including the brilliantly eerie *Whistle and I’ll Come to You* directed by Jonathan Miller which often turns up on festive TV.

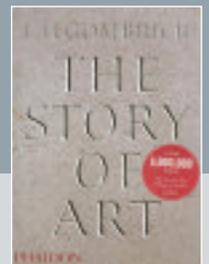
There are no rampaging monsters with M R James, no mass alien invasions or demons with a bad bloodlust, but there are shadows, dark rooms and things that go bump in the night, wild open landscapes and empty country houses. Things that you sense are there and you really don’t want them to be.

He is a brilliant writer who is justifiably lauded by other horror scribes.

There are many editions of his short stories from various publishers. Just get one and enjoy it.

## THE STORY OF ART

Author: E H Gombrich  
Publisher: Phaidon Press



**THIS book has sold millions and has been hugely influential at inspiring people to develop a love for art and architecture, maybe even following a career in it.**

As a layman’s guide to how art has developed over the centuries, there is nothing better. Gombrich writes straightforwardly without lingo and positively oozes enthusiasm.

Best of all there are lots of pictures, relatively short chapters and not that much text. Pretty pictures are always a bonus in a book.

*The Story of Art* is an introduction to the development of painting and drawing, with some architecture thrown in. The book certainly doesn’t go into forensic detail but is informative and will enthuse readers to look at paintings more knowledgeably and admire old cathedrals and churches anew.

Covering thousands of years of art from the prehistoric to the twentieth century is a mammoth task but Gombrich tells the tale beautifully.

Yes it’s very much biased towards European art, and even the Christian tradition, but there is no book better at telling you why you should visit an art gallery and understand that the artworks on show have their own tales to tell.

Many general art books get technical and tedious, but Gombrich wants the reader to learn and so keeps it simple. He is a great teacher and this book is as accessible to young people as it is to adults.