

Rebecca Markwick:

So, before we start, if you could say your first and last name to make sure I pronounce it right. And give your pronouns. If you'd like to give pronouns, that'd be great.

Tamsin Rosewell:

I'm Tamsin Rosewell, and she/her.

Rebecca Markwick:

Hello. Welcome to Shelf Healing, UCL's bibliotherapy podcast. I'm your host, Rebecca Markwick our guest today is Tamsin Rosewell. Tamsin is an artist, historian, broadcaster and bookseller. After 11 years working in Parliament, as a researcher, and for the British Government in Whitehall, she moved to the city to work in the regulated financial services industry on analysis and corporate communications.

After a few years in Brussels, she returned to England to join the team at English Heritage, then part of the DCMS. While retaining her interest in economics and public policy, Tamsin now works for 55-year-old, independent bookshop Kenilworth Books, where she has been a bookseller for nearly 15-years. Tamsin also lectures, freelance, on the history of ghost law, the history of perfume, the history of chocolate - she trained as a chocolatier whilst living in Belgium, I feel like that was like the best thing to do ever - and on Elizabethan horticulture. She paints and exhibits her work, which has been used for album cover designs, posters, and music videos, as well as published illustrations. So, the first question to get started, Tamsin, is nice and easy.

Do you feel that reading is therapeutic?

Tamsin Rosewell:

I actually don't. I don't think that was particularly easy question. I was the kid who was dyslexic and struggled to read at school and books were a real stress for me. I don't think I actually read for pleasure until I was in my twenties. I do remember the first book that I picked off the shelf and chose for myself, and that was *The Worst Witch*, by Jill Murphy. I remember that early on, I was about eight. I think I struggled to read it, but I did read it. And I remember enjoying, I think I probably enjoyed the illustrations, you know, that's my memory of it. Um, but I don't think I really read. The first book I remember reading and, you know, kind of really just getting lost in it was probably *Northern Lights*. So, I must've been about 25 at that point. And I'm 48 now. So just to give you some idea, I, I really didn't find any sense of pleasure in reading as a child. And as a teenager, I really came to it much, much later.

Um, I think left to my own devices, I'm probably more of a non-fiction reader and the overriding sense I get with reading is about interest. It's about kind of gaining an energy and information and it's not for me about just relaxing. I really passionately want to know what that author has got to say. I want to be in their world. I want to, you know, I want to support them as I'm a bookseller. Often, very, very often I'm reading a

book to decide how can I best support this book? Is this a window display book? Is this, am I going to invite the authors to come and join us? You know, do I go all out on social media and, and push this book?

And if I love a book, I will do everything I can to support them. So, it's not, you know, I very, very often don't read to kind of chill. That's not, that's not particularly familiar to me. Um, is it therapeutic? I just, I don't know the answer to that. I just, I find it all kinds of things; I'd say energizing. I think energizing for me is a better word than therapeutic. I don't find it relaxing at all. I don't think that's a bad thing.

Rebecca Markwick:

So, what kind of non-fiction books do you go for then? Are you, are you sort of like history?

Tamsin Rosewell:

Yeah, definitely history. I'm a historian by background. I wanted to study fine art when I left school but in the 1980s and nineties, you couldn't get a grant to study fine art or illustration. There's no way my parents could have afforded it. I managed to work my way through doing a foundation course in fine art, which at the time you had to have to get your portfolio. Then it just became obvious that it was going to happen, so I went and studied constitutional history instead, obviously, what else would you do? Um, and then from there, you know, was actually sent into government. So, I ended up in the Cabinet Office, um, from university. Didn't complete my degree, kind of went straight into government, was sent in there by Peter Hennessy as a historian by backgrounds.

Uh, yeah, I still gravitate towards history. And then those hybrid sort of narrative nonfiction, a lot of what Catherine Johnson writes, for example. Really well-researched historical fiction. I thought *Cecily*, Annie Garthwaite's novel *Cecily* was, it was just stunning. I thought it was one of the most, one of the best pieces of writing I've read probably in the last decade, a really remarkable piece of work. Um, yeah, I still gravitate towards those in, in non-fiction. I think if you're dyslexic, or struggled to read or don't have that confidence as a child often it's the nonfiction books which are displayed better. They're broken up in more reader-friendly ways you get little paragraphs, which are illustrated, you get sections, which are clearly defined. You don't get that in a novel. In a novel, in your, you know, handed *Jane Eyre* at 11 and expected to enjoy it, whether you like it or not. Um, and it's terrifying, you know, if you don't have that confidence. Um, and I think I kind of was drawn into nonfiction and things like short stories, ghost stories. I've always loved ghost stories. Uh, William Blake has always been a passion of mine because there was never a pressure to understand it. That whole comprehension aspect was just not there. You just enjoyed it. You just kind of let it, kind of, you just wallowed in it. Um, so yeah, that kind of nonfiction image, nonfiction books about art, about artists.

Rebecca Markwick:

Lovely. I think you're right. I think non-fiction has a lot more pictures and I've only just sort of thought just how many nonfiction books when you read them, they have beautiful illustration. All over the place and how wonderful that is.

Tamsin Rosewell:

They do. I think actually, we do nonfiction down as an industry. We don't allow it space to be what it is in its own right. The way we talk about non-fiction, whether it's biography, or whether it's history, or political thinking, is to somehow compare it to the novel. So, you often read reviews, which say things like, you know, it's so good. It reads like a novel as if what it really ought to be aspiring to is being a novel.

And it's not, it's nonfiction, it's something completely different. Um, and even I noticed I judged a, um, a schoolbook scheme. Uh, much earlier this year, and even there there's this emphasis, over emphasis, on fiction in our education system. That meant the only non-fiction books that were even being considered were narrative nonfiction.

They were pretending to be fiction as it was. That's too coarse, but you know that they were books that were presenting as fiction when actually it was nonfiction. Why can we not allow nonfiction to be non-fiction? And we define it, we call it non-fiction. We define it by what it's not, we don't call, you know, novels, non-facts books.

Do we, you know, we've kind of defined it in this really strange way. And I think that it's for me, that really needs rethinking and it's a huge selling area, you know, as a bookseller, I know how much, you know, our history and biography, uh, children's history, certainly children's sign dinosaurs' apps, maybe you're right from a really young age, from the age of three right up to, um, you know, adult non-fiction.

You know, something like interest in dinosaurs and that ancient pre-history that we've got this weird combination of geography and human science is, you know, I mean, Alice Roberts is, you know, writing on this and, and, you know, there's so much interest in it. So, and yet we kind of do it down by, you know, implying that these people really ought to be aspiring, to be fiction writers.

If they had any grace.

Rebecca Markwick:

I'm with you on that, more non-fiction. Non-fiction should be more places. Is there a specific time or a place that you read? Obviously, you're a book seller, so reading can sometimes be work.

Tamsin Rosewell:

Yes. Um, in some of is, it's always worked for me, but that makes it sound really dull. That makes it really hard to make someone go, oh God, I've got to read a book now.

It's not like that at all because I love my job. I think people do assume they have this... Everybody assumes that when you work in a bookshop, we all just sit around reading all day. That's what we do. And it couldn't be further from the truth. You have to be fairly physically strong to be a bookseller. I mean, lumping books around, you know, car, entire carloads of books, turn from festivals and schools is very much part of the job.

Um, you know, we really don't, it's manic. We don't get to, and you have to flip between jobs. We all do everything. And that involves everything from cleaning up, through to booking stock in checking stock. Um, and then, you know, delivering lectures to, um, students, to working in schools, to dealing with customer, we all do everything and it's always like that.

And there is there, there are days when we just don't even have time for a cup of tea, let alone, you know, lunch. It's not that we certainly don't have time to sit and read. Not actual books. We read buyer's notes. And the gum that publishers send us, oh I wish they'd stop.

Rebecca Markwick:

I enjoy those. I enjoy those. When they send you like to the, double-sided A4 piece of paper, all about this new book, and you're like, 'thanks for that...'

Tamsin Rosewell:

Thanks for that. Yes. I just needed that one funny paragraph though. But so, when I do get home, I tend to read in the evening. You know, before bed, um, because of my oldest, she goes to bed really, really early. So, my body really needs to be resting for about half past six in the evening. So, and reading's perfect for that.

I will often, and I get really excited about, oh, great I can actually just go and focus on this book, and I am a slow reader. And I make no apology for that. I think we do; we hear people say, oh, I whipped through it in one evening. And I'm thinking, you really can't have read it properly if you read that in one sitting, I'm sorry, honey. But, you know, you must at least have needed a loo break in there. Um, and I think. I don't know if an author has put, and I know how much work is put into those books. Often, it's years, sometimes decades in the case of *Cecily*, I think that, you know, Annie Garthwaite, seems to have been rising that since she was in her teens, you know, and you know, so I want to give it time.

And if I enjoy a writer's language, I think about language a lot. Um, I think about the choice of words, the setting, you know, even their own little illuminations. Illustrations that have gone inside that book. I want to give that time. I think I owed them that, if I read it really quickly and miss half the references in it, maybe miss the nuance, miss the subtlety, miss those particular choices of words that they agonised over. I don't think I do them any service. I want to give them that time. And I, I make no apology for reading slowly.

Rebecca Markwick:

Yeah. I mean, I read quite fast, but when I'm reading something for pleasure, I will always slow down to read it. If I'm reading something for a university course or for work, you know, I will, I will blast through it as quickly as I can in order to make sure I get everything. I'll go back to anything that seemed particularly important, but whenever I'm reading for pleasure, I always sit there, like, I can take my time with this now; I can really savour the experience which I really enjoy.

Tamsin Rosewell:

I know what you mean. I've just finished *Shadowghast*, Thomas Taylor's, *Shadowghast*, the third in the *Eerie-on-Sea* Trilogy and I kind of found myself, but the last third of the book, just reading slower and slower because I just didn't want to leave.

But there's parts of my brain that's thinking, oh no, what am I going to do you know when this is finished, there's not going to be another one out for like a year. I, you know, I can't read any faster! So, you know, I think there's that aspect. But if you're really in, involved in a book, if you're enjoying it, you know, and thinking about what the author has done, you kind of don't want to leave.

Yeah, I think we, we don't talk enough about rereading...

Rebecca Markwick:

That's my next question!

Are there any works that you return to over and over again, like a comfort food, but in book form?

Tamsin Rosewell:

Absolutely. During the first part of the pandemic, I went, and my mom did as well. Actually, a lot of people I know, went back to a certain type of book that to them is their comfort blanket is the way it's familiar.

It was such an unfamiliar landscape at that moment that I actually, this sounds really odd, but I went back to M. R. James, those ghost stories, Gothic novels that I've always loved and felt a very much part of me. Um, it sounds really odd thing to do to reach, you know, horror stories at that moment. But that's what I did.

My mum went back to her Georgette Heyer. I think all of us has something different that we turn back to at that moment. I have noticed though, in when we were in, when I worked in schools, I'm with libraries and with parents, that we almost actively discouraged children from rereading. And I think that's a mistake.

I think in a parents will say, oh, you know, he really loved *Boy Everywhere*. And he's now read it four times. I just want him to move on. No, let him read it again. What's the

problem with that. Um, and I don't know. I think, you know, I know how many times I read M R James' is collected works at least 50 or 60 times.

I'd imagine it's one of those books that I read a couple of times a year. Um, I know. Yeah. I still find this things. I haven't kind of quite noticed in it before things I appreciate over and over again, things I start thinking, I've heard this so many times where I really want to read this again, then I read it again.

I realize how much of it, I hadn't, uh, you know, had forgotten. Um, I think re-reading is a really powerful thing and I think, you know, that's when you can start to really appreciate an author's use of language and structure and tone and character, um, and really learn from it. I think we need to encourage that in children, and adults of course, and not discourage it.

Rebecca Markwick:

Definitely! I'm all for the reread. I have a set of books that I try and reread every year. And if not every other year.

Tamsin Rosewell:

Do you know what worries me that I've got this list of books that I reread every year and it's getting longer. It's going to come to the point, when actually I only ever read the same book over and over again, but it's yeah.

Rebecca Markwick:

I've started actually getting the audio book versions of some of those books that I love rereading because I do a lot of driving and they're great. I often I've listened to loads of podcasts, but I go through phases where I'm like really into my non-fiction podcasts.

Again, my nonfiction. And then I got like bored of podcasts. Now I want to listen to a story, like listen to a story. And those books that I reread I'll listen to in the car, and it makes me really look forward to driving because, you know, I'm reading the story without actually reading, but I'm very picky about my narrators.

So if there's multiple versions of an audio book I go through and I like test them out to see which one I like the best. There's nothing worse than like a narrator that you just don't like for a story that you love.

Tamsin Rosewell:

No, no, no, no. That's actually right. And I think audiobooks have kind of passed me by as a bookseller.

It's just part of the market we don't see. Um, audible has really taken that corner of the market. I don't even what we don't sell, or we did sell audiobooks. A lot of people wanted them on, in a mainly CD, but they're very, very high priced. There's only a select, you know, not everything is on there by a very long way.

Not many are produced on CD at all, particularly children's books. Um, You know, they're much lower cost. You know, the difference between, you know, buying a novel, which on audio on CD would cost you 15, 20 quid and on download it's cost a few pounds. You can't, it's just, it's just part the market that's wiggled away from us.

Um, I mean, other parts of market have come flying assets, so I've no complaint, but I just, I don't really know it very well. I don't know the nuance of that at the market.

Rebecca Markwick:

I find it very good for rereads because you know the story. So if you know, you could look forward to bits, you know, it's it's, I just find it quite good fun. Especially if you know, like a funny line is coming up because you can kind of do it along with the person who's read it. Maybe I'm just slightly crazy. I feel like I'm slightly crazy. But anyway, next question. What drew you away from all of your government work into book selling?

Tamsin Rosewell:

A very good question. Um, basically I began, I've got acute osteoarthritis, which manifest itself really after my son was born. So, I was in my early thirties. Um, when, you know, I had proper degeneration in my bone, um, and I was in Belgium at that time. Within a year of him being born, I had acute pain and was struggling to walk, and I, we, you know, I kind of managed, I think simply women just get on with it.

I think it's, I'm not doing down on men at all as for like, that's, you know, I can't know the male experience of this, but, you know, I think as a woman, as a mother, you do tend to just get on with it. You do what is necessary. You find ways to do things. Um, you know, I, I wanted to work. I'd had a long period of time off when William was born.

Um, and I kind of wanted that sense of purpose to do something. I wanted to be earning my own money. I wanted to, to have my own space. Um, I think that's really important. Um, you know, particularly for women, particularly for young women. So, I went to work at English Heritage kind of with castle, um, as a historian working out on site, I was delivering lectures.

And again, it was one of those environments where we all do everything. You know, we, you have to be able to work in the tearoom and work in the shop. And you also, you know, I was also then delivering lectures to groups of visiting professors from Canada. We had these extraordinary days that were everything, you know, we have people arriving here, you know, would say, well, I didn't do my degree or my master's in history to work in a tearoom. And you say, listen, honey, you know, if you want to work in heritage management, you need to know where the money comes in because it costs a million pounds a year just to do the basic upkeep on the castle. The money comes in the shop and the tearoom.

And as long as granny can visit and have a wee and a cup of tea, everything is completely fine. And you need to know where that money comes in. So, we all did everything and that was great, but I was physically really not coping on site. Um, I'd get back, my body would just not recover from my days there I, you know, had real problems with my back.

Um, I actually dislocated my ankle several times. Once I tripped over a Badger. Yes really, in the middle of the night. And the second time I jumped down an archaeological hole to examine a piece of possibly Anglo-Saxon pot. So, it became quite obvious to me that I wasn't going to be able to do that. I'd already done stuff with the bookshop. I had done evening talks for them on various things. And as a vacancy became available and they asked me to join them. Um, so yeah, it was my illness, but you know what, there's loads of things that I would never have done if I didn't have to struggle with osteoarthritis, I'd never have ended up working in the bookshop.

I probably still be working for English heritage or in government in some other way. And that's a really important part of my life now. I'd also never have broadcast. Um, you know, I'd never started working on radio documentaries if I hadn't had to have periods of time and I just had to be at home and recover.

I deliberately chose that because I wanted to do something that I could do from home. And both of those have been just formative in who I am now, what I am, what I'm interested in, the people I know, how I think, how I support people. All of those things have come out of that. So, in a very weird way, I think that is a positive change in myself. I know that sounds odd to think of a growing disability, a degenerative disease as a positive thing in yourself, but I really, really do.

Rebecca Markwick:

Yeah. It's lovely when things work out and you discover new things that you love and when no one can talk to you and Kenilworth books without mentioning their beautiful window displays.

Tamsin Rosewell:

We have a lot of fun with those!

Rebecca Markwick:

How do they come about? Because I wouldn't even know where to start because I see them posted up on Twitter and I just sit there, marvelling at their glory.

Tamsin Rosewell:

Okay. So, um, I think kind of where to start, and this first and foremost, I've got to have the right book. Um, and this is a more complex thing than it might appear at first because there are certain types of books that work really well in the window. And some that I would support with all my strength and with great passion, but I would never put

them in a window display because they wouldn't work so books that are because the sun hits the windows full on. So, you get a massive glare back. In our particular position. So, books that are foiled books that are brightly coloured, um, have certain types of designs on them, in a book with those bold colouring, like *Cecily* with those beautiful pinks and oranges, um, they all look amazing in the windows.

Often children's books work particularly well in the window. Books that are matte or, you know, elegant shades of grey and black just disappear. You actually literally cannot see them. So, the best example I can give you is that amazing book called *Thornhill* by Pam Smy that David Fickling published. Um, it's an amazing book and I really appreciate that book as a piece of publishing. I love selling it. It's never not on our shelves, but I would never put that in the window. You could literally, you would walk past and not notice that there is no point in my putting that in the window. So, I have to choose the right book first. I will look at it, but I need to physically see it, but there's no point in a publisher saying to me, oh, we got this book and it's this, you know, I have to actually see what it looks like.

Um, the second thing is it's got to have a strong theme to it. So, publishers will often contact me and say, oh, you know, we thought you might like to consider this for your window display. And I said, what's it about? And they'll go, well, it's kind of one of those books that's about that transitional period. You know, when you're thinking about moving and you say, oh my God, give me a dragon. How do I do that? You know, a ghost or something, you know, I, I can't do that as I can't express the nuance easily in a way, the thematic window. Um, so it's got to have that strong things often you'll notice things like, you know, we did *Cecily* recently with that extraordinary stained glass and the colour and the, that you know, which matched our own castle worked really well.

Um, I've just put, um, *Freeze* by Chris Priestly in there for Barrington Stoke, um, which is kind of creepy white on white kind of ice... and... so it's got foils on the front. So, it also sparkles a little glow from Owlet Press, wonderful Owlet Press who never fails to produce something amazing. Um, you know, which is about light festivals from all over the world.

Again, perfect theme for a window display. I use chalk on the glass. I don't advise using acrylic people often talk about using acrylic paint on glass. The problem with acrylic is in modern commercial glass you've got a plastic film on the glass itself, which stops it shattering. If the window breaks that will stain if you put acrylic on it or it can stay in, unless you really know your glass or you own the building and you don't mind, um, I would always advise chalk because it literally wipes off, but I'll use foils and things on the outside of the window to catch the light. Uh, there's nothing I won't do. I've used edible glitter on the window, which is basically sugar.

I didn't want to use glitter because I don't like the environmental damage that it causes. But edible glitter is sugar and it dissolves. Um, and it actually works really well. If you

get it wet and then you put it onto glass, I know that's unconventional, but I like being unorthodox, there's nothing I won't do in a window display.

I often think, you know, I really do plan the design. Um, do you know what? I, I always marvel at the number of bookshops that create displays that then completely hide the books and the windows that they're supposed to be displaying. And I think you blocked out, you've got a great piece in there, but you've blocked out the image of the actual book. What are you doing? The job of the windows is to bring people into the shop or whether that's online by them seeing images or bring them to the book, more accurate, to bring them to the book. So, a lot of people, if you look down those threads, a lot of people are saying, oh, I haven't read this book. You know, is this need from Chris Priestly?? Or how much is that book? Um, you know, and where can I get it, and I don't really mind where they buy it from. I think, you know, my, my job is to drive people to that book. That's what I'm interested in doing, because I think that's the right book. Um, So that's the window space job. And whether that's through photographs, mainly it's through photographs, actually we're sharing them across social media.

It's not really only for the people who happen to walk past. Um, not many authors actually see their own window displays. Not very many at all is actually just about... I want to create a series of photographs that the author, the publicist, the publisher, you know, all their marketing support can use more widely. And they do. They really do. I've seen those photographs circulating often for years after I've created long, long, long after the window displays gone.

Rebecca Markwick:

It's fabulous. And you are rather known locally for drawing little hedgehogs on your book post. You can't not mention the little hedgehogs!

Tamsin Rosewell:

Somebody proposed to me the other day that I set up a new Twitter or Instagram account called Parcelhogs and just photographs of all the little parcelhogs that I draw.

I can't remember why I started doing it. I think I started drawing them in the bookshop just as a little joke. So I'd lead Judy who actually owns the bookshop. Um, who's my business partner, you know, I'd leave her a little note you know, if I was leaving for the day saying, you know, Mrs. So and so wants this copy, you know, keep this aside for her, she's coming first thing or something. And I just draw a little hedgehog at the bottom, you know, and with a note or something. And I came in one day after I left the hedgehog note and she'd taken one of my drawings and made it into a sticker. I thought who made the decision that this was going to become a sticker! And it went down really well, everybody loves the hedgehogs, so I just kept drawing hedgehogs. Um, Hmm. I can't really explain it any better than that

Rebecca Markwick:

I am fully behind a Twitter account called Parcelhogs. That's just about all of your parcel hedgehogs.

Tamsin Rosewell:

Perhaps it needs to happen!

Rebecca Markwick:

Yeah!

So, you're doing more illustration now. Do you find illustration to be therapeutic?

Tamsin Rosewell:

I don't know yet is the answer to that. I've really, I've always painted. I've always been an artist since I was really small. My mom talks about how, when I was two, she would sit me at the kitchen table with piles of paper and pencils, and I would sit for hours and hours and hours just drawing and colouring. Um, generally creating nothing in particular. And I still do that. It's very much a natural state for me, but I was forced away from it by not being able to study, um, and always felt that it was therefore not something I could go back to. I've kind of come back to it at various points in my life, and then I've had to abandon it. I had to have both my shoulder joints, reconstructed. One was done about two years ago and the other, the right one was done earlier this year. Um, particularly the left one. I'm very left-handed. Um, actually meant that all this stuff I was painting at the time, I literally just abandoned for years because I couldn't pick up, I didn't have the motor control to do it.

And I've only just really getting that right now. Um, so I never thought about all my art as the least bit connected to my work as a bookseller. And it took an author to point it out to me. So I was working with Dr. Heather Martin and we were doing Lee Child's biography *The Reacher Guy*. And this was in the middle of the pandemic. And we realized that we weren't going to get him over here, and we weren't going to have our event and we didn't go to get, so we weren't going to get signed books and all of this. And she found one morning, and she still had this idea. You can paint like a really beautiful print that we'll use as a book plate. And it'll be more than just a book plate. Um, and we'll get them out and we'll make it really exclusive and fantastic. I can't do that, you know? Oh, you can paint it on themes. You can paint like the skyline Coventry. And I'll tell you all the things that you can tangle into the flowers around the edge. And I said, I can't do that.

And she can't, I can't, you know, I'm not, I'm not an illustrator. And she said, well, yes, you are. You're painting all those window displays. I really did have one of those moments where I thought. Oh, yeah.

And I did realise, it was kind of lights on moment for me. So, thank you Heather for that. Um, and I thought, oh my God, I am, I can't do this. I do paint in relation to the books. Of course I do. Of course I do. And it kind of went from there and then, you

know, it became obvious to me more recently that. I mean, I'm not, I'm not going to recover. I'm not going to get better and I'm going to need to shift my career. You know what I do with myself. And I think, you know, I've got to give it a try, you know, do I stand a chance of being a professional illustration and actually make my living that way? I don't know, but I'm going to give it a go. I kind of have to.

Rebecca Markwick:

Excellent!

I look forward to it. I love your, your windows are just beautiful and anyone that hasn't seen the windows, we're going to put links in the show notes to Tamsin's Twitter and the Kenilworth books Twitter and the websites and everything. So, you can go and hunt out all of the beautiful window displays.

Final question. This is going to be hard and horrible, and you're going to hate me for it. If you could recommend one book to people that you think will make a positive impact on them, what book would it be? It could be anything.

Tamsin Rosewell:

Oh, okay. Um, oh.

Okay. Um, just one book. That's going to make an impact on them only. I'm going to go back to. The seed of my soul and I'm going to say, find yourself a copy of Songs of Innocence and of Experience by William Blake. It's the ultimate in an illustrated book. It's I think the first time that we really saw books that way you cannot separate the illustration from the words without diminishing it. The illustrations give you a different view than the story. So, The Tyger. Everybody knows, 'tyger, tyger, burning bright', which is one of the songs in that little book. Um, it's this extraordinary, powerful creature that it's described that God-like it's mysterious, it's supernatural.

And yet the image that Blake has created under that is this very approachable kind of little pussy cat thing under it. And it really makes you wonder how much of that tiger he wanted you to understand and how much he wanted to challenge you about your own understanding of it. So, I think it's just a beautiful object and it's, again, another, it's an ultimate in having a book as a physically beautiful object is a beautiful piece of publishing.

It was when he created it and it is still now. The Tate still publish, um, many of Blake's books, but you know, this one in particular, um, and it's very much has the same feel of you know, what, perhaps it would have felt, you know, to, to look and to hold it at the time. I like the mystery of Blake, the fact that one Blake's scholar, when I was making a radio series about him, I was worried that I'm not a Blake scholar, and I didn't know enough to do this, you know, was I really the right person to do this?

And this, um, academic said to me, anyone who actually claims to understand, Blake almost by definition doesn't. The whole, you've missed the point if you're trying to

understand it, you've missed the point. You know, what it's about is that permission to create entire worlds and mythologies, they permission to be unorthodox the permission to dissent.

Um, you know, the power that images can have, the power that words can have, the power to create. It's all of those things. Um, and it's a tiny little book. You could literally put it in your pocket and, um, have it with you. All the time. I think I'm going to have to pick out Blake, if you're going to force me to choose one.

Rebecca Markwick:

What a pick! I am thoroughly behind that pick.

It's a really beautiful book. It's absolutely gorgeous. I always think he just has a really good cat. And he's like, and he's like, this is what the cat thinks it is. And then you look at it...

Tamsin Rosewell:

Is it possible that Blake had seen a tiger? It's perfectly possible because at the time in London, there's a book called um, uh, Penny Chimes, um, uh, what's it called about a tiger... *Tiger Heart*, um, which is set during this period in London, when there were these great menageries in London, they were for wealthy people to go and buy exotic pets. And there were tigers in these menageries, they were in London. Um, you know, but apparently there were things like giraffes were walked through the streets of London and taken to these menageries and people thought they were invented. People didn't believe what they were seeing when they actually saw these creatures. They must've looked familiar to us now because we got photographs and videos and images, but, you know, I dunno, it's perfectly possible that Blake actually saw a tiger. It's not unreasonable that he would have done, but I do know that there's not really any written evidence that he did, so he could just have been his cat.

Rebecca Markwick:

A really epic cat! Oh, I'd love that.

Well, thank you so much for coming on Tamsin. We'll pop links to everything you've, you've mentioned all of your stuff in the show notes and all of the authors, I will list them all out and all those books. Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me.

Tamsin Rosewell:

Thank you very much. It's been lovely to chat.

Rebecca Markwick:

A wonderful episode that with the lovely bookseller and illustrator Tamsin. The Instagram account, parcel hogs does exist now!

And I'm going to try and link it in the show notes for everyone. I hope you've enjoyed this. Do check out Kenilworth books on Twitter and Tamsin's account. It's absolutely lovely. And you'd be amazed at what Tamsin can do with window displays.

Thanks, as always to Nicholas Patrick, for our music. Please check us out on Twitter at shelf underscore healing share us with all your friends, and we'll be back soon with another episode of Shelf Healing.