

## **Q&A with Clementine Beauvais**

### **Who are your favourite authors/illustrators, and why?**

My favourite illustrators include Anthony Browne and French illustrators Claude Ponti and Sempé – all amazing, in different ways, at making people look just as complex and funny as people usually are. My favourite authors – now, that’s a terribly difficult question. There are so many! Half of me would hate the other half for selecting some and leaving others aside. I’m sure my favourite authors, whoever they are, all haunt my writing anyway – because that’s what happens when you write, you just pilfer tricks and themes from people you love.

### **What was your favourite book when you were a child?**

I was too much of a voracious reader to have just one favourite book. Of course, the *Harry Potter* books – of which I was a passionate fan from the age of 9, and which made me learn English. But some of my best memories of earlier reading include the *Pippi Longstocking* books, the *Jennings* series, *Tintin*, tons of other comics, and many other French books for children. I also loved Roald Dahl, of course, and later on, Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* as a young teenager. I tended to like magical or fantasy stories, but now I tend to prefer writing realistic or magical-realistic fiction.

### **Who is your favourite hero in a book?**

My favourite hero is definitely a heroine – but I don’t know which one to choose, between Pippi Longstocking, French supersleuth Fantômette, or Lyra of *His Dark Materials*... I like heroines who are funny and active, and don’t take themselves or others too seriously.

### **Who is your favourite villain in a book?**

I think *Harry Potter* has by far the widest range of villains, from Voldemort to the more complex ones: Severus Snape, Cornelius Fudge, and Bellatrix Lestrange... I also like villains who are hilarious, crazy or ridiculous, like most of the villains in *Alice in Wonderland*, who don’t even know that they’re villains – or are just playing at being villains – who knows?

### **If you could be a character from a book who would you be?**

Charlie Bucket right after the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Nothing bad can really happen to you if you’re Charlie Bucket then, apart from a bit of indigestion. It’s a pretty good life. I’d love to graze on the sugared grass.

### **Who or what was your biggest influence in deciding to become a writer?**

My parents’ bookshelves were full of other people’s books, and they seemed to value those books enormously. I realised I had to get on those shelves somehow to attract their attention... Now they’ve got a special shelf just for my books. Success!

### **When did you start writing?**

Even before I started being able to write. I would dictate stories to my mum, and she’d write them down. I had a very obedient mum.

### **If someone wanted to be a writer what would be your number one tip for them?**

Finish what you start! It’s very, very easy to begin a story, or two, or twelve – and incredibly difficult to *finish* them. You lose hope and love and motivation halfway through. To me, a writer is someone who finishes a story – no matter how good or bad. Get that first draft done. Finish it! What are you doing reading this interview? Go write!

### **Do you have any abandoned stories in your ‘bottom drawer’ that you would like to revisit?**

Very, very, very many, but though early stories are always worth a nostalgic look, they’re not really good enough to justify ‘revisiting’. Writing is like pole-jumping – you have to do it many times until you actually manage to pass the bar, but no one’s going to tell a pole-jumper “Hey, why don’t you show us the videos of all the times you didn’t make it?”. Those jumps were failures, but they did contribute to *that* moment when it was finally a success. Same for writing. Those abandoned books might never see the light of day, but they helped prepare the way for the stories that eventually did end up in bookstores.