

THE MAGICIAN'S ELEPHANT

Q & A WITH AUTHOR KATE DICAMILLO

Q. *What is your definition of magic? What has happened in your life that is magical or unexpected?*

A. I guess my definition of magic is something very close to the definition the magician gives toward the end of the story: “Magic is always impossible. It begins with the impossible and ends with the impossible and is impossible in between. That is why it is magic.” I would add, though, that while magic is impossible from beginning to end, it is also *possible*. Somehow (who knows how?) the impossible gets turned into the possible. That’s magic.

Which leads very nicely into the next part of this question: What has happened in my life that is magical or unexpected? Telling stories seems like magic to me; it seems both impossible and possible in that same way. And what has happened to me and my stories—people reading them, liking them, and me getting to make my living telling them—well, talk about unexpected. Talk about magical.

Q. *The Magician’s Elephant features an animal character. This is a common theme in your novels. Why an elephant this time?*

A. I didn’t think, *Oh boy, I’m going to put an elephant in a story.* I guess it happened this way: The story began for me with the magician and the fact that he wanted to perform real magic, true magic. That magician appeared before me in the lobby of a hotel in New York City. I had, in my satchel, a notebook that I was going to give as a gift to someone. The notebook had an elephant on the cover. And when I went into my bag to get *my* notebook to write a description of the magician I had just caught sight of, I happened to see that other notebook, the one with a picture of an elephant on the front of it.

Q. *Was there a specific place that inspired the setting for the city of Baltese?*

A. No, but after I finished writing *The Magician’s Elephant*, I saw a movie that took place in Bruges, and I couldn’t concentrate at all on what was happening in the movie

because I was so struck by how much Bruges looked like the city of Baltese, the city I had imagined.

Q. *The fortuneteller tells Peter that “truth is forever changing.” Why is this an important line in the story, and why did you want to share it with children in general?*

A. I think this comes back to the whole idea of the impossible suddenly becoming the possible. We have to remain open to those moments when everything can change. I actually think that children are much better at doing this than adults are because they are much less likely to see things in a black-and-white way. All of us, children and adults, need to remind ourselves that the impossible can become possible. That’s one of the great gifts of stories.

Q. *What was your predominant feeling while writing this book? Was it faith, or fear? Do you know how your endings will turn out when you start?*

A. Oh, I’m always afraid when I’m writing. And I never know how things will turn out. This time around it was particularly terrifying because there were so many different balls up in the air, and I had no idea how I would catch them all. But even though I was terrified, I was also, in a strange and wonderful way, healed by the telling of this story. I got out of my own way and let the story tell me how it would all come together. At the same time, I felt something come together, kind of *knit* itself, inside of me.

Q. *How do you feel about the illustrations? Have you ever met Yoko Tanaka?*

A. I think the illustrations are an astonishment, a wonder, a marvel. They literally take my breath away. They are haunting and otherworldly and just exactly right. I have never met Yoko, no. And yet she painted the world I imagined.

Q. *Isn’t that strange and wonderful?*

A. Impossible, but true.

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Tracy Miracle, Senior Publicist * Candlewick Press * 617-588-4404 * tracy.miracle@candlewick.com
Jennifer Roberts, Executive Director of Marketing, Publicity, & Events * Candlewick Press * 617-588-4431 * jennifer.roberts@candlewick.com

THE MAGICIAN'S ELEPHANT

Q & A WITH ILLUSTRATOR YOKO TANAKA

Q. *What was your first reaction when you were asked to illustrate a novel by Kate DiCamillo? Were you familiar with her work?*

A. When I was first contacted about *The Magician's Elephant*, my schedule was very tight, with two upcoming gallery shows, and I almost didn't take the job. I wasn't familiar with Kate's work at that time. But my agent, Steven Malk, suggested very strongly that I read the story. When I read the manuscript for the first time, I was simply amazed, and I immediately asked one of the galleries to postpone my show. I'm so fortunate to have been able to work on this project.

Q. *How did you decide on the palette and style for the illustrations?*

A. It was a very lucky thing that I saw the scenes of the story so vividly in my mind when I read it. I also felt that the story had an atmosphere and tone that were similar to what I create in my regular work. So the palette and style just naturally emerged. And Candlewick's creative director, Chris Paul, gave me wonderful direction.

Q. *Were there many ideas or drafts that you went through before deciding on the right one for each illustration? What was your creative process for making each piece of art?*

A. As I mentioned earlier, I had a strong impression of each scene as I read it, so it wasn't difficult to capture these scenes in sketches. The difficult part for me was deciding how much detail I should show in the images. It's a story that takes place some hundred years ago somewhere in Europe, but that's not the point of the story at all. I did lots of research about the architecture and clothing of the period, but I used it minimally.

Q. *Which is your favorite of your illustrations for *The Magician's Elephant*?*

A. My favorite illustration is in chapter 13, when Peter eats stew at Leo's house. I especially like this chapter because it describes so well how Peter's frozen mind is melted by his conversation with Leo and Gloria — and by Gloria's stew. I hope my illustration captures their emotions.

Q. *Did you do anything differently for this book, stylistically or artistically, that you had never done before?*

A. Doing precise character sketches was something new for me. But it helped so much when I worked on each scene later on. It was also suggested that I create a "height scale" for all the characters, and this helped even more to make them come alive clearly in my mind.



Illustration detail copyright © 2009 by Yoko Tanaka
from chapter 13 of *The Magician's Elephant*

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Tracy Miracle, Senior Publicist * Candlewick Press * 617-588-4404 * tracy.miracle@candlewick.com
Jennifer Roberts, Executive Director of Marketing, Publicity, & Events * Candlewick Press * 617-588-4431 * jennifer.roberts@candlewick.com