



READING ROOM

Author Q&A: Nell Zink

MISLAID/THE WALLCREEPER

(4th Estate, £20)



A double instalment from hotly-tipped Germany-based American author Nell Zink. *Mislaid* is her satirical debut novel about an unconventional marriage that upends traditional views of gender and race, while *The Wallcreeper* is a slim, thought-provoking and highly original book about drug use, domesticity, infidelity and bird watching.

Was it your intention that both novels share female protagonists attracted to older academic types?

There are no academics in my books – just Americans with baccalaureates and some books on their shelves. They've heard of education, but they haven't actually experienced it. I like exploring the gap between intelligence and literacy. Most of the characters in these two books live their lives in that gap.

Does the juxtaposition of these traditional relationships and the subversive elements of the novel reflect women's roles in the 21st century?

There's an apparent swing to the right going on – a backlash against feminism – that's hard to interpret. Much of it comes packaged as religious revival, but religion is a feminist force... Society is sexist and male-dominated, so it's worth second-guessing so-called feminist solutions. The entire working class is moving toward what used to be called women's work – temporary, minimally compensated part-time positions without fringe benefits, on flexible schedules. So is it "feminist" to demand free 24-hour day care for tiny babies? It would certainly help us keep those jobs!

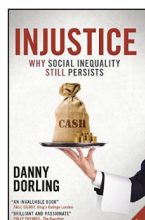
Are parents condemned to either neglect or try to control their children?

No. But people are neurotic, especially when it comes to their own children, so it doesn't matter what their intentions are. I think it's a mistake to control young children too much. You know – raise orderly, quiet,

INJUSTICE: WHY SOCIAL INEQUALITY STILL PERSISTS

Danny Dorling
(Policy Press, £9.99)

That Danny Dorling felt the need to extensively revise this 2010 book shows the extent to which inequality is entrenched in the UK. The first edition used a formidable array of empirical and statistical arguments to damn Labour governments spanning 18 years for turning their back on the fight against inequality and the injustices it creates, which had been growing since the 1980s. It's perhaps



obedient little introverts. Those are the kids who flip out when they get their freedom. In my experience it's the unbearably rambunctious kids who turn 13, settle down, and accomplish great things.

With the Texas pool party still making headlines, is there any way to end racist policing in the US?

It's not easy being a police officer in a country of ubiquitous handguns and prison terms so long and lethal you might as well shoot any stranger who sees you with a recreational drug. Racism is mostly unconscious... but there's a lot sensible lawmakers could do without trying to alter the contents of people's heads. Enact and enforce gun control. Reduce jail time and prison terms. Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences. Diversify hiring by police departments.

What impression would readers have if they read the two novels back to back?

I think they might guess correctly that I'm not married.

KEVIN GOPAL

A longer version of this Q&A is available in the Reading Room section of bigissuesnorth.com

no surprise then that in the five years since the social geographer first wrote it, a Conservative-led coalition did little to change the picture.

Dorling's argument is that richer countries are not short of resources but rather they are distributed unevenly. He points to five tenets of injustice that are unfounded but widely held: elitism is efficient; exclusion is necessary; prejudice is natural; greed is good; and despair is inevitable. And then he forensically unpicks them.

A companion to *The Spirit Level* by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, and Thomas Piketty's *Capital*, *Injustice* is hopefully making its way to the shelves of the Labour leadership contest.

KEVIN GOPAL

OFF THE SHELF NICK SHARRATT

My exhibition *Pirates, Pants and Wellyphants* begins with a section about my early influences. It's great to see that several of the books that stimulated and inspired me nearly 50 years ago are still in print.

The very first book that had an impact on me was *I Am A Bunny* (Golden Books, £4.99) by Ole Risom and Richard Scarry. I was tickled that the bunny was called Nicholas but it was the amazing illustrations that made this book so special. Scarry's beautifully painted scenes of a little rabbit experiencing the four seasons connected with the toddler me in the most extraordinary way – I felt the warm breeze blowing the dandelion seeds, caught the gently falling snowflakes and heard the pitter-patter of the spring rain.

Michael Foreman's gorgeous pictures in *The General* (Templar, £6.99) by Janet Charteris completely entranced me too. There is one particular spread in this tale with its message of peace that is forever etched in my mind. The general has fallen from his horse and is sitting in a meadow ablaze with dazzlingly bright flowers. Thrillingly I was able to relate to how the images had been created. It inspired me to draw.

The same is true of *Two Can Toucan* (Anderson, £5.99) by David McKee, a book filled with gentle humour and populated with the quirkiest jungle animals. In my edition the delightful black line drawings were shaded with the brightest flat colours – it's an approach I've followed to this day.

I was nine when I came across *The Giant Jam Sandwich* (Houghton Mifflin, £4.64) by John Vernon Lord and Janet Burroway – I thought it was just brilliant. The combination of hilarious plot, rollicking verse and fabulously funny illustrations was irresistible and made me yearn to be a maker of picture books myself one day.

Nick Sharratt is a children's book author and illustrator whose distinctive style is synonymous with other authors such as Jacqueline Wilson and Julia Donaldson. *Pirates, Pants and Wellyphants* is at *The Civic, Barnsley*, 27 June-22 Aug