



5 MINUTES WITH... KAREN HEALEY WALLACE

Which writer would you have loved to have met – and why?

Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. I'd love to know if their work is fiction or non-fiction.

Tell us what you do in 20 words or fewer.

I write fiction.

What do you like about your job?

It scares me. I think people enjoy rollercoasters because their jobs are dull. I hate rollercoasters because my job is sufficiently frightening. To publicly declare an intention is scary. And my novel, *The Perfect Capital*, raises some disturbing issues. Moreover, it was self-published. If traditionally publishing a debut novel is like walking through a ground floor door, self-publishing is like jumping out of a top-storey window. You have to fly or die (she says flapping her wings)...

The single biggest challenge facing the publishing industry right now is...?

Possibly the same challenge good writers face every book, every day: to ask 'how well can I do this?' rather than 'how much money can I make?' It may sound sentimental, but it's ultimately pragmatic. The first stands every chance of achieving the second while the second hardly ever fosters the first.

The one piece of advice you'd give to someone starting out in publishing today is...?

No man is busy except when swatting flies.

What imprints do you most admire – and why?

I don't admire imprints. At least, I don't admire an imprint any more than I admire a restaurant. Rather, I admire the chef who cooked my meal. In the same way, I admire the individuals who produce good books consistently. Even higher in my esteem are those

who got there via a few howling errors. As the scientist Piet Hein said, 'The road to wisdom? Well, it's plain and simple to express: Err and err and err again, but less and less and less.'

Does the publishing industry understand technology?

Does anyone? Even the people who understand how technology works can't, as yet, understand its effect. That takes time. Early print would have been fumbling and pig ugly compared to the illuminated manuscripts being hand-lettered and illustrated by monks. So, I don't think print book vs eBook. I think good book vs bad book. Equally, I don't pit social media against traditional media. I think 'have I got anything to say?' followed by 'what's the best way to say it?'

Tell us about a passionate interest you have outside the business.

I don't have one. I find passion to be all-consuming and I can't by definition do more than one all-consuming thing. My passion is writing. Everything else I'm interested in, I have already or will eventually have written about.

Who has been your greatest inspiration, and why?

God. All that and yet he still managed to take a day off.

What is the one essential item you bring to The London Book Fair?

My 'Books Are My Bag' bag, of course.