

Interview with U.S. author Dave King, who opened his Germany-wide reading tour of "Homecoming" in Frankfurt

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Question: Are there any literature styles or authors that have influenced your writing?

Dave King: Well, I read pretty widely. I've been a life-long reader, I think most writers are life-long readers, and even when I was a painter I think, you know, that I was a pretty serious painter for that time of 15 years, but even during that time I did a lot of reading, and I read—I should have known in fact that I was interested in writing, because during that period I read almost exclusively biographies of writers. I read biographies of Coleridge and Virginia Woolf and Orton and E.M. Forster and various other people. And so I've read really widely and I think one thing that it has been useful to me is that I'm trying to make up my own mind about what I read. I didn't read a lot of stuff in the context of, say, modern literature or American literature...

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: ...experimental literature or anything. I just read pretty broadly. Particularly as a teenager and as a young man. And so even though my book is quite conventional, I do feel that I'm influenced by a wide variety of styles.

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: I would say, the big discovery of the last 10 years for me was Whitman.

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: Our great American poet, who was someone I found threatening for a long time when I [interviewer laughs] was a child. I was –we were told to read Whitman and then it seemed too unstructured and maybe too emotional for me. Um, but in the last 10 years, I've begun reading a lot of Whitman, and I think Whitman has a particular influence on this book, on *Homecoming*. And the other writer who influenced the book is absolutely E. M. Forster. And this is something that a lot of readers have picked up on.

Interviewer: Hm

Dave King: In particular ... you know, E.M. Forster is known especially for his directive only connect. In other words: the most important thing in life is the human connection.

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: And this is what the main character Howard Kapostash discovers over the course of my novel, and I think that moral imperative of having a connection with your fellow human, with your fellow man, is essential to this book.

Interviewer: M-hm. Thank you. Have you—have you read Michael Cunningham's new book, *Specimen Days*?

Dave King: I love it. I think it's wonderful

Interviewer: You had Walt Whitman, he says Walt Whitman inspired him, he had, yes, a connection to Walt Whitman.

Dave King: Yeah, absolutely! Whitman runs through that book, and...

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: ... I think that first of all I should say I like Michael very much, he was my teacher in graduate school. And was really, really helpful, and when I was going to write and shaping my own sense of who I wanted to be. And I was enormously excited about *Specimen Days*.

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: I think it's - particularly the first part is just wonderful, beautiful.

Interviewer: M-hm. M-hm.

Dave King: I was very, very moved by it, and I think there's a point about half-way through the first section where the young hero is walking along at night and ...

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: ...encounters Walt Whitman and... it's a very, very beautiful exchange.

Interviewer: M-hm

Dave King: And the novel takes place in the late nineteenth century, and there's a particular event, which is the triangle shirt waist factory fire, which concludes the section. And there's this wonderful combination of, you know, the emotional and the ecstatic and irrational which I think Michael takes from Whitman and brings into his, into his narrative.

It was a great deal of fun owning my own business and I learned that I was a good businessman, and um, I actually liked the decor world. It was, — I think people imagine that it's you know, kind of caddie and a difficult world but I was very happy there. However, about ten years into it I realized that I missed being creative. That I had set out as a young person to lead a creative life. And that I had become more of a craftsman. And so I began thinking about what I could do and I started writing, I took a couple of night classes with some well-known writers who are very very supportive. Amy Hempel is one of them, Melvin Jules Bukiet is another one. And at one point Melvin took me aside and he said, you know, you're working 40 hours a week and writing at night, on the weekends. And you probably think it's pretty heroic to do both, but I think that you haven't made a commitment. And if you're serious about writing, you should make a choice. And so I thought about that and I devoted the next year to leaving my business and applying to graduate school and I ended up going to Columbia and becoming a writer. And so I've been writing fiction and poetry ever since then.

Interviewer: So you are teaching young students as well, right?

Dave King: I teach English at Baruch College...

Interviewer: M-hm. What advice do you give to them, when they tell you that they wanna be a writer, or is there any advice you give them on the way from what your experiences have been?

Dave King: My advice, I think, to all young writers is – and this is advice actually that I learned from Michael Cunningham, it's almost the same advice that he gives. Which is look for the thing

that seems implausible or risky or frightening and do that. I think the problem with a lot of writing today, but also a lot of writing being done by new writers is that it's very safe. And I do think that the best solution to that is to take chances, to be daring and bold. And, and not play it safe. So that's my advice to them. Sometimes the students catch it. You know, I have to say, for a lot of developing artists it takes a long time to learn that lesson. And most of us are still learning it. That is what I usually say to the kids.

Interviewer: Thank you, thank you very much

Dave King: Sure.