



Letter to the Editor - November 2007

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Letters to the Editor

Byline:

James Riordan defends his novel, **Rebel Cargo**.

Dear Editor,

Your reviewer, Brycchan Carey, evidently takes a dim view of my novel **Rebel Cargo** (BfK No. 166). Fair enough. What is unfair is his claim that I set out to write a pirate book to capitalise on the success of the **Pirates of the Caribbean** films, and then changed ... intentions halfway through to capitalise on the interest in slavery generated by the bicentenary commemorations?. Nothing could be further from the truth.

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As I made clear in my 'Afterword', the novel was inspired by a BBC TV programme in 2003 on Beaula McCalla who returned to her 'home' in Equatorial Guinea. I was not even aware of the bi-centenary of the Abolition of Slavery Act approaching four years later. The imputation that this was originally a pirate novel is also unfounded: popular culture is not something that impinges on my creative process. Fictional writers worthy of the name write from the heart, not the wallet.

The idea that the plot is a series of coincidences and contains erroneous historical details completely misses the point of the novel's structure: that two children of very different backgrounds, one a white boy (it is little mentioned in history books that thousands of white children, mainly of Irish and Scottish prisoners of the English, were sent to the Caribbean as slaves), the other a black girl, find themselves sharing similar experiences. I had no intention of writing a historical treatise. I leave that to academics like Mr Carey. The focus, as with all my novels, is to challenge young people to think about an important issue, in this case, the cruelty of slavery. Further, as the title implies, a vital message is that opposition to slavery came largely from the slaves themselves, not from one-time slave-owners among the English gentry.

As fiction, **Rebel Cargo** is not bound to historical accuracy. It exists first in the author's mind and then, if any good, in the reader's mind. Fortunately, many readers do not share Mr Carey's view of my novel. Unfortunately, they lack his public voice.

James Riordan

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Source URL (retrieved on Jul '20): <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/167/childrens-books/articles/letters-to-the-editor/letter-to-the-editor-november-2007>

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