



The Reading Desk Presents:  
An interview with A.M. Watson  
author of *Infants of the Brush*

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***Infants of the Brush: A Chimney Sweep's Story is A. M. Watson's debut novel.***

A. M. Watson is a teacher, attorney, and author whose soul awakens in libraries, courtrooms, bookstores, museums, and historic buildings. She earned a Bachelor of Science from Liberty University and Master of Science in Legal Administration and Juris Doctor from the University of Denver Sturm College of Law. A. M. Watson will always consider Victor, Colorado home. To inspire and equip young generations of writers, artists, and actors, A. M. Watson publishes adaptable scripts for teachers and students under the pen name Squire Spicket.

## INTERVIEW

**Peter:** A.M. Watson, it was a pleasure to get the opportunity of reading your book “Infants of the Brush: A Chimney Sweep’s Story”. It has been one of my favourite books this year and I absolutely loved the imagery, characters and plot you brought to life of 1720s London. I am delighted that we have the opportunity to conduct this interview to ask more questions about your novels, plans and your writing experience. Many thanks for making the time available to answer these questions.

**Peter:** What was the inspiration behind writing *Infants of the Brush*?

**A.M. Watson:** *Infants of the Brush* is based on the case *Armory v. Delamirie*, which involves a chimney sweep’s boy who had found a jewel and took it to a silversmith to sell only to have the precious stones stolen by the silversmith’s apprentice. The boy’s master later sued the silversmith for the return of the jewel. The case began a complex discussion on the definition and scope of property rights that continues 300 years later.

*Like many attorneys, I read Armory v. Delamirie the first week of my property law class. My professor addressed the case in a few sentences and said that there were better cases to discuss. I disagreed. The case haunted me.*

*That next summer I attended a study abroad program in England and had the opportunity to visit libraries, churches, museums, and famous landmarks all over the country. The chimney sweep’s boy from Armory v. Delamirie seemed to appear wherever I went. He was in art, literature, history, and even in a picture from a May Day Parade held that year. I knew then that I needed to write his story.*

**Peter:** You created several wonderfully drawn characters, some good some evil. Who was your favourite and who was the most challenging to develop?

**A.M. Watson:** *I love all of the chimney sweeps' boys – they represent the hundreds of nameless children who were forced to climb and clean chimneys, necessary but unnoticed members of society – but Pitt is my favourite. He continually surprised me through the writing process.*

*I found Paul de Lamerie particularly challenging to write. He is one of the greatest silversmiths of the 18th century, yet he allowed his apprentice to steal from an impoverished child and did not make reparations for the theft (if he had, he would not have been sued by Armory). He is depicted by legal scholars as the villain in *Armory v. Delamirie*, and his early life was fraught with indiscretion, but records of his later life describe a man who was, for the most part, a talented silversmith and honorable member of society. He was an interesting but difficult person to depict.*

**Peter:** What was the most difficult aspect of the story to write?

**A.M. Watson:** *Understanding that history rarely gives us the closure we desire, I struggled to write a conclusion that honored the characters, satisfied readers, and remained honest. I do not know what happened to the chimney sweep's boy involved in *Armory v. Delamirie*; the events after a court decision are rarely recorded. I drafted several ends, all of which were true to the historical period but only one was the right conclusion for the main character. Irrespective of how I ended *Infants of the Brush*, I hope the chimney sweep's boy had a chance to live his life on his own terms.*

**Peter:** How extensively did you research the history, and living and working conditions of this era, especially for children chimney sweeps?

**A.M. Watson:** *Most of the time it took me to write *Infants of the Brush* was spent researching and reading books, legislative material, first-hand accounts, and essays related to child labour. From chimney sweeping to mining, manufacturing, laundering, farming, and brickmaking, the use of child labour was and still is extensive. Most of the sources I found supporting or condemning child labour were written more than 100 years after *Armory v. Delamirie* was decided. In 1834, Samuel Roberts wrote *An Address to British Females of Every Rank and Station on the Employment of Climbing Boys in Sweeping Chimneys* to persuade women to use their social influence to abolish the cruel practice. Roberts' evocative address thoroughly chastised society for the employment of chimney sweeps' boys yet he received very little response to his work.*

*I also immersed myself in research about Georgian England. The Parliament and King's Bench records, church records and registries, city maps, architecture, English myths and legends, literature, economics, and art (particularly the works of William Hogarth) formed a vivid picture of 1700s London in my mind. I wanted to thoroughly understand not just the life of child chimney sweeps but the society and physical surroundings in which such a life could exist.*

**Peter:** I felt your characters were very well developed and believable for that period. Did you employ any particular steps to prevent yourself from creating heavily biased stereotypical characters, either all good or all bad?

**A.M. Watson:** *Each person has a soul, and if you spend enough time looking, you can find both redeeming and reproachful qualities in everyone. You see flaws and recognise the values that form their behavior. I thought about and analyzed my characters until I could give each one the essence of a soul. For example, Daniel Armory, the vilest character in *Infants of the Brush*, is an absolute cad. I get angry*

*just thinking about him. However, he never kidnapped a child. Armory either paid a fair market price for each child or asked for volunteers at parish orphanages. In his own view, and that of society at the time, he was an honest businessman. It was this societal standard that allowed Daniel Armory to subject children to horrendous working conditions with impunity.*

*When you understand a desperate woman clinging to the remnants of her life or an abused child fighting for a chance at freedom, you see beyond categories and stereotypes and find humanity.*

**Peter:** I found this a deeply moving story. Thinking of this interview I remembered the quote “No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader.” by Robert Frost. What emotional impact did writing this story have on you?

**A.M. Watson:** *Infants of the Brush is peppered with my own experiences – triumphs, humiliations, laughter, and tears. Many, many tears. At one point when I realised what would happen next, I stopped writing for six months. I tried to figure out other paths the story could take because I did not want to write the next chapter. I felt responsible for what these children endured 300 years ago. It was, after all, my book. When I returned to the story, I wrote what happened and hated myself for it. Afterward, I wrote the most delightful scenes that arise in the story – life has a way of harmonizing anguish and bliss.*

*I resisted publishing Infants of the Brush because sharing something so personal is a frightful experience. In 2016, I visited Ireland and found an inspiring country with a level of kindness and optimism in the midst of reality that I had never experienced before. I think part of my soul may still be there. That holiday taught me to recognise the beauty in all aspects of life. Even vulnerability in the face of rejection has merit. After that trip, I was determined to publish.*

**Peter:** Do you use story boarding or mapping processes to develop your plots and interactions, or do you go with the flow and follow your instinct and gut feeling? Do you use software tools to help?

**A.M. Watson:** *My writing process is unstructured and a bit haphazard. I shift my attention to different projects on a whim and produce my best work when I follow inspiration down every obscure path until the story unfolds before me. It took me 11 years to write Infants of the Brush, and I have been criticized about my inefficient and archaic writing process. Much of the criticism has merit; I could write more books if I outlined first or used a beat map or certain software or did a hundred things a different way. I would also lose my love of creative writing because I would be approaching it the same way I do my legal writing. Instead, I free myself from external expectations and enjoy my randomly beautiful writing process.*

**Peter:** Are you very disciplined in how you approach each writing day? What is your routine?

**A.M. Watson:** *I do not write every day, but I do research every day. I continuously read historical records, fiction written during the period (if any), newspapers, and any other resources that I can find about the period of my next book. When I have a day off, I typically spend 12-14 hours writing because my mind has already absorbed pages of history, formed strong opinions about events, and figured out how the pieces fit together. The approach compliments and gives me a break from my legal career.*

**Peter:** Could you share with us why you decided to establish your own publishing house [Red Acre Press](#), and what have been the greatest challenges and rewards you have faced? Do you have plans to grow and potentially bring in other authors?

**A.M. Watson:** *Many traditional publishing houses focus on profit margins and look for authors that can produce a new book every 6-8 months. There is nothing wrong with this model; publishing is a business, and I applaud both traditionally and self-published authors. But this model is not a great fit for me.*

*I established [Red Acre Press](#) so that I could write and publish on my own terms, which include hiring content and copy editors, a graphic designer, and other polishing professionals employed by a traditional publisher all while retaining full artistic control. *Infants of the Brush* may not be commercial, trendy, or ever a best-seller, but it is my genuine artistic work that I am pleased to have written. Marketing is a challenge, but I am confident that I will find readers that appreciate my work. I am not accepting submissions at the moment, but one day I hope to expand Red Acre Press to publish the work of other authors who have a similar philosophy.*

**Peter:** How personally involved are you in undertaking other aspects of the book production, for example the cover design, editing, narration, and the promotion of the book?

**A.M. Watson:** *I am personally involved in every detail but trust the opinions of those individuals that helped me produce *Infants of the Brush*. Writing a book is as important as the reader's experience with that book. Angela Carter once said, "Reading a book is like re-writing it for yourself...You bring your history, and you read it in your own terms." I cannot form the opinions of the readers, but hiring knowledgeable professionals helped create a superior reading experience. Michael Troughton, a UK actor and writer, did a fabulous job producing the audiobook. I could not have asked for a better voice for my characters. I also rely on my publicist, Patrice, who was an early fan of *Infants of the Brush* and has a talent for marketing.*

**Peter:** What authors have you most admired and have had an influence on you?

**A.M. Watson:** *I grew up in a mountain town in Colorado. The local library was my refuge from small-town life, and I read every old, dusty book available. As a result, I most admire authors of the classics – Mark Twain, Jane Austen, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, Alexander Dumas, Louisa May Alcott, C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, W. B. Yeats, and L. M. Montgomery, to name a few. I appreciate writing that reveals human nature and challenges my perceptions of history.*

**Peter:** What is your favourite book you've read this year?

**A.M. Watson:** *Dr. Mutter's Marvels: A True Tale of Intrigue and Innovation at the Dawn of Modern Medicine by Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz. The book is a fascinating look at the life and work of Dr. Thomas Dent Mutter who was a pioneer in many surgical procedures and advanced healthcare through cleanliness and post-surgical care. Most notably, he treated people with deformities and gave them a chance to live normal lives.*

**Peter:** What advice would you give to aspiring or debut authors?

**A.M. Watson:** *Surround yourself with people you trust to tell you the truth about your book and then find an unbiased editor who will show you all of the flaws that they missed. It is difficult to receive criticism, but it is a gift that will refine your work. Also, read and travel. Read classics, modern literature, non-fiction, and biographies, and travel and get outside of your daily experience. Writing is a process of self-discovery. Find your inspiration and then captivate the minds of readers with its energy.*

**Peter:** If you had a dinner party and could invite 3 personalities from any period in history who would they be and why?

**A.M. Watson:** *While I am tempted to invite a few of my literary heroes, their lives are well documented and available to investigate at my leisure. Instead, I would invite people who witnessed the notable and mundane events of ordinary life but whose perspective was not recorded – perhaps a milliner in the Elizabethan period, a town crier that walked the streets of Paris during the Enlightenment, and a sailor employed by the East India Trading Company prior to the Industrial Revolution. Our knowledge of history might be very different if it had been recorded by the multitudes instead of their leaders. I would like to find out just how different.*

**Peter:** Can you give us any insights into any future books or projects that you're working on?

**A.M. Watson:** *I am working on a few books inspired by cases I have collected over the years; one book is about a fascinating case from the pre-jury era. Like *Infants of the Brush*, the books recognise that the law is neither good nor evil, it is simply a reflection of society – its values, achievements, failures, and limitations.*

**Peter:** How can readers learn more about you and your work?

**A.M. Watson:** *My website is <https://redacrepress.com>, and I am active on social media @redacrepress on Facebook and @AMWatsonAuthor on Twitter. Responding to questions from readers is the highlight of my day. Writing *Infants of the Brush* was an incredible journey for me, and I am thrilled to introduce the broomers to readers around the world.*

**Peter:** A.M. Watson, I appreciate you taking the time for this interview. If there are other snippets of information you wish to provide, please feel free. I would like to congratulate you on your wonderful book and I wish you massive success for the future.

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Written by [Peter Donnelly](#) – [The Reading Desk](#)

