

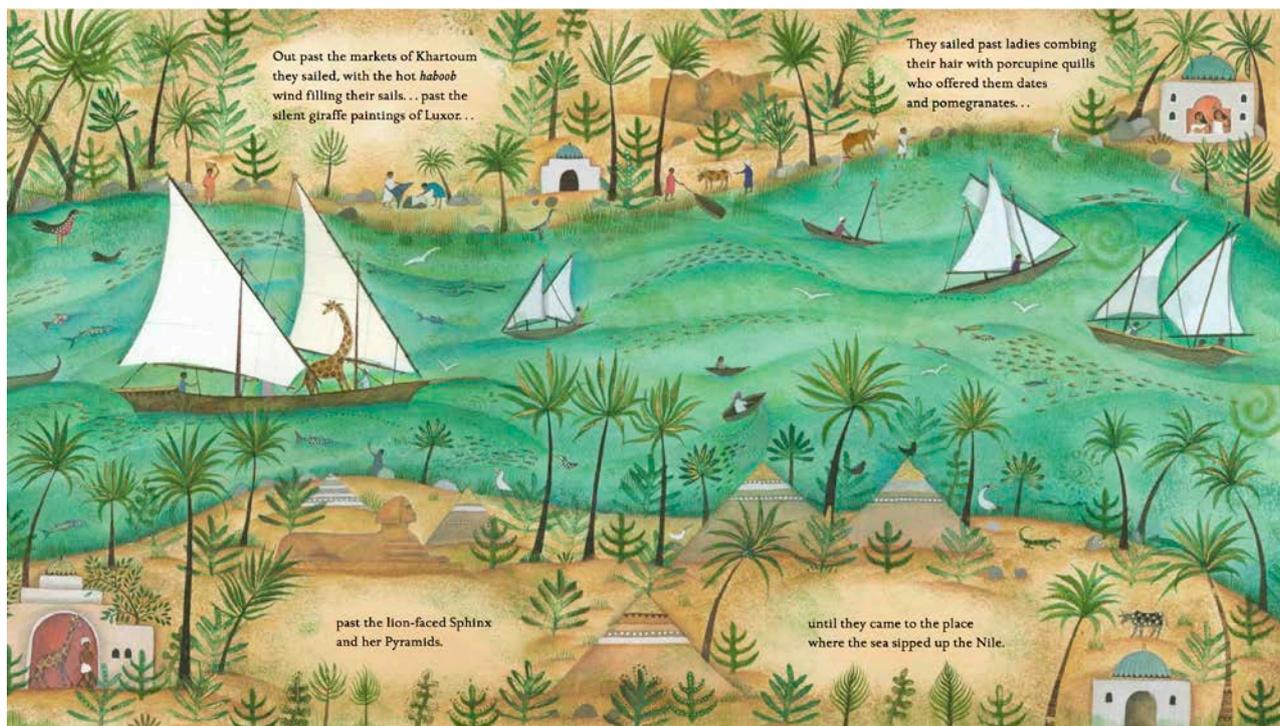
## Steering the Craft

### CONTENTS

#### EDITORIAL

A note about the illustration on the front cover	2
Granny's Table: Navigating the Process of Publishing Children's Books in the 21st Century David Fickling	2
So you Want to Be an Editor? Jane Winterbotham	3
The Alchemy of the Picture Book Jane Ray	8
The British Teacup's Edge Chantal Wright	11

A Canary down the Mine: A Gaelic Reading Club for Children Mairi Kidd	17
Good Companions Daniel Hahn	21
Happy Birthday Alice! An Exhibition at the British Library to Celebrate 150 Years of <i>Alice in Wonderland</i> June Hopper Swain	23
The Stephen Spender Prize 2015 for Poetry in Translation in association with <i>The Guardian</i> Robina Pelham Burn	23
REVIEWS	30
	33



'On past the markets of Khartoum they sailed ...'. From *Zeraffa Giraffa* by Dianne Hofmeyr and Jane Ray. Copyright © 2014 Dianne Hofmeyr and Jane Ray. Reproduced courtesy of the authors. Published by Frances Lincoln Children's Book.

## EDITORIAL

It may be rather late, but Happy New Year to all our readers. If the New Year now seems to be rather distant, the IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference at Roehampton University in November is even further in the past. However, members will be able to revisit some of the papers on the IBBY UK website ([www.ibby.org.uk/](http://www.ibby.org.uk/)), while in this issue we pick up the theme – Steering the Craft: Creating Children’s Books in the 21st Century. Of course, this is a very large and complex subject; we can do no more than take a few snapshots. So David Fickling, in inimitable style, looks at the position of the publisher in an age where technology seems to reign. Indeed, the possibility of self-publishing might seem to make both the publisher – and even more, the editor, redundant. Or does it? Jane Winterbotham, Deputy Managing Director and Editorial Director at Walker Books reflects on what it means to be an editor today.

What about the texts themselves? Traditionally, books for children in the UK have been very much

created within the UK – the result a very rich tradition, and one that is reflected in the classics we still enjoy. Surely one of the most familiar is *Alice in Wonderland* that is now 150 years old and the subject of an exhibition at the British Library which June Swain visited. This concentration on the homegrown has been to the detriment of the translated – though maybe that is beginning to change. Both Chantal Wright and Mairi Kidd are involved in this in rather different ways as their articles reveal.

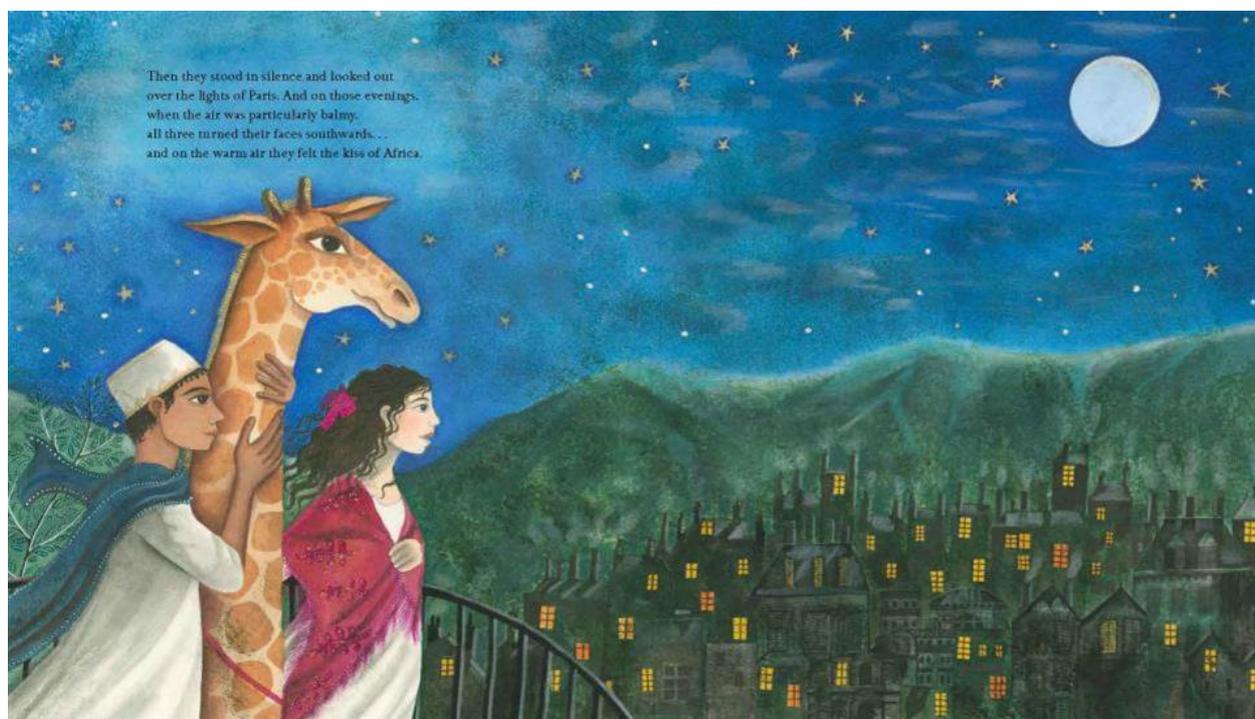
And then there is the illustrator. Jane Ray is one of our most distinctive and best known in the world of children’s books. What is her take on this theme? While prophets of doom claim the book is dying, it is difficult to credit this when walking through bookshops, charity shops or even libraries. How to navigate such riches? Well you need a companion, and Danny Hahn has created the ideal one to explore this world.

**Ferelith Hordon**

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## A note about the illustration on the front cover

Dianne Hofmeyr and Jane Ray presented a conversation, chaired by Pam Dix, on collaboration in picture-book production. *Zeraffa Giraffa* was included in the discussion. The rest of their conversation and further illustrations can be seen in the annual 2015 IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference archive area on the IBBY UK website [www.ibby.org.uk](http://www.ibby.org.uk).



Final double-page spread from *Zeraffa Giraffa*.

# Granny's Table: Navigating the Process of Publishing Children's Books in the 21st Century

*David Fickling*

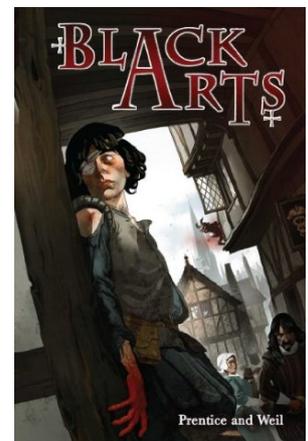
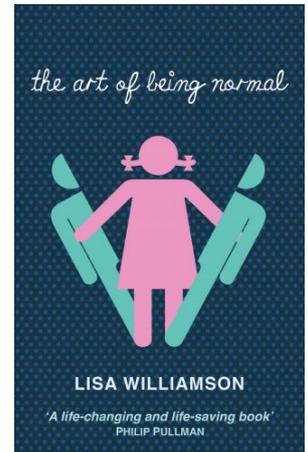
Above all, publishing, in my view, is an intensely personal activity. A publisher should know all the books they are publishing and every single one of their authors. This has the added advantage of limiting the size of a publishing company. I am sitting writing these bold statements at a plain oak table. This particular table encourages boldness in me. It sits in the David Fickling Books offices in Oxford. The table, which first belonged to my grandmother, did long service as an English dining-room table. There it was the centre of many large family meals. In its time it must have born many a Sunday lunch – traditional roast beef, roast chicken or leg of lamb, roast potatoes, gravy and all the trimmings. There is nothing particularly special about the table. It is an extendable table that when stretched out will seat ten people comfortably and more at a push.

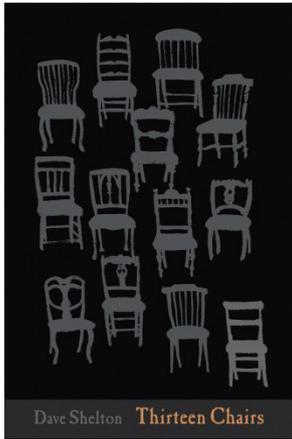
When my grandmother sat at the head of the table she was renowned for serving out all the food and never leaving enough for herself, at which there would be a huge mock outcry from everybody else, and the tipping and scraping of food back on to Granny's plate. She would sit there smiling, waving us away and mildly protesting. All the rules at Granny's table were understood. Table manners were important but everybody chatted away freely. There was much laughter and family tale telling by the grown-ups, sudden heated family arguments would break out usually centred on the grandchildren who might start quietly on their best behaviour but always became the centre of attention until they escaped or were shooed into the garden. Normal family stuff. None of what happened there ever reached the outside world. It would have been of no interest. Just family stuff.

Nowadays it doesn't see much food, maybe some sandwiches, and certainly not one of Granny's lovely linen tablecloths, and it is now much more likely to support coffee mugs and glasses of water, and, for special editorial occasions, plates of biscuits. Mostly it is covered in a mess of typescripts, illustrations and books and being constantly tidied. It is where I read submissions for DFB and it is where the DFB team all meet to have editorial meetings and discuss novels and stories and texts. These days something mysterious happens on Granny's table. It is connected to the mystery of stories and where they come from, who makes them up, how do we know they are 'right', and then how they go out into the world. This mystery is to me the most exciting phenomenon in the world. And perhaps more importantly it is the most exciting and important for all the young readers of the world. Where is the next truly brilliant story coming from?

Granny's table has existed for maybe 90 years. It spans the entire computer age, from Turing to Google and Amazon and Twitter. For more than five centuries the bound book held glorious cultural sway and the bookshelves held the books. Then little more than 20 years ago the texts began to leave the shelves. Like birds, the texts have flown. This is very, very recent and mostly within the lifetime of today's teenagers. Though their physical form remained, there are books still on shelves, their essence flew elsewhere and now exists truly in another dimension, literally beyond our senses. Where did the texts go? Where are they stored now? All the avid science fiction and comic reading of my youth never predicted this. Do you know? Can you tell me? Can any of us say for sure where those texts actually are? You may airily say, 'they are on servers somewhere'. As a publisher I am hard put to say where they are exactly. It is no longer the same as simply getting a book down from the shelf. And how many of us can say exactly how, in what manner, they now exist? Or how we retrieve them? Take the machinery away from us and where is our culture stored?

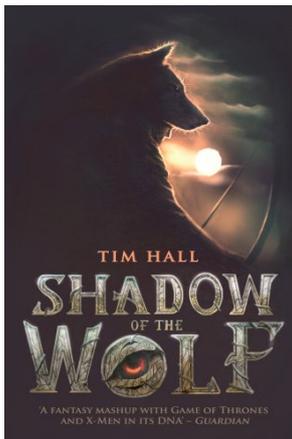
## CREATING CHILDREN'S BOOKS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



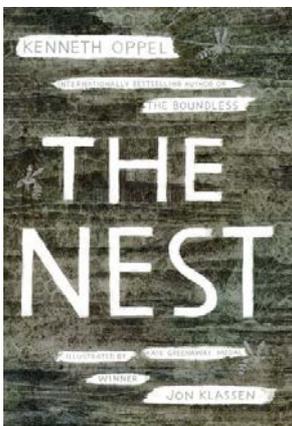


These questions are no mere idle philosophical conjecture. They have changed the business of publishing from top to bottom. They have changed how books are paid for. And the speed of change has accelerated and continues to accelerate. On the face of it we still have books made of paper, make new ones and still store them in libraries. Much seems as it was but this is wholly deceptive. The universe of texts has been irrevocably shattered into a new form of existence. Physical versions of texts can be summoned, like genies, almost at will into whatever form we wish to read them. The genies are getting good at reading to us too. Universal translators don't seem that far off right now. Will that in turn be replaced by self-realising texts who compose a sort of 'show' of the text for you – a sort of advanced version of a spellchecker and no doubt just as irritating, an 'imagination checker'?

'David,' a voice sounding spookily like Hal from *2001: A Space Odyssey* will say, 'I have imagined a story just for you. Would you like me to show it to you now?' 'Later I can't be bothered ...'.



For surely soon these books, these stories will be able to formulate themselves as algorithms. Even our imagining will be done for us. Orwell was good but surely even he couldn't have anticipated this. Good thing he set his story in 1984 when the computers were only just starting to ... I was going to say 'whirr' but they don't make a sound that I can hear. Traditional can now be seen as merely the physical avatars of texts, *not* the texts themselves. The change from paper to digital storage is slipping beyond the understanding of most of us, though we confidently pretend to understand and to take it all in our stride. What else can we do? Ask me actually to explain 'digital storage' and my mouth will start to flap. And what implications does this stupendous revolution in the composing, recording and storage of texts have on the texts themselves, on the people who compose them, the authors, on the people who sell and promulgate them, the publishers, and most of all on the young people of the world who may or may not come to read them? Yes, especially on the young readers of the world?



So why bother to learn to read at all? Is reading itself doomed to disappear? The main thing to remember here is that reading is a highly involving mind process requiring the active participation of the reader. Reader and storyteller are locked together by a book. We do not read in order to surrender passively to stories but for them to teach us to think for ourselves. Perhaps the greater number and variety of stories we read the clearer this becomes.

I don't think anybody knows what is going to happen to publishing businesses or the economics of writing and publishing except that they know it is changing rapidly. So large have publishing companies or corporations become that it may even be beyond any individual to manage them or even understand them. When a cabal of senior executives at the helm of large publishing companies (in truth they were only medium sized compared to what they have become now) in the UK in the 1990s pressured the UK government to abandon its Net Book Agreement, they believed they were acting in the interests of readers, customers and the general public. The Net Book Agreement artificially maintained the same price for books in all bookshops and wherever books were sold. It trammelled the free market, they said, we should be unfettered. But those senior executives didn't imagine Amazon and they certainly couldn't have imagined that they might be undermining the profitability and independent future of their own organisations! Whether the decision was for good or evil is a matter of opinion. It has happened. Pandora's box was opened. Hindsight shows us one thing clearly though: those executives didn't fully understand what they were doing. Publishing companies are not even in control of themselves anymore. They are owned by yet larger corporations who trade in many things other than texts. They march to a fascinatingly simple financial drum. The beat of that drum grows faster every day. Every book sale is instantly recorded and tabulated. The success of a text is faster and more ephemeral. I have a horrible suspicion that the drum itself, its ubiquity, its

mesmeric insistence, its immediacy and announcements of success, now harms the writing and publication of debut stories, new stories, because their success is so apparently risky. Why bother with debuts when we are so rich and their sale so unpredictable. We shall endanger our treasure chest. It is a monstrously persuasive argument. Huge publishing corporations have a very large number of people to take care of and who rely on their income. They have to be responsible and careful with their investments ... they think.

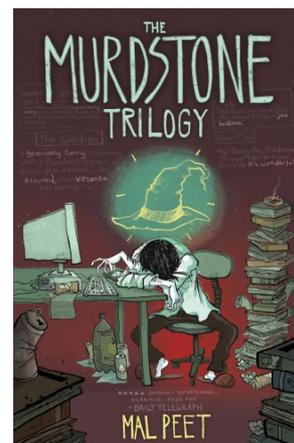
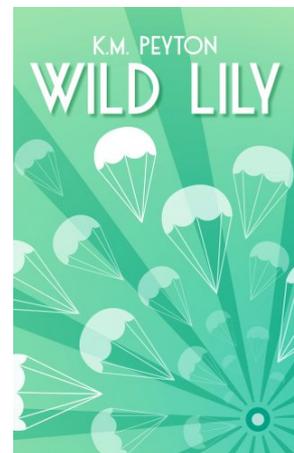
Of course the people in gigantic corporations are no less human. They are no less lovely and friendly or the opposite as everyone else. I should know. Until recently I was one and all my talented colleagues worked for the corporation. It is not pleasant to feel that one is working for a machine that one doesn't understand. It can drive iron into the tenderest soul. The 'imprints' that international corporations put on books are at best misrepresentations, at worst lies. They give the impression of small personal teams making books in a personal way. That impression is a half-truth. Most imprints seem to be the names of dead white males from a patriarchal age when publishing was intensely personal and hugely privileged and wondrously inefficient. Writing this I am only too aware that I too am a white male. But happily not dead. Today's imprints are not really personal in the same way. It is not the people so much as the system that I question. The system is fast becoming beyond the control or understanding of any individual. I wonder if the general book-buying public know or care about the ownership of publishing companies? Perhaps they think that the unimaginably large corporations are publicly owned, answerable to pension holders and governments and the like? Actually almost all the modern gigantic publishing companies are privately owned and in the private possession of a very few families ... go figure.

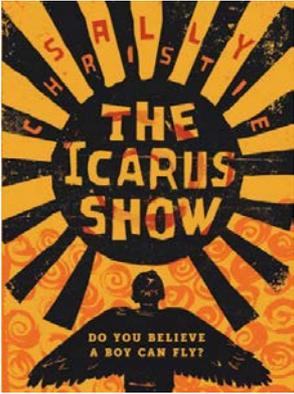
It is with some relief I return from all this ghastly speculation to the solid oak reality of Granny's table. I hope you are still with me! One of the things I do know is that all this stupendous technological and business revolution and its hair-tearing human stretching complexity does not in any way answer the mystery of Granny's table: where do good stories come from? And how can we encourage the best storytellers to Granny's table?

This mystery has absolutely nothing at all to do with new technology. And worse. It seems likely that all the discussion of and excitement with new technology gets in the way of this mystery. The time it takes to manufacture a book, to copy a book has shrunk to almost nothing. You can now do that in the twinkling of an eye. Puck put a girdle round the world in 40 minutes. Puck is a slow coach; achingly slow, compared to downloading a digital copy of *War and Peace* with a fast broadband connection. You can now do that in seconds and the process is becoming ever faster.

It still takes a human being pretty much as long to read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as it ever did, or to watch it as a play for that matter. It still takes a reader just as long to read *War and Peace* as ever it has. We can own more texts or have unlimited access to them, virtually picking them off the shelf has never been easier but we can't read, understand or enjoy more texts. We can now take the British Library on holiday with us. But out of the whole pile we still only actually read properly one or two books. Then there is the time to think about it and let it settle into your mind.

If we talk only about technology and business then, for the young reader, for any reader, we are concentrating on entirely the wrong things. And never mind the readers, what about the magic elves themselves, the writers and authors? It takes just as long to write *War and Peace* too. The time it takes to write a good story, a good novel or to illustrate it beautifully has not shrunk. It takes just as long as it ever did! Writing a book is a tremendous achievement. Writing a good book is almost a miracle. Writing a great book stops time itself.

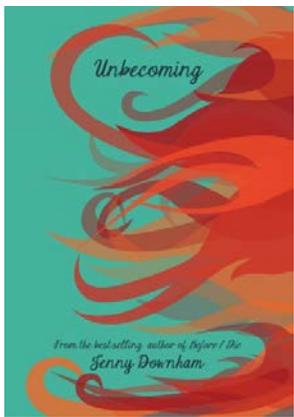




Think of Granny serving up roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes, carrots and gravy at her table. (I am sure Granny would cook something delicious from Ottolenghi nowadays, so think of that if you are a vegetarian.) It still takes Granny time to cook and for us to eat and digest the meal, however much you want to rush away from the table and play. And as time goes on you want to linger at the table more, to enjoy the meal and the conversation. As time goes on the whole family begins to relish the making of Sunday lunch. Fast food is nothing like as good. The same goes for reading and publishing and an exciting literary culture. It is time that is the real currency. It is time that we have so little of. And because of this, we need the books to be very good indeed.

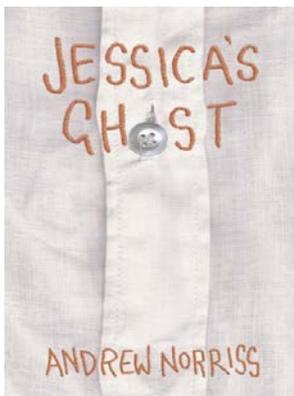
One of my favourite stories has always been *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. Yesterday I was reading a yet unpublished typescript by one of DFB's marvellous debut authors Sally Christie and there it was again. (DFB has just published the amazing *The Icarus Show* by Sally.) She quite incidentally mentioned *The Pied Piper* to describe one of her characters:

She looked like the little lame boy in the Pied Piper story, who got left behind.



It put me in mind not so much of the poor lame boy himself as to the town he went back to. It has taken me a lifetime to realise that we are all the lame boy, chasing after the piper and his mesmerising music. We can never get there, though we never give up trying. We don't know why we follow the music except we must. And then when the music abruptly stops we all have to go back to town to face the music rather than listen to it. After all, Hamelin is where we make our living. Funnily enough, back here in Hamelin town nothing much has been changed by the loss of the children. The Mayor and Corporation far from resigning and apologising to the townspeople who have lost their children have instead absolved themselves of responsibility and launched a counter suit against the parents on the grounds that they had been irresponsible to let their children play outside. And besides, didn't they clear up the rat problem just as they promised in their manifesto?

Granny's table is the same as ever. Except that now it serves not meals to a family but stories.



Granny's table was never clever or smart or fashionable but I can't remember a single Sunday lunch at her table that isn't delicious in the memory. We know that, like Granny, as publishers for young readers, rather than be clever, smart and fashionable we need to be cheerful, constant and patient, and to be there for the author and their writing now and in the future, to lay the table every day and wait for the story to knock like the Pied Piper at our door. And when that Piper knocks, be they man, woman or magic elf, I know that we must keep our promise and look after them. A publishing company *is* its authors. They are inside the company, and not a group of spoiled studio stars. And all the company's duties are to the reader. Can you imagine how lucky we feel to be in an office where we read stories and novels for a living? Where we have the chance of being the very first reader of a story that just might resound all over the world?

Where is the next world-changing story coming from? Well of course I don't know. Will DFB publish it? Well I don't know that either. How do we find the best stories then? Well we put up a shop sign saying good stories, the very best stories, published here. There is just a chance that the next big story is coming to you directly from Granny's table. I say this humbly. We are small but we bring our stories from Granny's table to the world's table. It is for the world to judge.

Today Granny's table is laid with a banquet fit for the family of readers in the world. Like Granny's Sunday lunch I would hope the texts are enjoyed by all ages. I have listed some of the most delicious and satisfying below. I hope you find them tempting and come back for seconds. As I always greedily did.

## Selection of publications, Oxford: David Fickling Books

*The Art of Being Normal* by Lisa Williamson (2014)

*Shadow of the Wolf* by Tim Hall (2015)

*The Murdstone Trilogy* by Mal Peet (2014)

*Running Girl* by Simon Mason (2015)

*Unbecoming* by Jenny Downham (2015)

*The Icarus Show* by Sally Christie (January 2016)

*Wild Lily* by K.M. Peyton (February 2016)

*My Name's not Friday* by Jon Walter (2015)

*The Nest* by Ken Oppel (March 2016)

*Jessica's Ghost* by Andrew Norriss (2015)

*Black Arts* by Andrew Prentice and Jonathan Weil (2012)

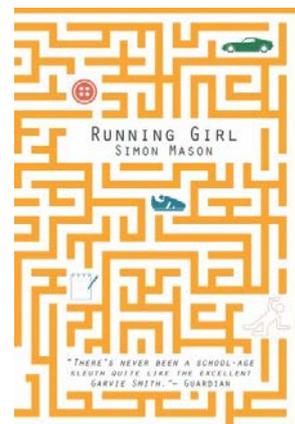
*Thirteen Chairs* by Dave Shelton (2014)

### A note

Please forgive me for this article if you can. I know I have spent far too much time discussing the dull mechanism of publishing and an oak table, and not nearly enough time on the mystery of storytelling. In particular I have not managed to solve the mystery of how stories come into the world. Or how that happens at Granny's table. How do we know when a story is finished? How do we know when it is right and ready for publication? Sometimes it seems even the author doesn't know when they have finished. Authors speak equally mysteriously of their 'characters' deciding what happens. They have given their characters life in the story. Such and such a character 'just wouldn't do that'. Only today I heard the Egyptian writer Alaa Al Aswany say exactly the same thing on the radio. In some sense that character has become real to the writer and cannot be contradicted. It sometimes seems to me that the story itself is hovering over Granny's table situated somewhere between the author and the reader (editors are just professional readers), and that the story itself is waiting to be summoned into its proper form.

And even worse, I delivered the article late! How can someone who sets deadlines and mercilessly chases late authors be late himself. Please do not mention this to any of the DFB authors should you be lucky enough to meet one. More than ever I am struck by how very difficult it is to write anything at all, let alone well.

[David Fickling is a publisher of children's books, now at the helm of independent publishing company, David Fickling Books. For nearly 12 years he ran the company as an imprint, first as part of Scholastic, then of Random House. He has edited and published some extraordinary books over his career including Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and, more recently, bestselling young adult novel of 2015 *The Art of being Normal* by Lisa Williamson. In 2012 he launched a weekly story comic for children called *The Phoenix*, filled with beautiful and original artwork, exciting stories and featuring no advertising. David Fickling Books works closely with *The Phoenix*, sharing a mission to create stories and excitement for all children.]



## So you Want to Be an Editor?

*Jane Winterbotham*

'I have just completed an MA in Children's Literature: it focuses on the rules of Quidditch and how they relate to the human psyche. My dream is to be a children's book editor.' Sound familiar? How many hundreds of letters do we receive every year from eager new graduates looking to an editorial career in publishing? But is there a future in editing or is it a disappearing role? And is the job itself still how people imagine it?

There are many new challenges facing today's children's book editors. But is there a bigger one than the effect on reading from the rival distraction of electronic devices? Books are facing ever-swelling competition for children's attention. Time that was once devoted to reading is increasingly swallowed up by video clips, photos, chat and gaming. Much actual reading is in the form of short-form text that can be consumed in manageable chunks – information, messages, profile updates.

So what about those who do still find time for books? What are they reading? While the children's market is, in fact, growing, it is becoming increasingly polarised, with a few books selling in huge volume, and the rest trailing in their wake. Those that do sell come largely from the celebrity or brand end of the market. New novels and debut picture books have a hard time competing with the Zoellas and the Peppa Pigs, the Stampy Longnose and Star Wars books that dominate the retail shelves and till sales. Last year was a bumper year for children's book sales, but the Bookscan sales charts clearly demonstrate this polarisation between the big hitters and top brands ... and the rest. David Walliams and Wimpy Kid totally dominated the top 20 bestsellers in 2015, followed by vlogger Zoella's *Girl Online*, a couple of film tie-ins and annuals, and a tie-in book to a supermarket TV commercial. Is there any chance for the other thousands of new books the industry turns out every year?

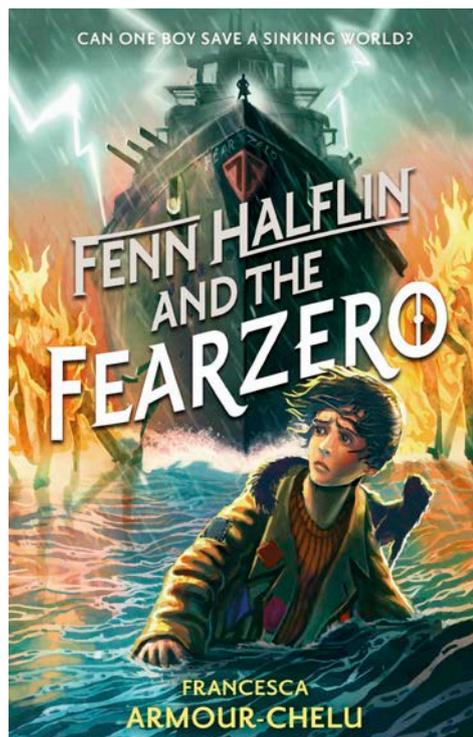
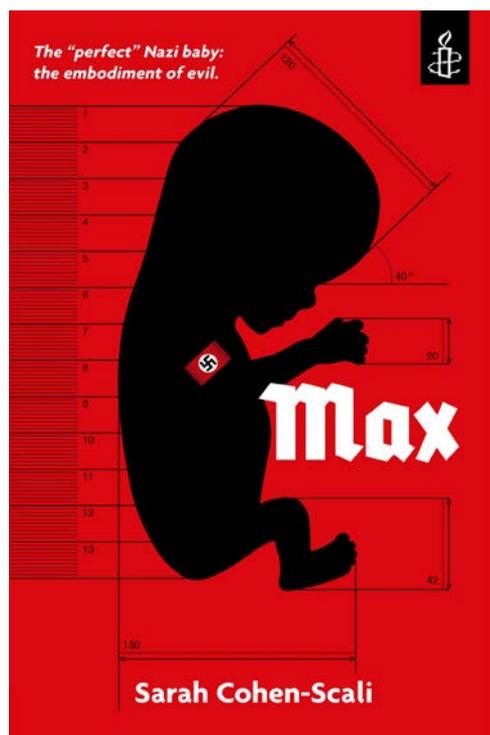
And then there's the rise of self-publishing, with a growing number of books reaching their audiences without recourse to an editor, or even a publisher. The success in the adult market of *Fifty Shades of Grey* has spawned a buoyant market in self-published young adult fiction. That some of this work might well be improved by a good edit doesn't hinder its popularity. The bestselling picture book, *The Rabbit who Wants to Fall Asleep*, became a word-of-mouth bestseller as a self-published book. Who needs an editor?

Well, it turns out that even some successful self-published authors eventually turn to the experts. Both *Fifty Shades* and *The Rabbit* were picked up by publishers, and went on to build even greater sales. Under the watchful eye of an editor, David Walliams turned a successful debut as a children's author into a successful career. Those film, game and TV-driven properties all need an editorial vision behind them to transfer successfully from screen to page. To satisfy the widest audience, there is clear value added through the editorial stages and processes, even if these are evolving as the market and audience change.

So what exactly is the added value that an editor offers in today's world?

It still starts with finding the author, the illustrator, the book. Tracking down new talent may mean visiting writing courses, art colleges and exhibitions. It means talking to tutors, keeping in touch with agents. These days it includes checking out vlogger talent and celebrities who might have a book in them. For translated work, add in regular meetings with international editors and rights sellers at book fairs. Yes, searching out new talent takes time, but when it delivers it is hugely satisfying. This year Walker Books publish *Fenn Halflin and the Fearzero*, a thrilling middle-grade adventure from debut novelist Francesca Armour-Chelu, spotted from her winning a short-story

competition, and *Max* by French writer Sarah Cohen-Scali, a powerful and shocking young adult novel set in wartime Germany, a book I found at the Bologna Book Fair.



Competition for the hottest books is increasing. That will often mean putting together a jazzy pitch to the agent, to convince the author that you are the best home for their work, and to convince the agent that you will deliver the best commercial success. As an independent company competing in a world of conglomerates, we have to pick our targets. Walker's track record with Anthony Horowitz's Alex Rider series and Cassandra Clare's Shadowhunters series no doubt gave us an edge in winning recent auctions for new commercial properties like Bobbie Peers' *William Wenton and the Luridium Thief* and Scott Bergstrom's *The Cruelty*. Our publishing of such award winners as David Almond and Patrick Ness helps attract literary submissions from agents. But every pitch is individual and must show your passion for the book, setting out your publishing plan and editorial vision, and backing that up with financial offers to win over the agent. A huge amount of time and energy goes into creating these pitches, and the thrill of winning the book is as great as the disappointment of losing it.

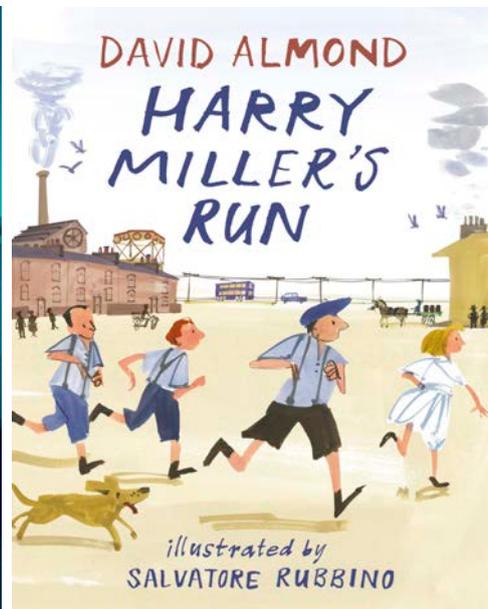
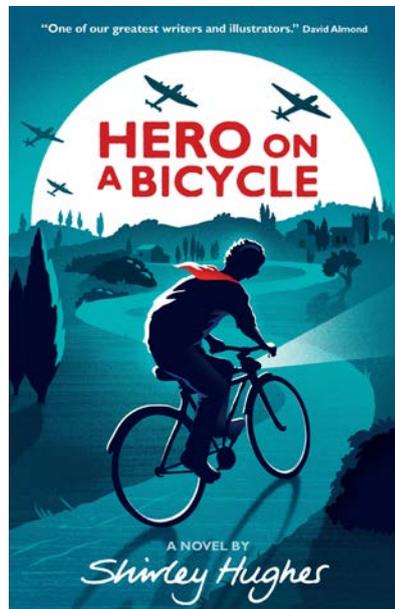
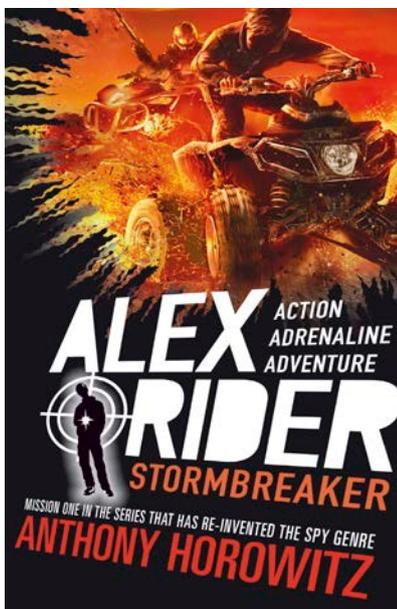
The editor needs to develop a vision for the book, including format and price, its look and feel on the page or screen, whether or not the text needs illustration and, if so, in what style. In my seven years editing David Almond's younger fiction, it has been a joy to work with art directors in selecting different artists to pair with his varied texts: Polly Dunbar and Oliver Jeffers for his young funny novels including *The Boy Who Swam with Piranhas*, Dave McKean for grittier graphic novels like *The Savage* and, recently, Salvatore Rubbino for the more reflective *Harry Miller's Run*. Each is perfect for the tone of the writing and each brings an extra dimension to the book. In an increasingly tough market, the editor also needs good financial and business skills, covering royalty structures as well as production-cost implications to make sure every project is viable and profitable for both the author and the publisher.

The general lament about poorly edited books is, I would hope, not one that can be levelled at Walker Books. All our books are given the same meticulous editorial attention, going through many stages of editing and proofreading, something that marked Walker Books from the start and which we still hold as an important measure of our list. That attention to detail is focused first, of course, on the text and art, for style, factual accuracy, consistency and continuity. But the need for attention to detail now extends beyond the traditional editorial work of copyediting and proofreading, to

metadata. It's our new mantra. Metadata, metadata, metadata: our current obsession, covering all the peripheral information about a book – SBN, BIC, BISAC, CBMC and ONIX codes, keywords, short and long blurbs etc. etc. So much in bookselling is now driven by the feeds to retailers' listings to help take best advantage of their marketing algorithms that the editor's role now embraces whole swathes of data inputting and checking. This, along with checking market and sales data, updating spreadsheets and feeding the internal publishing systems, is now the stock in trade of today's editor.

As well as dealing with the behind-the-scenes data to help the book to reach its audience, the editor must also be the book's key champion. It's a crowded market out there and a new book needs a megaphone to be heard above the rest. Editorial work may traditionally have attracted the quiet and scholarly, but an editor also needs to be able to shout strong and loud, both inside the publishing house and to the world outside about the merits of the book and to make direct contact with the readers: engaging online, liaising with blogger communities, and attending and speaking at events, festivals and conventions.

The editor's vision will also need to reach beyond the book itself to a future plan for the author. When we get excited about finding a great new writer or book, we're naturally hoping that success will extend beyond the first book to a body of work, perhaps even to the development of a brand – that holy grail. It was my good fortune on first arriving at Walker Books 15 years ago to find the manuscript of Anthony Horowitz's *Stormbreaker* on my desk. I claim no credit in getting it there – he had been published successfully by Walker for some years, and had himself come up with the brilliant character of Alex Rider, reluctant teenage spy. My opportunity was to push for a big marketing campaign for the book, to make a big splash with it, to establish it from the outset as the start of something big. Supporting the author as he built the series book by book and ensuring regular repackaging and reformatting, paid off and Alex Rider is now one of the best-known brands for children.



So, the role of the editor has developed and expanded. No doubt it will continue to. But at its heart one thing hasn't changed: the love of story. Talking about stories with authors, illustrators and colleagues is the greatest joy of the job. That engagement with such creative people, giving them the space to work, guarding their interests and helping them discover new ways to express their vision is a privilege and a pleasure. Watching Shirley Hughes, aged over 80, embark on her first novel, *Hero on a Bicycle*, and helping to bring it to fruition, together with the website she requested (this from someone who has never turned on a computer ...); inviting David Almond to explore his life and writing in essays that illuminate his collection of short stories *Half a Creature*

*from the Sea*; tussling over a paragraph of text with Timothée de Fombelle’s translator to capture the beauty of his language for an English-speaking reader: this part of the job remains constant – and is constantly exciting.

So, the editor needs to be a hunter, a visionary, a cheerleader, a wordsmith, a legal eagle, a hustler, an adviser and an honest friend. And because we believe, even though our experience of the market may tell us otherwise, that every single book we publish is going to be *the one*, above all else the editor needs to be an optimist.

So, newly minted Children’s Literature MA, does that sound like the career you’re after?

[Jane Winterbotham is Deputy Managing Director for UK Publishing and Editorial Director for Junior Fiction at Walker Books. Jane has worked in children’s publishing for over 35 years, in a career which has included educational and own-brand publishing, as well as a stint in Japan, involving export, rights and marketing. After her return to the UK, she took over at Reed Children’s Books, later Egmont, and 15 years ago moved to Walker Books to oversee all genres from picture books, fiction and non-fiction to classic brands. Under her stewardship, the Walker list has seen major growth in fiction alongside ongoing success in illustrated books. She edits Anthony Horowitz, Shirley Hughes and David Almond, and acquires as much foreign fiction as she can.]

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## The Alchemy of the Picture Book

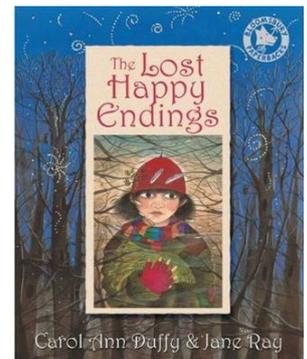
*Jane Ray*

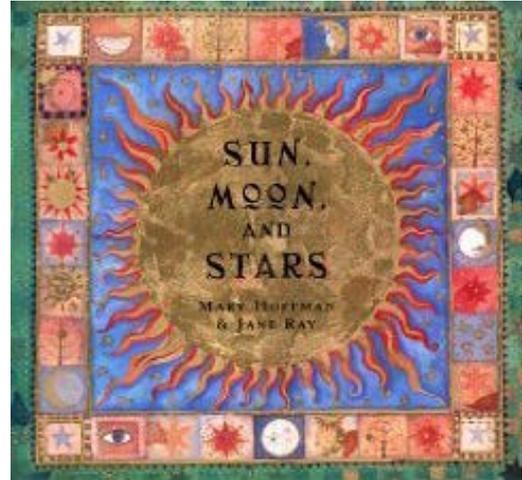
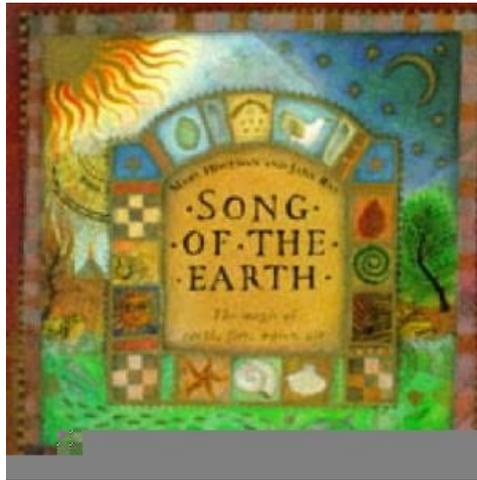
A frequent question for makers of picture books is ‘What comes first? Words or pictures?’ – a tricky one to answer. For me, a picture book is a cocktail of ingredients in various quantities and proportions, added, subtracted, balanced, shaken *and* stirred. In this piece, I’ve tried to outline a few of the ways in which picture books that I have worked on have come about, through varied collaborations and, more generally, how words and pictures work together.

The most straightforward approach, I suppose, is when a publisher sends a text and I illustrate it – *The Lost Happy Endings* by Carol Ann Duffy for example. Bloomsbury sent me Carol Ann’s magical story. I was blown away by it and immersed myself in the process of illustrating it, without, if I recall, any communication with the author at all. I had completely free reign and we didn’t even meet until after the book was published. So in that instance, the text came first, followed by the illustrations, which were made in direct response to the story. Simple.

But there are also the fascinating collaborations with other authors where minds meet and a sort of game of imaginative ping-pong develops – ideas being batted back and forth, author and illustrator each adding, suggesting, occasionally arguing (not often – we’re a peaceable bunch in the main), sometimes compromising, until the finished book emerges. And each collaboration with an author is totally different.

Way back in the 1990s I did two books with Mary Hoffman: *Song of the Earth* and *Sun, Moon and Stars*, both published by Orion Books. Mary and I evolved what we came to think of as the ‘compost-heap’ method, where we each simply pitched possible ideas connected with our subject matter onto a mental compost heap and left them to mature and ‘rot down’ until we had a rich mixture of possibilities. This was a good way of working on these particular books, both of them collections of stories, folklore and poetry.





More recently, with *Zeraffa Giraffa* (Frances Lincoln Children's Books) and the book I am working on at the moment, *The Glass Maker's Daughter*, Dianne Hofmeyr had sent me her original texts some years ago because she recognised something in the way I worked that she felt was right for her story. I immediately loved her writing with its rich descriptions and visual imagery. (Dianne has taught art and has a wonderful visual sense that shows clearly in her work.) (See an illustration from *Zeraffa Giraffa* on the cover of this journal.)

Perhaps the most unusual collaboration has been the recent one with Kevin Crossley-Holland. Kevin and I had long wanted to do a book together, but kept stumbling over subject matter. We had exchanged a few ideas, which, though they had potential, weren't quite right. Then, very tentatively, I showed Kevin the fragments of a story that I had started to write on my first trip to Venice a few years earlier. Actually, to describe what I showed him as a 'story' is generous – these were minimal notes and ideas that had chimed for me and convinced me that there was a wonderful potential tale to be told here. But I had wrestled for two or three years and couldn't make it work. I had a subject, a main character, Laura, whom I could see in my mind's eye as clear as day. I had a sketch book full of Venetian atmosphere – the canals, the market stalls and quiet churches. I could hear the music, the birds and the street cries. I even had the ending. But I couldn't map a full story or bind the whole thing together.



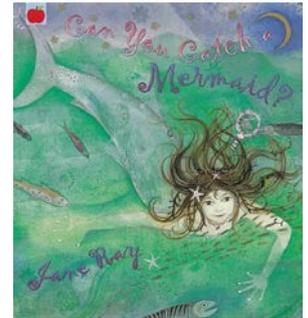
Kevin, of course, knew exactly what to do. He took my fragments, discarded some, added many more of his own, and with his wonderful warm storyteller's voice, wrote *Heartsong*. As soon as I saw the finished manuscript I knew it was right. Illustrating the story was a joy. (Illustrations from this book can be viewed at [www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/gallery/2015/dec/20/the-joy-of-christmas-books-jane-ray](http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/gallery/2015/dec/20/the-joy-of-christmas-books-jane-ray).)

The process of retelling existing stories – fairy tales, folktales, myths and legends – is a collaboration with a voice from the past, one that is already familiar. We have a collective folk memory of traditional stories and each of us has our own impressions and understandings of them. It is fascinating to be able to take the truly familiar 'bones' of a story and to reshape and retell it for oneself and for a contemporary audience. I find this process immensely satisfying, not only because I can decide how I want to retell the story, but also because I can write according to the images in my head, present since childhood. Those images have been sparked by fairy-tale archetypes – the tower, the magical tree, the princess, the witch, the three brothers, the wolf – and have been a source of inspiration that took me through my art education.

After graduating from art school, I began showing and selling my paintings through various galleries, and my subject matter continued to be those fairy/folktale themes,

myths and legends, dreams and archetypes. These pictures weren't illustrations – I was making paintings with a 'feel' of those fairy-tale themes.

Gradually, as my illustration career developed, the work I was commissioned to do was often fairy-tale related and the gap between my own personal work and commissioned illustration work narrowed. These days I rarely make paintings for their own sake, finding that the commissioned work I do fulfils me. Having retold many traditional fairy tales, I began to write my own – *Can you Catch a Mermaid?*, *The Apple Pip Princess*, *Ahmed and the Feather Girl* ....



And I suppose that in the end, the most immersive and satisfying work is found in illustrating one's own writing. Creating a story, and finding the language with which to tell it is a delightful, frustrating, irritating, exhausting process. But you have complete freedom to 'write' the pictures you want to paint, and paint exactly what you want to say, and that is a wonderful position to be in.

The sound of words, the music of them and, of course, their meaning, has always been important to me, and actually indistinguishable in my mind from the images they conjure in my mind's eye. I have a memory, that maybe illustrates my meaning better, of a remarkable teacher at my bog-standard comprehensive school, giving a lecture to a group of bored adolescents, on Renaissance art. Not a subject to quicken the heart of the majority of 14 year olds. But for me at least, something magical happened that afternoon.

In a dreary school hall, Miss Olive Cordell told us about tempera painting, the illuminating of manuscripts and, most extraordinary of all, the frescos of fourteenth-century Florence. She talked about how pigments – rose madder, burnt sienna, ultramarine blue, yellow ochre – were ground to dust and mixed with pure water to make paint. How plaster was spread in patches on a wall and while still wet, the precious colours applied to the fine smooth surface. From this alchemy of powdered pigment and wet plaster emerged frescoes of such vibrancy, beauty and longevity, that centuries later, they still move and astonish. This talk came straight from the heart of a remarkable teacher with a passion for literature, for travel and, clearly, for art. And through her verbal descriptions – she showed no slides or images of any kind – she made a direct link to my heart and my imagination. Those words, the beautiful poetry of the names of the colours – vermilion, violet and indigo, and the techniques – burnishing, polishing, gilding – lit a spark for me that day.

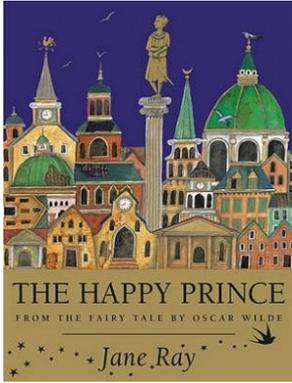
At around the same time, I fell in love with the fairy tales of Oscar Wilde, especially 'The Fisherman and his Soul'. Wilde's descriptions of characters and places infused my thinking and my early art work. Here is the little mermaid, for whom the fisherman sells his soul, lying asleep:

Her hair was as a wet fleece of gold, and each separate hair as a thread of fine gold in a cup of glass. Her body was as white as ivory, and her tail was of silver and pearl. Silver and pearl was her tail, and the green weeds of the sea coiled around it; and like sea shells were her ears, and her lips were like sea coral ....

And, later in the story, a garden:

... I found myself in a watered garden of seven terraces. It was planted with tulip cups and moon-flowers, and silver studded aloes. Like a slim reed of crystal a fountain hung in the dusky air. The cypress-trees were like burnt-out torches. From one of them a nightingale was singing.

Descriptions such as these almost paint themselves!



One of the first picture books I was commissioned to illustrate was Wilde's *The Happy Prince* and I was in my element creating visually the images Wilde had written so vividly.

Ironically, the more I have written and the more I have learnt about my craft, the more I have come to understand a paradox at the centre of what inspires me. The very words that delight me are often not needed in a picture book. You may start out with a beautifully ornate and poetic text. Then you begin to work on the pictures and realise that much of that descriptive text is redundant – it is, or should be, shown in the pictures. There begins a process of slimming down and streamlining the story, which at first feels reckless and frightening, but becomes satisfying once you have learnt how to ruthlessly 'kill your darlings'.

To finish, I want to include here something in a different vein, but connected none the less to this idea of words and pictures and how they spark each other into existence. The author Sita Bramahchari and I work one afternoon a week as writer and artist-in-residence at the Islington Centre for Refugees and Migrants. We have evolved a way of teaching using image and words, to give students a creative outlet and to improve their English. We choose a theme – 'hands', for example, or 'hearts', or 'eyes', and I supply visual imagery to stimulate ideas and connections in the students' minds. We will talk, as a group, taking notes as we go, about, say, 'hands', starting maybe with the most obvious aspects – 'naming of parts', fingers, palms; what hands can do – pointing, beckoning, hitting, making, touching. We start to draw and paint, maybe simply drawing around our hands to start us off. Culturally diverse ideas start to emerge – traditions and 'old wives tales', palm reading, for example, or decorating the hands with henna, painting fingernails, or shaking hands. Some things are culturally unique, some universal.

Ideas become more metaphorical, spiritual and poetic as we go, until we have a selection of writing and imagery that is often profoundly moving and insightful, and which Sita then lightly structures and edits into poems of great power and eloquence. The links between the words and the pictures in this therapeutic, educational process are impossible to unravel, and are a direct reflection of our 'day jobs' as author and illustrator.

So to return to the question at the beginning of this piece, 'What comes first? Words or pictures?', actually, the answer is, for me that they are inextricably entwined, a tapestry of interwoven words and images, each inspiring the other, each unimaginable without the other, and striving towards, hopefully, the creation of gold.

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Oscar Wilde's short story 'The Fisherman and his Soul' can be read at [www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/FisSou.shtml](http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/FisSou.shtml).

Further illustrations by Jane Ray are in the proceedings of the 2015 IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference archive on the [IBBY UK website](#).

[Jane Ray began her career designing greetings cards, book jackets and posters. Gradually, however, she moved towards children's book illustration, specialising in fairy tales, mythology and folktales. As a writer, her work includes *Can you Catch a Mermaid?* and *Ahmed and the Feather Girl*. She has also worked with authors such as Jeanette Winterson on *The King of Capri*, Dianne Hofmeyr on *Zeraffa Giraffa* and, most recently, on *Heartsong* with Kevin Crossley-Holland.]

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## The British Teacup's Edge

*Chantal Wright*

The situation of literary translation in the UK and in the wider anglophone world is frequently a source of gloom for its practitioners. 2–4% is the usual figure placed on the proportion of annual book releases made up by translations and it's often quoted as evidence of Britain's lack of interest in foreign literature and in the world beyond our island's borders more generally. The 2–4% figure is certainly a much smaller proportion of annual book releases than is the case for our continental European neighbours, where double digits in the teens and 20s seem to be the norm. But we have a worrying lack of decent statistics on translation in the UK, despite the best efforts of organisations such as Literature Across Frontiers and of individual translators who monitor the situation with respect to their own source languages, so it's difficult both to validate and to contextualise the 2–4%.

It is not only statistics that we are lacking. I recently went digging to see how many times Michael Ende's classic children's book *Momo* had been translated into English. Three times, it turns out. Once by Frances Lobb in 1974 under the title *The Grey Gentlemen*, only a year after *Momo* first appeared in Germany. A second time by J. Maxwell Brownjohn ten years after that (1984). And most recently, in 2013, by Lucas Zwirner. Gathering this information was a more complex task than I had imagined, partially because not all the translations mimicked the German title of the book, but also because library catalogues can be surprisingly imprecise when it comes to crediting particular editions to a translator, particularly if the library has multiple copies of a title among its holdings. Amazon is also a culprit here: its Look-inside feature doesn't distinguish between different translations and the older the translated text, the less likely it is that the translator will be credited. Publishers, too, can be guilty of this particular literary crime. I recently plucked some six different editions of Grimms' fairy tales off the shelf at my local (and quite small) Waterstones and while I was impressed to find this level of coverage, I also noted that only a few editions gave a sense of the translation's provenance. I say this not to suggest that your average purchaser of the complete Grimm should approach his/her selection with the pedantic zeal of a scholar, but rather to argue that the imprecision of institutions' and publishers' dealings with translation is part of the symptomology of a literary affliction from which the UK suffers: we haven't cultivated a national translation history in the

modern era. We have little sense of what we have translated when and for which reasons. And as a consequence, the effects of translation become difficult to measure.

The Brothers Grimm are as good an illustration of this as any. There are lots of different translations of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812) out there, from the selection of *German Popular Tales* that was first made available to the Victorian reading public by translator Edgar Taylor in 1823, to Philip Pullman's 2012 *Grimm Tales*. The translation that you, as a reader, knowingly or unwittingly select will not only determine the nature of your encounter with the Brothers Grimm – whether you thee and thou it with Margaret Hunt in the late nineteenth century, or travel back to 1812 and the ur-versions of the fairy tales with Jack Zipes (before the Grimms manicured the sex and ramped up the references to the Almighty). The fact that the Grimms were imported via translation at particular points in the nineteenth century, the manner of their presentation (first bowdlerised, then gradually more complete) and their periodic retranslation over the centuries since then: all of this is as much a part of the history of British children's literature as any Lewis Carroll, Enid Blyton or Roald Dahl, all of whom owe debts of various kinds to the brothers from Hanau.

When we import books from elsewhere, giving them access to our culture and our culture access to them, we set something of a chemical reaction in progress. Children are given glimpses of worlds and ideas beyond the purely domestic. Writerly exchange takes place: words and concepts hop from the pages of one book into another; ideas germinate. I keenly remember my own childhood fascination with the elusive figure of the Great Pumpkin and the phrase 'Slide, Charlie Brown, slide!' in the *Peanuts* comic strips, despite – or perhaps because of – my essential ignorance of both American-style Halloween and the sport of baseball. *Peanuts* was not a translation, but it still hailed from a cultural and conceptual world beyond my own, and I carried the Great Pumpkin with me into adulthood until I lived in the United States and was finally able to appreciate its significance.

The reasons why we should work to push the 2–4% figure into double digits are obvious. Translator and writer Daniel Hahn made the case eloquently in the BBC Radio 4 programme *Four Thought* in September 2014. David Almond did the same more recently, also on the radio, in *A World Beyond Alice*. And things are getting better. The impressive list of translations published by Pushkin Press and their [Pushkin Children's Books](#) division demonstrates what is possible. Pushkin's list of translated children's books is impressive. Tonke Dragt! Long overdue new translations of Eric Kästner! And now a Finnish feminist children's book! Many of Pushkin's titles aren't new books, they simply have never been translated into English before. How, or rather why, does Pushkin do it? If you glance at the publisher's web pages, you will see that Pushkin editors have lived all over the world and speak lots of languages. So for starters they are not as reliant on intermediaries to recommend books for them, as most British publishers are. They may still have teams of trusted readers and translators who pitch titles to them and assess their suitability, they may still be receptive to foreign publishers' attempts to sell the rights to titles on their lists, but chances are there is somebody on the Pushkin staff who can read a given book in the original language and assess its quality. Trusting a translator's or a reader's opinion is always more of a risk than following your own instinct. But it's more than just the languages: there's obviously a cosmopolitanism at Pushkin, a belief in looking out over the rim of the British teacup. Curiosity, in a word. And the UK needs to be curious. Not speaking and reading other languages is both a symptom and a cause of our lack of curiosity, our inability to look beyond our borders.

We also need to cultivate a curiosity about our national translation history. This would help us understand how our domestic literature has been shaped (or not) by encounters with the foreign. Where children's literature is concerned, it would also help us to compare and contrast national literary representations and explorations of

childhood and their historical cross-pollination. A comprehensive national database of translations into English in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries would be a start. It would also help furnish some statistics that would allow us to consider that 2–4% figure as part of a longer trajectory. It would allow us to write a genuinely comparative history of children’s literature and to think about which childhoods in translation – African, Asian, South American, continental European? – we wish future generations of readers to be able to access.

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- [Chantal Wright has twice been shortlisted for the Marsh Award for Children’s Literature in Translation, in 2011 and 2015. She teaches in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. Her translation *Anton and Piranha* from the German by Milena Baisch (Andersen Press, 2013) is an IBBY UK 2016 Honour Book.]

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## A Canary down the Mine: A Gaelic Reading Club for Children

*Mairi Kidd*

‘Steering’ is a very apt term for the process by which children’s books are created for Gaelic-speaking youngsters in the twenty-first century. In a context of complete market failure – there is a total potential readership of perhaps 2,500 youngsters from 0 to 18 – various bodies are tasked with funding and developing publishing within the wider context of Gaelic development. Funding originates in most cases with the Scottish government and agencies, including local authorities, Creative Scotland (the Scottish Arts Council as was) and the Gaelic Language Board. These latter two are the funders of the Gaelic Books Council, an agency specifically tasked with the promotion of literature in the language. Books for schools teaching through Gaelic are the remit of yet another

agency, Stòrlann. Their output includes some fiction but they're mainly concerned with core curriculum materials.

There are two ways to look at all this. An optimist might take the view that it's positive that so many agencies come together to make books possible. A pessimist might feel that there's an episode of *The Thick of It* in here. Two tiers of government fund NDPBs (non-departmental funded bodies); NDPBs fund other agencies; other agencies fund writers, publishers etc. How many administrators are involved in this chain? How many salaries? How many opportunities does an individual agency have to pass the buck? How much power does an individual reader or, indeed, many readers, have to influence decision making when the stakeholders are as high stakes as this?

In a normal commercial context, readers exert purchase power and publishers engage or die; in this context there's no such foregrounding of the reader.

Now, it would be mean-spirited and plain wrong to claim that good work doesn't happen. But it would not be unfair to note that there's no clear, published framework in place for what is, ultimately, the use of taxpayers' money. Public spend should be strategic, and it should be transparent. Furthermore, Gaelic book spend must surely be informed – at least in part – by principles of reader development, since Gaelic is a formerly suppressed minority language with a resultant literacy deficit among its speakers. Literacy strategies have been commissioned for Gaelic over the years, but – perhaps because the context as outlined above is political and the political landscape is wont to change – all have been laid aside. Development agencies announce their priorities – teen fiction, perhaps, or graphic novels – but not how or why these have been reached, nor whom they have consulted. There is no suggestion of a reading continuum; individual initiatives are not underpinned by any concept of a pathway from picture books through all the variety of non-fiction, classics, humour and all the rest, up to being a reading adult.

As evidence of strategic failings, significant gaps in provision exist. To date, one of these has been 5–8 and 8–12 fiction for independent reading. On the other hand, there are quite a lot of picture books, relatively speaking, for 3–5s. Again the strategy is unclear. Full-colour, large-format books are expensive to produce. To develop language skills, children need sustained text too. At the risk of reverse engineering a rationale, picture books may be seen as a prompt to parents to establish a pattern of Gaelic-language use with young children. If this is the case, it raises further questions. Picture books are a test of adult literacy; no strategy exists for the support of those who never had the chance to learn to read Gaelic, or those who have Gaelic-speaking children via school but don't speak the language themselves.

Back with the 5–8s and 8–12s, Stòrlann has translated some Heinemann Storyworlds Bridges texts for use in schools, a few Jacqueline Wilson early readers and a couple of Roald Dahls. A series of slim original Gaelic novellas called *Crosgagan* (Starfish) was published in the 1990s and early 2000s. These are still used in schools, although they now look and feel very dated.

And that's it: some reading-scheme materials, a handful of translations and some books older than the children themselves, competing with Hetty Feather, Harry Potter, Percy Jackson, Lego Star Wars series and all the rest in the great ragbag of riches and rubbish that English offers. And we'd better hope the kids *are* reading in English because otherwise targets such as a million words before the end of primary school look like a bad joke.

### **We need to do something**

This is the context for an innovative, successful and highly unsustainable project set up by myself and two other volunteers in late 2014. They're parents; I'm a publisher – I used to run Stòrlann and now am managing director of Barrington Stoke. Although we

all have full-time jobs and – in two cases – work away from home, we decided to put sleep on hold and set up Cuilean Craicte (Crazy Puppy), a social-enterprise company offering a subscription-model Gaelic reading club for 7–12s.

It's quite a simple model. Parents commit £50 up front, which gets kids a membership badge and card, and a brand-new chapter book through the post every month with accompanying fun stuff in the form of colouring sheets, word searches and so on. We know that 7–12 is a wide bracket, but we are dealing with a mixture of native-speaking children and second-language learners, and all the variety in reading ability one would naturally meet in the Primary 3 to Secondary 1 cohort (Year 2 to Year 7 in England, although our pupils are often a year younger). Some of our members are even younger because their parents want books to read to them and see membership as a chance to build a library for the future.

We needed 100 members to make our first six month's publishing happen and we got around 150, plus lots of individuals making smaller donations to help us get started. We offered more expensive memberships that included dedications and/or thanks in the books themselves, which were taken up by some very committed individuals and helped with the start-up costs.

Feedback for the first six months was fantastic:

'new and appealing reading for a stage that cries out for it' – a parent

'In our household, an unexpected benefit has been that the older children have taken pleasure in reading aloud in Gaelic to their little sister and in helping her with some of the activities on the accompanying sheets' – a parent

'My youngest child is 8 and making the move towards being an independent reader. She is developing the habit of reading for pleasure in English. Thanks to Cuilean Craicte there's a chance she might develop the reading habit in Gaelic too because she now has access to a growing number of entertaining books in Gaelic that would not otherwise be available. It is not just about increasing children's technical competency in the language (though it is doing that), rather by exploring the world through reading in Gaelic, children's emotional connection with the language deepens and they develop their ability to function across the broadest possible range of thought in both their languages.' – a parent

'absolutely worthwhile – my son loves getting the books in the post' – a parent

'links Gaelic with something so cool that it drives kids wild' – *The Scotsman on Ninja* by Chris Bradford.

That's clear demand and clear endorsement. Backed by members old and new, we're now embarking on our third six-month programme. In this way we've published 12 new books to date, plus one extra funded by donors and some other earnings. But we'd be fibbing if we said we can keep going much longer at this sort of rate. The funds we raise through subscriptions and donations pay for the following costs:

- translation rights
- image rights
- typesetting and jacket work (at less than the going rate)
- digital print
- postage and packing materials
- occasional marketing materials, such as fliers for schools
- annual accounts.

We do everything else ourselves. That's:

- translation, editorial and proofreading

- management, including administration of subscriptions, and rights and permissions
- bookkeeping and other administration
- marketing, including social media, blog posts and occasional talks at Gaelic events
- website design and content
- distribution
- occasional book events, e.g. at the Edinburgh Book Festival
- sundry other tasks including badge-making (!).

This is a heavy workload for three volunteers. And so in recent months we have been trying to source support to buy time from a paid development worker. And that's when we confirmed our project is a canary down a mine, hitting gas pocket after gas pocket in the form of issues and challenges.

### **There's gas here**

The first issue was a given: the lack of strategy. We were not prepared, though, for the discovery that there is a serious lack of understanding across the Gaelic community of the importance for children of reading for pleasure in Gaelic. For every parent who 'gets' why Cuilean Craicte matters, there is another under the impression that reading in Gaelic is handled by school.

When it comes to parents who are themselves Gaelic speakers this is perhaps not surprising. The language was actively suppressed by the establishment until relatively recently. As a result, its place in formal education was very limited, and literacy is quite low. The idea of reading for pleasure in Gaelic and having the books to do so, is not widespread.

Where we did not expect to have to work quite so hard was in making the reading for pleasure case to teachers, those charged with Gaelic development, and switched-on parents in urban settings who have chosen Gaelic-medium education because of their appreciation of the benefits of bilingualism.

We also discovered that the Gaelic community – insofar as one exists – may be quick to protest about what it lacks, but that doesn't mean anyone trying to help out should expect an easy ride. For every local authority education officer who bought surplus books from us or parents who bought their own subscription plus one for a library, there was a school that refused to circulate leaflets due to their paperless policy, or a parent getting in touch to tell us that the subscription was too expensive on their professional salary.

### **If you'd only come to us in the first place instead of proving demand exists and you have a model!**

Latterly we've proven – in case anyone was in any doubt – that 'responsive', 'flexible' and 'fast' are not words in the average funder's vocabulary. Systems, systems, systems, we hear, all the money is committed already; our next round is in August with a decision in 2028. We can't fund ongoing activity; we want something new so we can claim the credit and of course we can't fund you if you sell your books although of course we fund other people who sell theirs. And always, always, always, there's someone else we (volunteers with full-time actual jobs) should really speak to and she/he is on a salary and therefore only available 9–5.

Remember what I said about all those administrators? Here they are, using bureaucracy for its traditional ends of ensuring nothing ever happens but that they get their salary anyway.

## Lessons for all of us

Cuilean Craicte has taught us many things, and some of these have a wider application. We hope these thoughts are of use.

- Bureaucrats are interested in bureaucracy first. This is good news for publishers with a market to publish for. It's bad news for scenarios like ours.
- Translation is a quick, efficient and low-cost way to get books into hands in minority-language contexts while ensuring quality and breadth. Our kids especially love reading about ninja and space. Nonetheless, funders prefer original Gaelic writing. We think this is a great example of trying to please both sets of people – in this case writers and readers – and actually not pleasing either.
- Traditional post is a novelty for digital natives. As one parent wrote to us, our members love 'the excitement of waiting for the arrival of each month's book, popping through the letterbox in the distinctive envelope marked with the print of An Cuilean's own paw'.
- Bookclubs get everyone involved. Our parents have a level of ownership, books are actually addressed to the kids and we hear tell of older siblings reading to younger ones.
- This one was never in any doubt, but when no reading goes on, reading skills suffer. Some of our kids struggle with their Gaelic reading although they are fantastic readers in English. Of course they do; they have had almost no sustained prose to read to date in Gaelic for pleasure.

Poor canary; we'd better keep sending it down that mine.

[Mairi Kidd is the Managing Director of Barrington Stoke, an Edinburgh-based independent publishing house specialising in breaking down the barriers that can stop children getting into reading. She was previously the CEO of Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, the National Gaelic Educational Resource Agency.]

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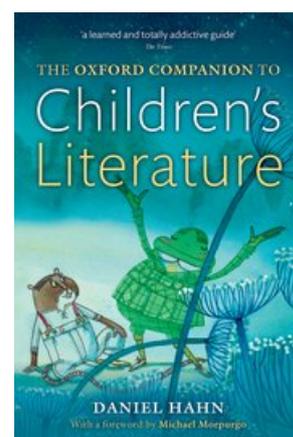
## Good Companions

*Daniel Hahn*

What with one thing and another, with writings and translations and whatnot, I've published 40 or 50 books so far, I think. But last year's was different. It was one of the most fun I've worked on, and one of the most difficult. (Frankly I can still hardly believe it's done.) What is it? I'm glad you asked. It's a new edition of *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. Yes, fine, but really – *what is it?* Well, now that, you see, that really *is* a good question ....

A 'companion' is a strange sort of creature in the book world. It's a reference book, but it's also, I think, something else. By which I mean, yes, it exists to supply reliable information, which is arranged under a series of alphabetised headings – like a kind of dictionary, you might say. But it's also more than this because, while it exists to be a resource, useful as any reference book is supposed to be, it should also be companionable – it should, in other words, be good company. This means having a personality, having eccentricities and enthusiasms, aiming to seduce and surprise as well as to inform.

*The Companion to Children's Literature*, then, is a dictionary of children's literature (that's its subject, right there in big letters on the front cover), but it also presents a lot that's adjacent to that subject, things that might look slightly tangential to it but somehow help to reveal it; or things that frankly just seemed to me to be interesting – inherently interesting, and interesting, too, in the connections they allowed. So yes, the



book contains all the obviously significant information – who wrote the Harry Potter books, and when, and roughly what are they about. (OK, let's leave aside the fact that I've just casually used the phrase 'obviously significant', as though it really were obvious what/who was important to include and what/who wasn't. *It was not obvious at all*. But that's for another time ....) But in addition to the obvious stuff (ha!), I felt there should also be room for anecdotal material that may be, frankly, rather trivial, but which seemed to me to be amusing or charming. My hope is that a reader will think the same, and that once they're inside they'll find it hard to leave.

Because, crucially, the *Companion* should encourage digression – that, I think, is the particular pleasure of it. You might pull it off the shelf because, say, you're wondering about the publication and translation history of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl*. You'll find that on page 162 – I hope it answers your question. But then your specific wondering gives way to aimless wandering when your eye is caught by the brief entry that follows immediately after this, about a now obscure nineteenth-century American writer (DIAZ, Abby Morton) who wrote something called *The Cats' Arabian Nights*. (Incidentally, you might also be interested in the big entry on the Arabian Nights itself. It's on page 31. I think it's a good one.) Or you'll notice that Anne Frank's *Diary* is preceded immediately by *Diary of a Killer Cat*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and *Diary of a Wombat* – quite a curious foursome. This last named is by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley; you probably know their work already, but, if by chance you don't, there are entries on them. In the piece on the latter (on p.621), you'll learn that illustrator Whatley is ambidextrous, producing different kinds of illustration depending on the hand he's working with.

That diary page where you started also has three paragraphs about *Diamonds and Toads*, a fairy story I knew little about before I started working on the book, but which sounds pretty wild, and which might make you then curious about the origins of the fairy story generally, or about who he actually was, this famous Charles Perrault to whom so many of the stories we know so well are attributed. And if you read the entry on Perrault (p.450), you'll see it immediately followed by a cross-reference under the heading 'Persepolis' to an entry on contemporary graphic novels for teenagers (p.243) – which you may or not be interested in, but even if you aren't, not especially, you may wonder what on earth they're doing in a book like this and what I have to say about them, and so the trail continues and on you wander ....

That's what might happen – what I hope will happen – when a reader opens the book at page 162 and looks around. A quick glance, then drawn in ....

Oh, and look, facing that is page 163, with Charles Dickens side by side with *Eddie* Dickens, and the late, great Peter Dickinson, and – oh – Kate DiCamillo! (I do love her.) And Dick Turpin, and ... Dick Barton, Special Agent. And then there are, of course, some 650 other pages, with 3625 entries I haven't yet mentioned. There's a lot there. It won't always be the things you expect – and indeed I'm sure many will disagree with what my picture of children's literature includes and what it doesn't. And indeed with the opinions expressed about those things I *do* include. But that's OK too – this kind of book should be encouraging conversation just as much as it encourages digression, and exploration, interest and perhaps sometimes even exasperation too. (Because this book needs a kind of editorialising too, and context and not just data – in the Wikipedia age, how many people choose hardback reference books just for discrete pieces of quick information?) It's a book to dip into occasionally and get to know slowly, not just to consult for the hard facts, but to agree with or argue with, that makes you want to keep adding little diversions to whatever it was you came looking for in the first place.

So you pop into the local shop for a pint of milk, and while you're there something else catches your eye ... ooh, you know, I could murder a KitKat – oh, and while I'm up here at the counter, maybe I should buy a lottery ticket. (And shoelaces? Weird. I had no idea this place sold shoelaces!) And ... hmm, wait, I can smell freshly baked bread – in

that case maybe I could buy a couple of nice bits of cheese and I can have that as my lunch (and there was something I noticed in the kitchen this morning I'd run out of ... what? it'll come back to me ...) – so, bread and cheese for lunch and maybe some salad things. Perhaps get just a nice little something for dessert? Mmm ... and before you know it you have three carrier bags full, half an hour has passed and you're £38 poorer. And ... what was it you came in for, actually?

A *Companion* is a bit like that. (But obviously cheaper.) Happy browsing!

### Work cited

Hahn, Daniel (2015) *The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. 2nd edn. Oxford University Press.

[Daniel Hahn is a writer, editor and translator with 40-something books to his name. His work has won him *The Independent Foreign Fiction Prize* in 2009 for his translation *My Father's Wives* from the Portuguese of Jose Eduardo Agualusa (Arcadia Books) and the Blue Peter Book Award (Best Book of Facts) in 2005 for *The Ultimate Book Guide* (A&C Black) among others. Recent books include *The New Oxford Companion to Children's Literature* and a translation *Happiness Is a Watermelon on your Head* (2012) from Portuguese of a Brazilian picture book by Stella Dreis. He is currently chair of the Society of Authors, the UK's writers' union.]

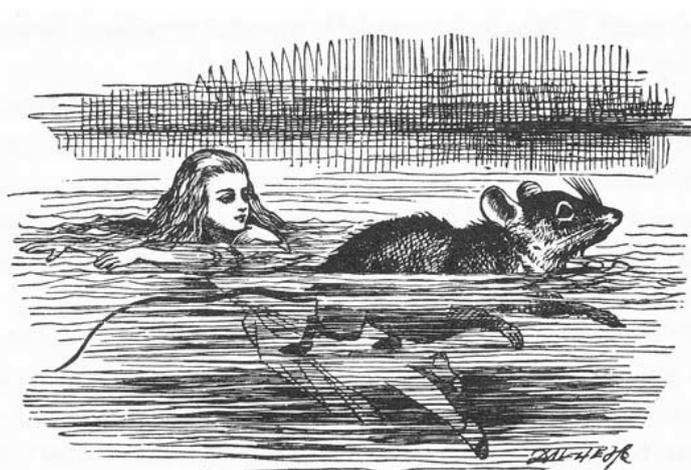
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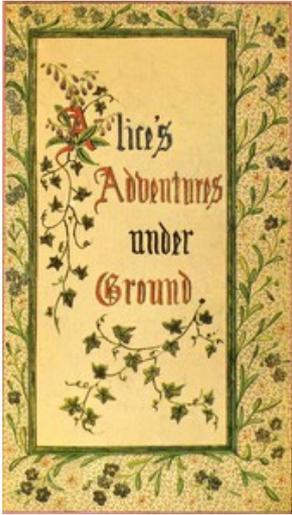
## Happy Birthday Alice! An Exhibition at the British Library to Celebrate 150 Years of *Alice in Wonderland*

*June Hopper Swain*

As part of a national celebration of 150 years of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the British Library has mounted an exhibition that shows the many ways that Alice and her world have been portrayed visually over the years. As well as Lewis Carroll's original handwritten manuscript with his hand-drawn illustrations and those by British-born artist and cartoonist Sir John Tenniel, there are on display editions of *Alice* illustrated by Arthur Rackham, Ralph Steadman, Mervyn Peake, Salvador Dalí and many others, and it's fascinating to see how each illustrator responded to the language and imagery of Carroll's text in his/her own distinctive way.

Many of us are familiar from childhood with the illustrations of Sir John Tenniel (1820–1914) for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and, indeed, consider them to be the definitive interpretations, but it has been proved in the intervening years since *Alice* was first published that there are other possible, and successful, ways of looking at Carroll's story.

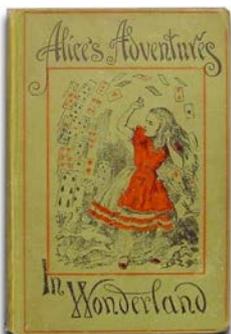




The exhibition begins and is marked by splendid models of two life-size flamingos, with photographs taken by Lewis Carroll, who was a keen photographer, his diary in which he set down his ideas about the *Alice* story, and his own handwritten manuscript and drawings in book form for *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (1864). The book is open, and on the verso we see Alice, with long, flowing hair, which echoes the female models in the Pre-Raphaelite art of Carroll's friends, holding the 'drink me' bottle. On the recto, Alice, having taken a sip from the bottle, is so large that she has outgrown the space around her. Carroll had a strong visual picture of what Alice and the characters in her dream world should look like but, as he began to realise and as is shown by his illustrations on display, he didn't have the necessary skills to commit them to paper convincingly. They do, however, have a certain charm, and also provided John Tenniel, who *did* have all the necessary skills, with an idea of what was needed. Carroll knew exactly what he wanted, so much so that Tenniel continually felt restricted by Carroll's demands, but the finished product was a triumph.



It is fascinating to learn that 'Alice' and some of the creatures that she encounters in her dream worlds had already been visualised in a different context and committed to paper by Tenniel before his collaboration with Carroll. A regular cartoonist on *Punch*, the satirical magazine, Tenniel's 'Alice' prototype is seen in this exhibition putting a floral garland around a lion's neck on the title page of the magazine dated 1864, volume 46.



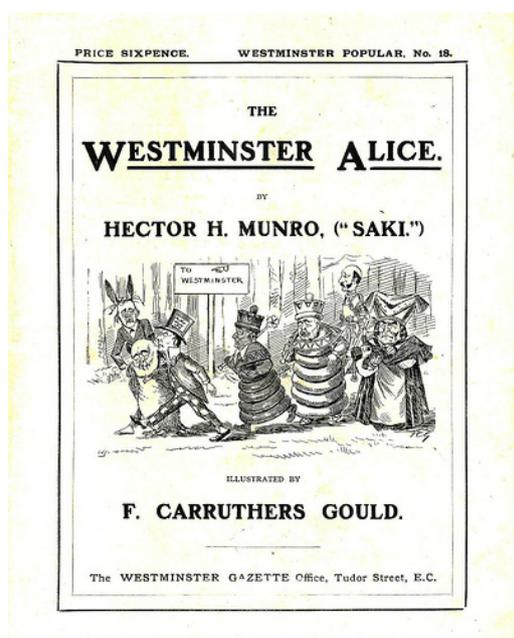
Other characters that would one day appear in the *Alice* stories, such as Tweedledum and Tweedledee, are featured within this volume too.

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* illustrated by Tenniel was published in 1865. The first printing was withdrawn because Tenniel was dissatisfied with the quality of the printed illustrations. After recall, the remaining stock was reissued in America by Appleton in 1866. On display, for comparison, are the two printings of the page that shows Alice talking to the Cheshire Cat in the 'Pig and Pepper' chapter. Also shown are some of the boxwood engravings of Tenniel's illustrations for *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* that were created by the Dalziel Brothers in 1864.

A copy of *The Nursery Alice* (1890), a shortened version aimed at younger children of the two *Alice* stories, with twenty enlargements of Tenniel's illustrations and also coloured by the artist, are on display too.

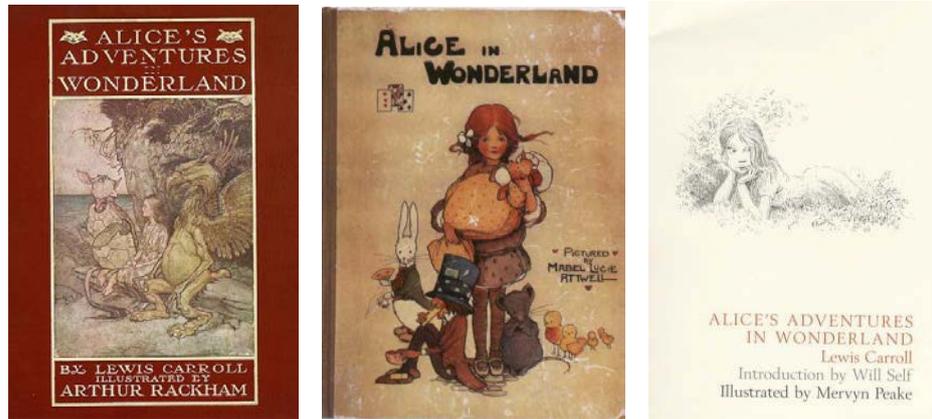


The Victorian political satirists couldn't resist exploiting the popularity of *Alice* and making fun of the politicians of the day. 'Saki' (Hector Hugo Munro, 1870–1916) produced *The Westminster Alice* (1902) with illustrations by F. Carrington Gould that were a direct copy, with amendments, of Tenniel's pictures. On display at the exhibition is a page from the book, and underneath the illustration has been added in parenthesis 'With Apologies to Everybody Concerned'.



The art-nouveau illustrations, richly coloured and in decorative line, that British born Charles Robinson (1870–1937) produced for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1907) have an Alice who has dark, bobbed hair and looks more like Alice Liddell, for whom Carroll created the adventures in the first place, than any that had gone before. Robinson's *Alice* is open at the title page, which is in black line, and with a colour plate opposite which shows Alice and the Queen of Hearts who is shouting 'Off with her head!'.





British born Arthur Rackham (1867–1939) has depicted his Alice (1907), who was modelled on one Doris Donimet, as an elegant, ‘older-looking’ individual with echoes of the Pre-Raphaelites and art nouveau in her flowing locks and Liberty-print frock. On display, as a colour plate, Rackham’s Alice is shown with the animals, which are carefully observed studies, swimming in the pool of tears. There are deliberate echoes of Tenniel’s *Alice* illustrations, with Rackham acknowledging them rather than trying to compete with them, although his sepia-toned world has a darker, perhaps more sinister, quality.

Also in colour, this time in soft, muted shades, are the illustrations that British-born Mabel Lucie Atwell (1879–1964), who was at the beginning of her career, produced for *Alice in Wonderland* (1921). Her depiction of Alice is that of a wide-eyed innocent who is not quite a match for Carroll’s spunky, self-possessed child, but charming nevertheless. On display, her book is open at the title page with a colour plate opposite that shows Alice and the White Rabbit prior to falling down the rabbit hole.

The characters in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1946) as depicted by British born artist Mervyn Peake (1911–1968) tend to be rather theatrical. On display, and what a pleasure it was to see Peake’s finely detailed art work, are two of Peake’s original line drawings: one is of a particularly malevolent Cheshire Cat and the other of the Hatter, the March Hare and the unfortunate put-upon dormouse in ‘A Mad Tea-Party’. There are few props in this picture and the spotlight falls on the Hare and the Hatter and their vain attempts to prevent Alice from sitting down with them at the table. ‘No room! No room!’ they cry, while adopting exaggerated expressions of unconcern as the Hatter does the ‘bit of business’ with his drumming fingers. Not described quite thus in Carroll’s text, it is, nevertheless, a witty and entertaining addition to the episode. Also displayed is a letter to Peake from the novelist Graham Greene who states that although he likes Peake’s illustrations for *Alice*, he feels that Alice herself is ‘a little bit too much of a gamin’, and it might have been appropriate here to have displayed at least one of Peake’s illustrations of her to support, or otherwise, Greene’s point. In at least one picture of Alice, Peake captures something of the vulnerability of a child’s slender form, and in his interpretation was probably influenced by the sketches he made of his own young family. Interestingly, Tenniel would not work from real life when drawing the human form, so, consequently, his rather stiff and formal-looking depiction of Alice does lack the subtleties that Peake brought to his.

The *Alice in Wonderland* (1949) illustrations by American artist Leonard Weisgard (1916–2000) have bold, colourful, often flat shapes, which reflect the graphic styles of the first half of the twentieth century, including some of the work of the avant-garde French illustrators of children’s books in the 1920s. On display, Weisgard’s *Alice* is open at the page that shows Alice in the beautiful garden with the King, Queen and Knave of Hearts, The label tells us, however, that the illustration shows Alice and the White Rabbit after their fall down the rabbit hole.

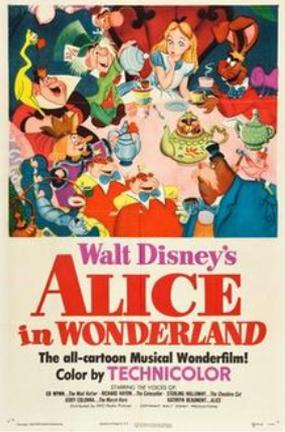


The scratchy, inky lines, which he himself once described as his ‘very primal marks on paper’, of Ralph Steadman (b. 1936) have produced a very different world for his Alice to inhabit. Having drawn cartoons for newspapers and satirical magazines like *Punch* and *Private Eye*, his work is often hard hitting and rather angry looking, but for his illustrations for children’s books like *Alice in Wonderland* (1967), for which he won the Francis Williams Book Illustration Award, he toned them down. They do, however, remain frenetic looking and quirky although the illustration chosen for display here, which is of Alice in the law court and appears at the end of the book, is not, perhaps, one of his most typically outrageous examples. The close-up of the Mad Hatter wearing Union Jack spectacles and headphones, for example, and the Cheshire Cat perching, not in a tree but on a television aerial, might have been more representative of his work on *Alice* as a whole. His Alice throughout, however, is long-limbed and has long, flyaway hair, her ever-quizzically raised eyebrow telling us exactly what *she* thinks about these Wonderland creatures.

Using a stunning colour palette, Spanish surrealist painter Salvador Dalí (1904–1989) produced surrealist lithographs for an *Alice* (1969) that demands some careful looking to understand exactly what they represent, but the more one looks the more their meaning can become clear. On display in this exhibition is Dalí’s lithograph for the chapter ‘Advice from a Caterpillar’. One of the two caterpillars in the illustration is beautifully and realistically depicted, while Alice herself looks rather frail and insubstantial, with flowing wavy hair and is an isolated figure whose face we do not see. Seeming not to connect with the figures and landscape around her, adrift as she is in a strange, dreamlike scenario, her arms are raised above her head as she holds a skipping rope that forms an arc above her. Dreams and mirrors are key themes of the surrealists, and what Dalí has created here is atmospheric rather than representational, the image capturing the unreality of a strange dream landscape and its impact is rather unsettling. But then, it is fascinating to note that there are other interpretations of *Alice* on display in this exhibition that are also quite dark and disturbing.



Pool of tears.

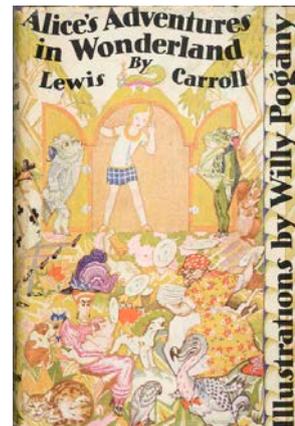
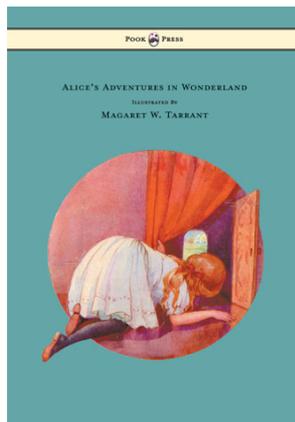


In 1951, and in complete contrast, Walt Disney produced an animated film of *Alice in Wonderland* and a book, which is displayed, based on the film. As is pointed out in both the film and book, much of the darkness of Carroll’s story is lost.

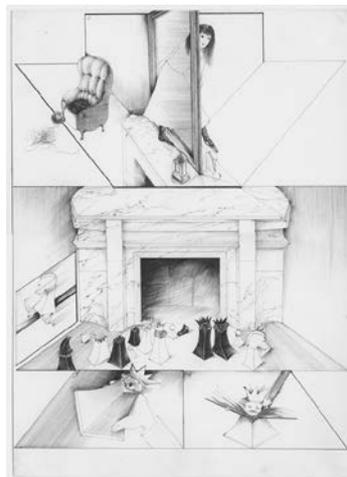
There is, inevitably, a vast range of ‘Alice’ spin-off material, and on display are a ‘Tenniel’ tea cup and saucer, a ‘Queen of Hearts’ calendar, an ‘Alice’ tea caddy, a set of ‘Alice’ playing cards, figurines and much more. Carroll himself designed the attractive ‘The Wonderland Stamp Case’ for children (1889-1890) with 12 pockets for stamps.



Also showing is a continuous video recording of an early silent film, rather grainy (1903), of *Alice in Wonderland* by Cecil Hepworth and Percy Stow of the Hepworth Studio and is part of the British Film Institute’s National Archive. Here, we see Alice disappearing down the rabbit hole.



Other illustrators whose work appear in this exhibition include British-born Margaret Tarrant with her lively and colourful *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1916); Hungarian-born Willy Pogány with his so-called ‘Flapper’ Alice (1929); the Czech artist Markéta Prachaticka with her finely drawn and darkly disturbing illustrations for both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1983) and labelled in the display as ‘Alice behind the Iron Curtain’, and American-born Robert Sabuda with his skilful paper engineering for his pop-up *Alice* (2003).



Surely artists from many countries will continue to be inspired by Lewis Carroll's *Alice*, producing illustrations as varied in style and interpretation as those in this fascinating and well-mounted exhibition.

British Library Entrance Hall (upper level), 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB, until Sunday 17 April 2016, Admission free. Enquiries: +44 (0)1937 546546; email: [boxoffice@bl.uk](mailto:boxoffice@bl.uk). There is an *Alice in Wonderland* pop-up shop in the Entrance Hall.

## Website

'The best illustrations of *Alice in Wonderland*' chosen by Citarny Knihy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3udGxR-ccyw>.

Read or listen to *Alice's Adventures Under Ground* (illus. Charles Dobson):

[www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=86825520-a671-11db-a264-0050c2490048&type=book](http://www.bl.uk/turning-the-pages/?id=86825520-a671-11db-a264-0050c2490048&type=book).

Download or read *Alice in Wonderland* with illustrations by Gordon Robinson (1916):

[www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19033](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19033).

Download or read *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with illustrations by Arthur

Rackham (1907): [www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/28885](http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/28885).

Illustrations from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with illustrations by Salvador Dalí

(1969): [www.huhmagazine.co.uk/4668/salvador-dali%AD-illustrates-alice-in-wonderland-1969](http://www.huhmagazine.co.uk/4668/salvador-dali%AD-illustrates-alice-in-wonderland-1969) and [www.dali.com/email\\_pages/alice\\_in\\_wonderland\\_13.html](http://www.dali.com/email_pages/alice_in_wonderland_13.html).

Illustrations from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* with illustrations by Leonard Weisgard (1949 edition):

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2011/11/07/leonard-weisgard-alice/>.

Illustrations from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with illustrations by Ralph

Steadman: <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/10/alice-in-wonderland-illustrated-by-ralph-steadman/>.

Illustrations from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* with illustrations by Willy Pogány:

<http://aliceiseverywhere.com/willy-pogany-and-his-flapper-alice-in-wonderland/>.

See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUOs7heNfrk> for a video of Robert Sabuda's paper engineering pop-up of *Alice*.

[June Hopper Swain had been writing articles on children's books for some years when she enrolled on the MA Children's Literature Distance Learning Course at Roehampton University with Pat Pinsent as her tutor. She gained her degree in 2004. She has since written papers that have been published in the *Journal of Children's Literature Studies* and the *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*. For *IBBYLink* she has written short articles, reports on exhibitions and reviews of children's books.]

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**The Stephen Spender Prize 2015 for Poetry in Translation  
in association with *The Guardian***

*Robina Pelham Burn*

After a dark day,  
I sit down to play Haydn  
and the simple heat of my hands warms the gloom away.

Having fallen in love with a Swedish doctor, a friend of mine painstakingly worked his way through Swedish editions of C.S Lewis's the Chronicles of Narnia to teach himself the language; seventeen-year-old Beatrix Crinnion used pop songs to teach herself Swedish. In search of a new challenge, she turned to poetry, Google leading her to the work of Nobel Prize-winning poet Tomas Tranströmer and his poem 'Allegro', quoted above in Beatrix's translation for which she won joint first prize in the 18-and-under category. In the commentary that is an integral part of the Spender Prize, Beatrix wrote: 'The Swedish he uses is not particularly extravagant or elaborate, and yet his poems create very intricate and pure images.' For judge W.N. Herbert, Beatrix's rendition 'combined strong decisions about form and layout with precision of tone'.

Anna Leader's two translations of the contemporary German poet Jan Wagner won her joint first prize in the 18-and-under category and also a commendation. This is the second year running that translations of Jan Wagner have impressed the Spender Prize judges: in 2014, Iain Galbraith won first prize in the Open (adult) category before scooping the 2015 Popescu Prize for his collection of Wagner translations, *Self-Portrait with a Swarm of Bees*. In his judge's report, Stephen Romer described Jan Wagner as a poet 'who invests humble phenomena or small events with sensuous linguistic and metaphysical charge', going on to say that 'Anna Leader's rendering of "Weeds" relishes the consonantal German and matches it.' Or as Anna put it: 'The best thing about this poem, apart from the imagery, is its sounds – the last stanza especially is so full of the "sch" sound that it becomes suffocating, just like the weed-choked garden that it is describing. Preserving this was the most difficult part of translating this text, and I tried to use "s" and "ch" sounds to produce the same sonic effect.'

**'Weeds' by Jan Wagner**

not to be underestimated: weeds,  
their syllable full of greed – this is why  
they bloom so hoveringly white, chaste  
as a tyrant's dream.

weeds always sneak back like old guilt  
to send secret messages  
through the dark, under lawns and fields  
to someplace where a white resistance –

nest is festering. behind the garage,  
by the crunching gravel and under the cherry tree: weed  
as choking froth, as foam, that germinates

soundlessly and creeps up the gable, until it grows almost  
everywhere, in the whole garden weeds  
slice into weeds, twisting with and swallowing nothing but weeds.

Third prize in the 18-and-under category was awarded to Maud Mullan, whose scholarly commentary on an epigram by the Ancient Greek poet Callimachus had at least one of the judges looking up 'polyptoton'. The tightly constructed couplets of the Greek were drawn out into three stanzas of nine lines, the first reading:

Sleep like this  
In the ice bath of evening,  
Head heavy on the hard porch  
Where you have left me.  
I curse you, sweet lover, I curse  
You, lying in the shuttered house.  
Sleep like this! Nothing is crueller  
Than you. Live how you  
Have made me live.

Five poems were commended in the 18-and-under category: an extract from a Welsh poem by Iwan Llwyd, translated by Sarah Hudis, who was mock-castigated by judge Katie Gramich (a native Welsh speaker) for not translating the whole poem; a second Jan Wagner poem translated from the German by Anna Leader; a Japanese poem by Miyazawa Kenji translated by Euan McGinty ('I initially found out about this poem from my mother; she takes an interest in Japanese poetry'); an extract from Odysseus Elytis's 'The Monogram' translated by Alexandra Seizani-Dimitriadi, who gave a great deal of thought to the tricky issue of how to translate the chorus of 'μ' ακούς' which is repeated every three or four lines; and Chloe Taylor's Jacques Prévert ('Despair Is Seated on a Bench'), a favourite of Stephen Romer, who wrote: 'her decision to break the French up into stanzas, each one representing a kind of photographic still in an unfolding cinematic narrative, was convincing. It was also a relief to find a different Prévert from the "Déjeuner du matin" or "Le cancre", that turn up rather too frequently in this competition.'

In the 14-and-under category, the judges shortlisted three young entrants from Highfield Primary School in north London who had been encouraged to enter by the school's poet-in-residence Cheryl Moskowitz. Eleven-year-old Teodor Egriderliev, clearly proud to be a Young Interpreter for newly arrived Bulgarian pupils, did not make the final cut for a prize or commendation – his translation did not survive scrutiny by a Bulgarian expert – but his commentary charmed the judges. 'I wanted to make an English translation of this poem, "Letter". Damyanov wrote it for his wife because he was afraid he would not see her again because of the war but I think it is for all people who need to feel close to each other in difficult times. I like it because it tells how communication can happen without technology, even without an address to put on a letter. Poetry is a good way to communicate – heart to heart – like Damyanov shows in his poem.'

One of the two eventual winners of the category was Teodor's ten-year-old classmate Viktoria Mileva, whose grandmother introduced her to 'Прощално' ('Farewell' in Viktoria's translation) by Bulgarian poet Nikola Vaptsarov. Written in July 1942, hours before he was executed by the Nazis, it is a final love letter to his wife.

Sometimes I will come into your dreams,  
an unexpected and unwelcome guest.  
Do not leave me outside –  
doors bolted.

I will come in silently. I will sit quietly,  
I will stare into the darkness to see you.  
When I have seen you enough,  
I will kiss you and go.

Viktoria wrote in her commentary: 'I like the first two lines which give the impression of a ghost coming and the end which shows that even when you are dead, love does not leave you.' Joint winner with Viktoria was 13-year-old Euan Ong whose clever reworking of 'Pages Volantes', Alain Bosquet's poem about the difficulties of translation, impressed the judges with its inventiveness and daring.

Entries in this category are not expected to be flawless; creative solutions and a willingness to experiment are welcomed by the judges, who were amused by Grace Guthrie's mostly successful attempt to recast Sulpicia's *epistula* as a truculent teenager's diary entry. Also commended was Thomas Delgado-Little, who chose Carmen Conde's Spanish Civil War poem 'The Victims Won't Speak' and described in his commentary how his grandfather had died for the Republican cause, prompting judge Josephine Balmer to write: 'As in previous years, many entrants submitted translations of poems that held a deep resonance for them. Yet perhaps more noticeable, even among our younger entrants, were the translations that showed us how poetry can respond to worldwide conflict and tragedy, if the most moving – and successful – of these combined the political with the personal.'

Victoria Fletcher, another entrant lucky enough to have grown up speaking two languages, tackled Czesław Miłosz's 'A Song about the End of the World' because she was intrigued by the idea of the world quietly ending as night fell at the end of an ordinary day.

Only a silver-haired old man, who would be a prophet,  
But isn't one, because he has other chores to do  
Says, thoughtfully, while lashing the tomato plants to their canes:  
There won't be a different end to our world,  
There won't be a different end to our world.

'Translating this poem,' wrote Victoria, 'was like creating a series of pictures created by Miłosz in the original but using different artistic technique.'

Judge Katie Gramich particularly enjoyed eight-year-old Anissa Felah's translation of La Fontaine's 'La Cigale et la Fourmi' (Anissa's mother's favourite poem), which she wrote in her report 'showed an impressive command of rhyme and rhythm', singling out:

I promise with my insect heart  
To pay you back when Harvest starts.

The winning and commended translations from this and previous years as well as some poetry translation activities can be found at [www.stephen-spender.org](http://www.stephen-spender.org).

The closing date for the 2016 competition is Friday 17 May 2016.

The Stephen Spender Prize was supported in 2015 by the Old Possum's Practical Trust and the Dr Mortimer and Theresa Sackler Foundation.

[Robina Pelham-Burn is director of the Stephen Spender Trust.]

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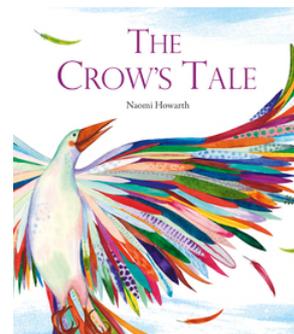
## REVIEWS

### Novels and Tales

#### *The Crow's Tale*

Naomi Howarth, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0614 7, 2015, £12.99, 24pp. [Suggested age range 4–7.]

This story is based on a Pennsylvania Lenape Native American myth 'The Rainbow Crow', retold here in rhyming verse and beautifully illustrated using a combination of lithography and watercolour by the Scottish-born artist Naomi Howarth. Howarth, who is now based in London, has a keen interest in myth, legend and folklore. She produces bespoke interior designs and exquisite fabric designs, all in vivid colours and with an eye for detail, all of which are reflected in this her first picture book.



It is in the depths of winter, in a land far away, that Wise Owl decides that 'the bravest and best' of the animals must go to the Sun and plead for warmth. Crow, who has a sweet singing voice and beautiful plumage and is thus known as Rainbow Crow, is the only one equipped to undertake such a perilous journey. Thus, Crow flies through ice, wind and blizzards until he arrives at the Sun's kingdom of dazzling bright light. Sun listens to Crow's pleas, but is impatient because he is tired and trying to sleep, having been shining all summer. What he does give Crow to take back to his friends, however, is a long branch of fire that will keep them warmer and drier. On the return journey Crow's colourful feathers become scorched and covered in soot from the burning branch that he is carrying with his foot, and his beautiful singing voice has become croaky. The other animals are astonished at the warmth and power of the fire that Crow had brought back from Sun, but Crow weeps because his colourful wings are now black and his beautiful singing voice has gone. He feels sure that the other animals won't love him anymore. But Sun awakes and, hearing the bird's distress, takes pity on him. 'It's not how you look but how you behave,' Sun reassures Crow; 'can you not see what the others can see?'

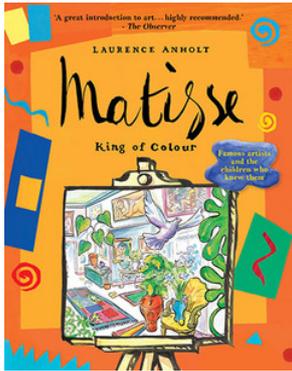
And so, in the final double spread, we see what Crow sees when he looks down at his feathers: an array of beautiful colours. To produce this effect during the picture book's production, an iridescent varnish had been applied to Crow's outstretched black wings so that, when held to the light, they have a sparkling gloss in which the viewer can see all the colours of the rainbow. Thus, it describes perfectly the Crow's well-earned gift from the Sun for his selflessness, perseverance and bravery.

The depictions of the other animals in this picture book have also great charm, and I particularly like the way watercolour is applied to wet paper to describe the seal's huge, blubbery body. This is an attractive picture book and the final couplet sums up the spirit of this heart-warming story: 'Whatever we look like, it's the beauty within that really counts'.

Two inside pages can be viewed at [www.naomihowarth.com/the-crows-tale/](http://www.naomihowarth.com/the-crows-tale/).

#### June Hopper Swain

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### ***Matisse, King of Colour***

Laurence Anholt, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, pb. 978 1 8478 0043 5. [hb. 2007] 2015, £6.99, 32pp. [Suggested age range 5–9.]

Not everyone has easy access to galleries and museums. For anyone who has looked for a way to inspire and hook children (and adults) into the world of the great artists and their stories, this book is a fine example of the best in artist's picture-book biographies. (I'd strongly recommend heading off to the children's section in a library or bookshop for wonderful picture-book biographies.) *Matisse, King of Colour* is the sixth title in the successful Anholt's Artists series about great artists and the child that inspired them.

The daunting task of telling the story of the famous French colourist Henri Matisse is inspired by a meeting between a young girl, Monique, and Matisse. Monique comes to nurse the frail Henri back to health after an operation. This is Monique's first job, and very simple sentences tell the story of their enchanting and developing close relationship – almost that of grandfather and grandchild. She reads to Matisse, Matisse draws and paints Monique. Their shared joy in Matisse's child-like love of life, colour, music and flowers is expressed in clear, flowing language, perfect for reading aloud. Eventually, Monique leaves Matisse, his health recovered, and moves away to become a nun.

By chance, they meet again later in life when Matisse had moved to a house near the convent – a house called 'The Dream' because of its 'views right across the mountains to the sea'. Monique comes to nurse the elderly Henri there, now 80 years old, but as inventive as ever and they quickly resume their close relationship.

'You are all black and white,' he teased, 'but I have found a way to be more colourful than ever! Look, I'll show you. ... First I put on some music. Jazz is best. Now I shall paint some big sheets of paper ... as BRIGHT as I can!'

Then with hands as quick as butterflies, Matisse cut a hundred dancing shapes, and soon they were pinned up on every wall of The Dream.

Anholt describes how the excited Matisse plans to build a chapel in the mountains for the nuns and, with help from Monique, he creates the dazzling designs for the 17 stained-glass windows and the Matisse Chapel outside Vence, France, now considered his masterpiece, his greatest achievement. 'Now I can rest,' says Henri, the King of Colour.

The illustrations throughout, by Anholt, create images that provide a real sense of Matisse's own style. The bright, flowing abstract shapes are expressed in collage, paint and spare black-and-white line drawings. Matisse is shown working freely from his wheelchair, a bed with wheels, his 'taxi-bed!', and using bamboo poles tipped with chalk to draw on the ceiling. Nothing daunted him or stopped him creating with joy and energy – giving a strong but subtle message with regard to his disabilities.

Collage, paper cutting, designing for stained glass, textiles and architecture are all in this wonderful informative book, showing that art comes from a wide variety of materials, and from the joy in exploring and experimenting with the most simple of elements – colour and shape.

**Carol Thompson**

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### ***The Ghosts who Danced and Other Spooky Stories from around the World***

Saviour Pirotta, illus. Paul Hess, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0435 8, 2015, £14.99, 64pp. [Suggested age range 6–10.]

The stories are from Lithuania, Ireland, the USA, Russia, England, Tanzania, China, India, Korea and Brazil. The book is large, 10.63 in x 8.465 in/ 270 mm x 215 mm, but easy to hold as it is a hardback. The font is a good size and clear so can easily be shared, although the stories are aimed at 'younger readers'. Each story is prefaced with a title and the country in which it originated; e.g. 'The Ghost Ship/ A story from Rhode Island, USA', followed by a coloured illustration – in this example, a schooner.

'About the Stories' at the back of the book, tells us that this is the legend of the 'Palatine Light' and is based on a true incident in 1738 when the ship *The Princess Augusta* was wrecked on Block Island in the state of Rhode Island in the USA. The author goes on to describe his other sources for his version.

'Well, Hans,' said his mother, standing on the quay. 'What a fine ship [*The Palatine*] to be sailing on.'

The story continues with pirates, who are already on board, inviting Hans to join in stealing spices and gold ingots from the hold and passengers' jewels, making off with their treasure in two boats.

'My father is a law-abiding man,' Hans protested. 'He would never turn pirate, and neither would I!'

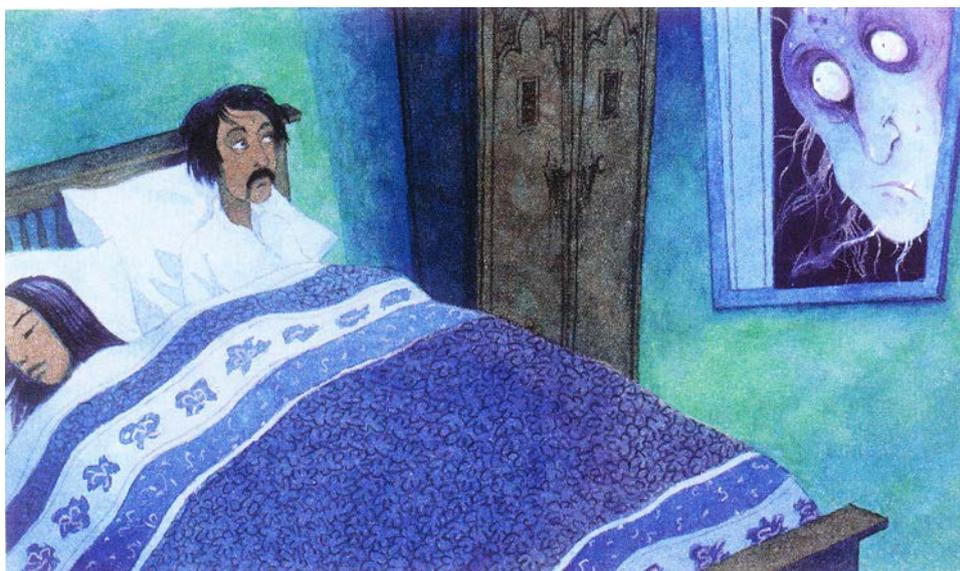
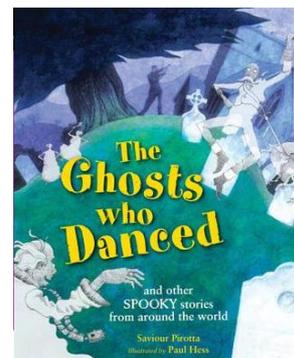
However the reply was:

'[Then] 'tis but a short journey to Davy Jones' Locker you be taking.' As he hurled a lighted torch at the main-mast.

The schooner runs aground off the coast of New England and Hans and many others who could swim clambered ashore at Block Island and were tended by the locals.

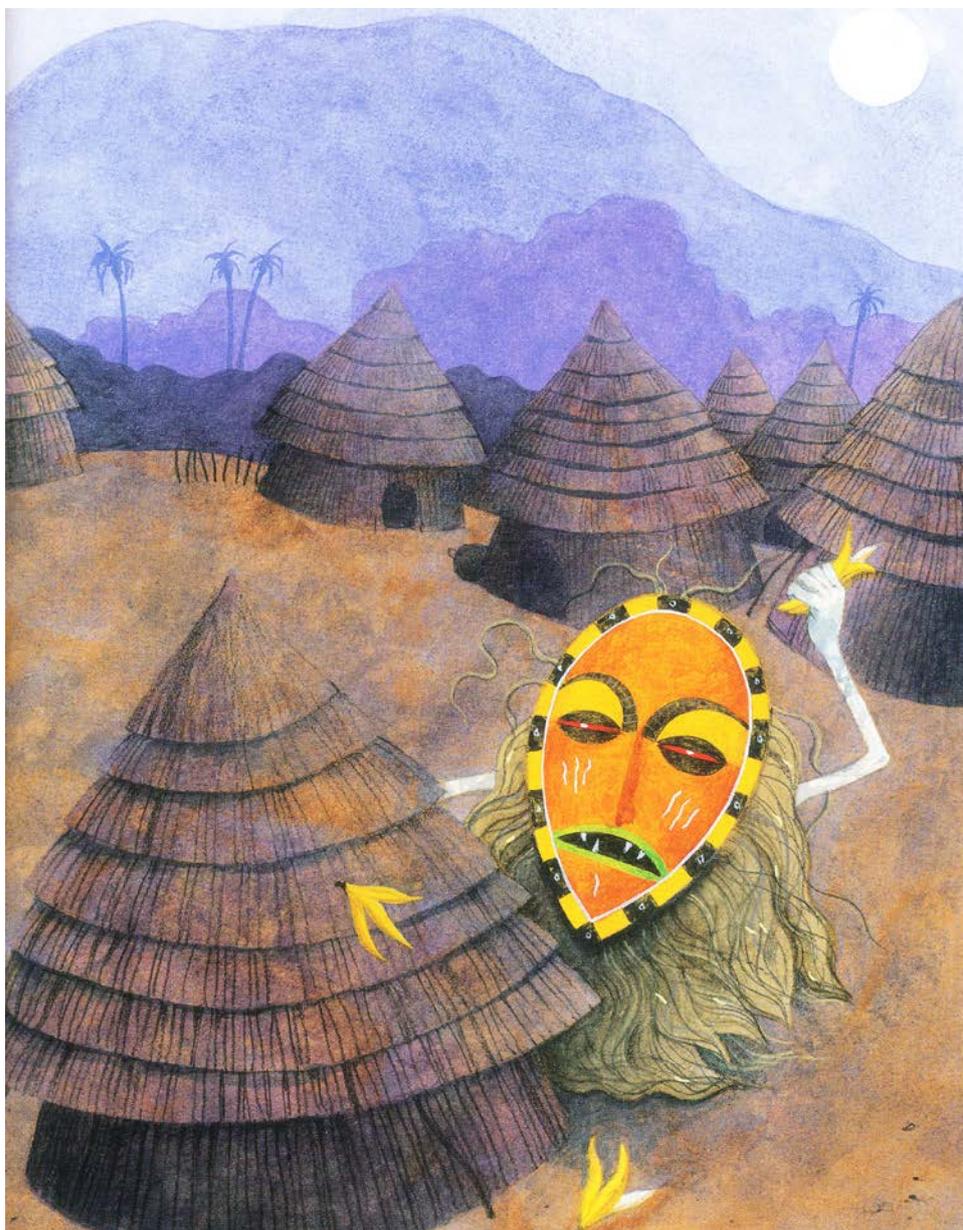
No one ever found out what became of the pirates and their stolen treasure. As for *The Palatine*, well, people on Block Island still glimpse her ghostly shape far out at sea on stormy nights.

So not exactly the ending I expected from a book with the words 'ghosts' and 'spooky' in the title – a lively twist! An excellent story with plenty of suspense and a very evocative illustration of the ghostly, burning ship.



'The Ghost and his Uncle'. A story from Bengal in India. Copyright © 2015 Paul Hess. Reproduced permission Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

All the stories are page turners and I couldn't put the book down until I had finished a story as all are gripping. I was not familiar with any of the stories in this innovative collection. Some of the illustrations are full page, some smaller and always one between the story's title and the start of the text. The illustrations are a very important part of the book and are given prominence. The palette varies to suit each situation, giving a wide variety of colour and style. The examples give you a flavour of them.



**'Them Bananas!'. A story from East Africa. Copyright © 2015 Paul Hess. Reproduced permission Frances Lincoln Children's Books.**

What a fabulous book! A combination of superb text and superb illustrations from masters of their craft.

**Jennifer Harding**

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## **Ten**

Shamini Flint, London: Allen & Unwin, pb. 978 1 7433 6645 5, 2015, £5.99, 144pp.  
[Suggested age range 7–11.]

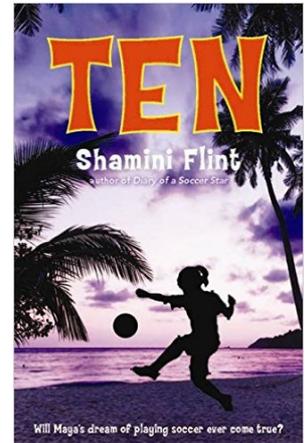
Flint's comic sporting Diary of a ... series is popular with children and this book with its title referring to a football jersey makes for a special read.

This is the story of ten-year-old Maya, desperate to become a professional footballer. Except there are some 'minor' drawbacks; she has never kicked a football before, and she's a girl and everyone knows that girls don't play football! Especially one who lives in a small suburban town of Malaysia, is considered a bookworm and belongs to the minority Indian community. To complicate matters further, her annoying older brother Rajiv is a hockey player, and her visiting grandmother thinks no one will marry her because, at ten, Maya is too tall and too pale skinned (from her English father) for a 'good' Indian girl. Money is tight and the siblings have learned to cope with their parents' frequent arguments. In one of the many football metaphors used, at times she feels she's 'just scored an own goal in a tied match in the last minute of extra time'.

But Maya decides to start kicking a football, on her own, in her all-girls school. Painstakingly she builds an all-girls team, which later participates in a tournament where Maya is given the number 10 jersey, a secretly held desire. By this time, her parents have decided to separate and her father has returned home to England. So, when Maya's team, somewhat predictably for the narrative, wins the tournament, her dad is not around to cheer for her. When she receives the surprise award for the best player – return tickets to England to watch an England v Brazil friendly at Wembley – she is ecstatic! She is going to fulfil two of her dreams: watch Brazil, her favourite team, with Zico, the striker she idolises, in action; and, she is going to bring her father home! At Wembley, she carries out an outrageous plan; it leads to celebrity – she becomes 'a nine-day wonder'; her father, however, does not return. Maya is mortified, but takes heart from her family and friends, and, of course, football.

The book encompasses tricky themes of coping with parents' divorce, of finding friendship while being different, of doggedly following one's passions, and of identity. I particularly enjoyed the diasporic Indian connection, and the authentic cultural and food references, often outrightly hilarious. If anything, Flint seems to work too many issues into the plot, but happily the book is certainly more than the sum of its parts, and, with such universal themes at its heart, will find echoes in readers from any part of the world, football crazy or not. The note at the end from the author explaining some football facts is a nice touch and so are the small illustrations alongside the text. The book would have benefited from a better cover and print quality; however, they are easy to overlook once the story takes over.

**Soumi Dey**

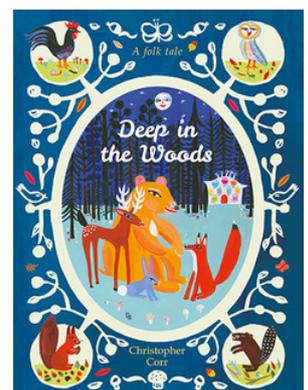


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## **Deep in the Woods (A Folk Tale)**

Christopher Corr, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0726 7, 2015, £11.99, 32pp. [Suggested age range 3–12.]

One day, a little mouse finds an empty wooden house in the woods with nine windows and a red door. The mouse cleans it and starts living in it. Then a frog comes and asks to live in the house and the mouse agrees. He is followed by a rabbit, beaver, fox, rooster, deer, red squirrel, owl, two magpies and a woodpecker. They all live happily together. Then a bear comes along and asks to live with them. Unhappily the animals say 'no' because he can't fit in the house. Disappointed, the bear climbs onto the roof to try and get in. However, he is too heavy and the house crashes to the ground. The animals don't know what to do until the bear has an idea and starts building. Together, the animals build a new and bigger house and all live happily together in it.



*Deep in the Woods* is a retelling of a classic Russian children's folktale 'Teremok'. 'Teremok' is a diminutive of 'terem', which refers to a particular kind of house in medieval Russia. In the folktale, it is shown as a little hut, cabin or hideaway.

*Deep in the Woods* is a story about kindness, sharing and friendship, and it uses a group of woodland animals to show this sense of friendship and community. The animals live in a pastoral world, and their relationships with each other have been idealised so that they coexist in harmony. This harmony is engaging and will appeal to young children. Young children will relate to and enjoy the themes and characters.

The design and production of the book is very well thought out and to an extremely high standard. This can be seen in the well-designed cover. On the front is an oval illustration framed with patterning on a deep blue background. The style is very nostalgic and seems to hark back to books of the 1940s. As you open the book, you see the attractive and detailed endpages which are intricately decorated with acorns, leaves, insects and fungi. Nature also form patterns within the illustrations and sometimes functions as borders, linking the endpages to the story.

The text is complemented by a series of unusual and delightful illustrations. These can vary in shape from oval to full page/spread bleed. They feature a group of animals painted in a naive style which complements the folk-tale narrative. Other motifs include the cabin, trees, flowers and leaves. The trees are represented by a wide variety of simple geometric shapes, and the sun and moon have faces that smile down benignly on the animals and landscape. Finally, as is characteristic of naive art, size and perspective are distorted, making the bear often appear bigger than the house and trees.

There is also a very imaginative and inventive use of fluorescent colours in the illustrations. These include oranges, blues, yellows, purples and greens, and are mixed with normal colours such as brown, white, black and dark green. This brings a sense of modernity and originality to the traditional artistic form and creates a picture book that is not only refreshing and vibrant to look at but also great fun to read.

For some inside pages, see <https://jillrbennett.wordpress.com/2015/10/12/deep-in-the-woods/> and <https://picturebooksblogger.wordpress.com/2015/09/21/deep/>.

**Andrea Rayner**

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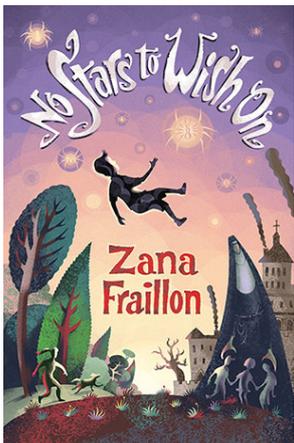
### ***No Stars to Wish On***

Zana Fraillon, London: Allen & Unwin Children's Books, pb. 978 1 7433 1514 9, 2015, £6.57, 176pp. [Suggested reading age 8–12.]

Jack is a boy aged six, living in a remote Australian settlement. He has a poor but loving family. Although the reader is not told, one suspects he is of aboriginal ethnicity. Though he is deaf, Jack is an accomplished lip reader. Jack, his twin sister Janey and baby Sal are taken away from home to an establishment run by nuns.

The nuns say that this is their new home. But the children are treated sadistically. Jack knows he must escape. He is now known only as number 49. The same number appears in the clothes Jack was given. What happened to the real child 49? Will Jack's escape plan work?

This book is somewhat reminiscent of John Boyne's *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. It is told in the first person by Jack. As in the Boyne book, the assumed reader is likely to have a better understanding of what's going on – the Holocaust or the abduction of aboriginal children – than the child narrator. In this book, however, Jack may not have a complete understanding of his situation, but he knows enough at least to realise that he must put distance between himself and his new environment.



Superficially this is a deceptively simple book. But what matters in this brief narrative is often what the text doesn't say. The reader's fellow feeling for Jack is captured from the very start. Jack's deafness is a significant characteristic, but the depiction of him is so dense and varied that the reader often forgets he cannot hear.

**Rebecca R. Butler**

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### ***My Life as an Alphabet***

Barry Jonsberg, London: Murdoch Books, pb. 978 1 7433 6683 7, [2013] 2015, £6.99, 264pp. [Suggested age range 10–13.]

I assume Murdoch Books are agents in the UK for the Australian publisher Allen & Unwin. The review slip placed inside the book I received is headed 'Allen & Unwin' and their details are on the title verso with a publication date of 2013, whereas Murdoch Books give the release date as 2015. The cover has a sticker proclaiming the book as a Children's Book Council of Australia Honour Book in 2014. The author profile on the slip tells me that he has many awards for his young adult novels and that his books have also been published in France, Poland, Germany and China. The story is set in Australia.

The protagonist, Candice Phee, is 12 years old, very 'honest but a little odd'. She is 'determined to ensure everyone is happy. So she sets about trying to fix all the problems of all the people (and pets) in her life'.

Each of the – yes, 26 – chapters starts with a letter. For example: 'A is for Assignment' through to 'Z is for Zero-Hour'.

Chapter A starts with Candice describing her teacher:

I am excited. Miss Bamford is my English teacher and she is the best English teacher in the World.

Wait. Wrong way – go back. ... It is more accurate to say that she's the best teacher *as far as I am concerned*.

Miss Bamford is a small woman and she is between thirty and sixty years of age. I refuse to guess at ages. I asked her once, in the interests of accuracy, and she wouldn't tell me. She wears long and shapeless dresses so it is difficult to tell what her body is like.

Candice continues in her minute observances of her teacher, who seems to be very understanding and patient! I had to sympathise with both of them. Candice's remarks are spot on, even if they should be kept to herself and Miss Bamford must have wanted to wring Candice's neck.

The first English assignment that day is

RECOUNT: Write about something that happened in the past.

Of course, everything that already happened MUST be in the past and I tried to point this out, but Miss Bamford ignored me. ...

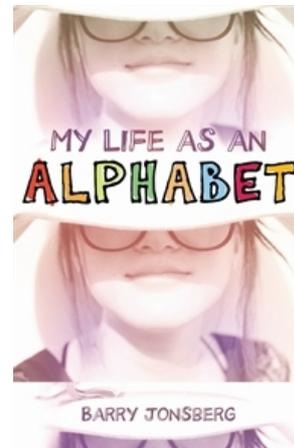
We have to write a paragraph about ourselves for every letter of the alphabet. ...

I put my hand up. ... Jen Marshall interrupted. 'Yeah, shut up, Essen,' even though I hadn't said anything.

There are several girls (and boys) in my school who calls me Essen. It's a phonetic representation of S.N., which is short for Special Needs. Many people think I have learning disabilities, but they are mistaken.

So far I think they are, but time will tell as I read on.

Candice decides that a paragraph is too short and hence the chapters in this book. Here are some of the topics:



Her mother giving birth to her and family members.  
'Classrooms are battlegrounds'  
'Douglas Benson From Another Dimension'  
Kitchens  
Artificial breasts  
Trying to divorce from her parents  
Schisms  
Talking

Well, you get the idea!

The chapters include letters to her penfriend Denille in America who has never replied – until the final chapter. The letters were delivered to Denille's neighbour who had been in Europe all year and brought them round on his return. On reading the numerous letters from Candice, Denille replies:

You are either a cool chick or you're completely mad. Who knows? ... Or maybe you're deliberately weird.

By the time I got to the end of the book, I decide I was both weird and deluded, not Candice nor her friend Douglas. Help! A book with a different perspective on life. Read it!

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### Jennifer Harding

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#### *Emilio*

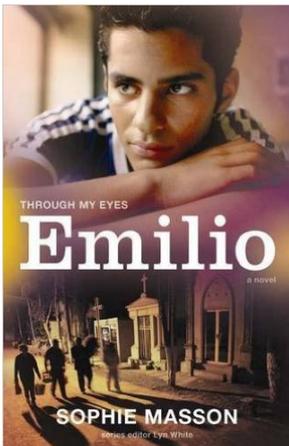
Sophie Masson, London: Allen & Unwin Children's Books, pb. 978 1 7433 6685 1, 2015, £5.99, 184pp. [Suggested age range 11–14.]

This documentary fiction of a kidnap in Mexico is part of a series of novels from the publisher that features the lives of children in conflict zones.

Emilio's mother has been taken by an offshoot of a drug cartel, and the story follows the subsequent days in which Emilio and his family raise the ransom to secure her release. While Emilio's anxiety and the occasional stresses within the family are portrayed, the tale seems to be dominated by the research that has gone into it and which is shown by a list of websites and a short bibliography that are appended along with a glossary of Spanish words. As an example of the way in which a kidnap might play out, it is mostly convincing, although the two clues provided by the mother that eventually lead to the capture of the kidnappers belong more in a Nancy Drew detective story. The concentration on the kidnap does not enable us to get a clear picture of Emilio as a character: the situation itself claims all the attention. Nor do we feel that this is a story told from inside a culture. The description and explanation of Mexican food and customs is rather too obtrusive. A more ambitious book might have tackled directly the way that young people are caught up in the drug gangs. This is seen only tangentially through Evita, a street child who is used on one occasion as a go-between by the gang. She is befriended by Emilio, and provides vital information to the police. The way the story is handled suggests an audience of upper junior or lower secondary age, while the bibliography looks much more teen and adult in content.

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#### Clive Barnes



### ***From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler***

E.L. Konigsburg, London, Pushkin Children's Books, pb. 978 1 7826 9071 9, 2015, £7.99, 150pp. (First published in 1967, New York: Atheneum Books.) [Suggested age range 12–16.]

The author was the winner of the Newbery Medal in 1968 for this book and a Newbery Honor the same year for another book (the only person to achieve this). She was again the medal winner in 1997. However, she doesn't seem to be well known in the UK.

Pushkin Children's Books was 'created to share tales from different languages and cultures with young readers, and to open the door to the wide, colourful worlds these stories offer'. Hence the reissue of this book, attractively designed with a clear, easily read font and the original black and white illustrations by the author.

The book opens with a sketch of Mrs. Frankweiler at her desk. She is writing a letter to her lawyer, Saxonberg, the letter is opposite the sketch. She is wanting to make changes to her last will and testament. She tells him that he will understand why she is making these changes when he has finished reading the book to which this is the covering letter.

At the time of the letter, Mrs. Frankweiler is 82. She is smart, insightful, eccentric and rich. In the book she is the narrator of the story with asides to Saxonberg in parentheses. Some of these are quite acerbic and she is not without a sense of humour! She is also a commentator, providing the reader with insights into the children's actions, and the plot facilitator for her decision to allow the sale of an extraordinary sculpture at an auction.

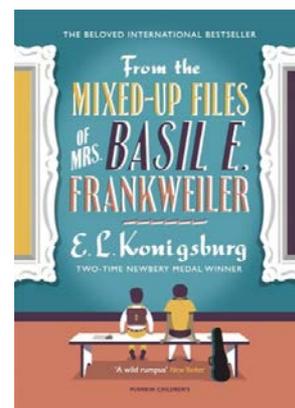
Claudia, almost 12 years old, has resolved to run away from home with the middle one of her younger brothers, Jamie. She feels put upon at home. As the eldest child and the only daughter, she thinks she is the skivvy and not treated fairly compared with her brothers. Her resolve to run away is to make her parents appreciate her and to assert herself as an individual.

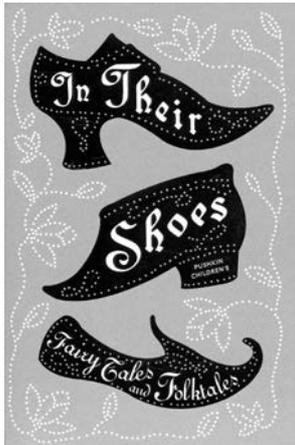
She chooses Jamie to be her companion because he has made some cash from card playing and is thrifty, whereas she has been spending her weekly allowance on hot fudge sundaes. This is to be a carefully planned affair, not a sudden impulsive run away. They leave their home in Greenwich, Connecticut, to hide in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The children stay unnoticed inside the museum for a week by various ingenious methods. A new sculpture exhibit, *Angel*, fascinates Claudia, and she resolves to solve the mystery of its origins. This is the main thrust of the story but the repartee between the children is spot on. *IBBYLink* readers will appreciate Claudia's pedantic attempts to improve Jamie's speech, but he is more than a match for her in his reactions and replies!

This is a wonderful book that will resonate with every teenager who feels unnoticed and taken for granted – all of us, as I think back to those years and my ploys to be 'different'. As soon as I started reading it, I was hooked. It is so well written and the storyline unusual and gripping.

**Jennifer Harding**

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### ***In their Shoes: Fairy Tales and Folktales***

Julia Nicholson and Anne-Laure Mercier (sel.), illus. Lucie Arnoux, London: Pushkin Children's Books, pb. 978 1 7826 9101 3, 2015, £6.99, 128pp. [Suggested age range 14+.]

The title verso gives a fascinating list of the sources, translators and permissions of those tales still in copyright. The three tales not listed are by the Brothers Grimm ('The Twelve Dancing Princesses'), Andersen ('The Red Shoes') and Joel Chandler Harris ('Brer Rabbit and Mr Dog'). The source used for these is not stated. At the end of each chapter there is a brief interesting note about that particular tale.

For example, the first tale is Duan Chengshi's 'The Story of Yexian'. The note states that this is the earliest version of the Cinderella story that has been recorded, dating back to the ninth century in China. The chronicler, who lived during the Tang dynasty, set his version on the coast of what is today Vietnam.

The Perrault tale 'Puss in Boots' is appended by two different 'morals' and his 'Hop o' my Thumb' with one moral, both in the 2009 translations that have been chosen, but no other tale is given an explicit moral.

I am not qualified to classify all these as folk or fairy tales although there is obviously a mix and some are stated to be one or the other. The country of origin is also varied: a Greek myth, a fairy tale set on the streets of Paris and a Russian folktale, as well as the Chinese tale mentioned above and the German, Danish, French and African American tales from the well-known collections of the Brothers Grimm, Andersen, Perrault and Harris.

The book was published to coincide with the opening of the V&A exhibition of footwear, Footwear: Pleasure and Pain, shown until 21 January 2016, hence the emphasis of these tales. Not many illustrations (all black and white and a full page) are of shoes, but all the stories have a shoe or shoes woven into the text.

There are no shoes in the illustration for 'The Story of Yexian'. This tale is illustrated by a fish since the heroine Yexian catches a fish 'two inches long'. She placed it in a bowl and looked after it but it grew so large that she had to throw it back into the pond. Whenever she came to the pond 'the fish would stick its head out and pillow it on the bank, but it wouldn't do this when other people came'. There is of course a wicked stepmother and a shoe, but the prince is not a very pleasant character and rather devious. It is not at all as I think of the 'Cinderella' story!

Pierre Gripari's 'The Pair of Shoes' is one I have never come across before and has an unusual theme: a pair of high-heeled shoes who are married (in the illustration, the husband is on the right and the lady on the left). They go through many mishaps of being separated and whether or not the ending is 'happy' is not conclusive.

I am very surprised to find that the Brer Rabbit story is given in its original. I have read the following a few times and am baffled! I did force myself to read the tale right through and I got the gist, but I would be unable to write it out in today's English. I don't think a reader, unless an adult, would persevere.

Dey wuz one time w'en ole Brer Rabbit 'uz bleedz ter go ter town atter sump'n' 'n'er fer his famerly, en he mos' 'shame' ter go 'kaze his shoes done wo' tetotally out. Yit he bleedz ter go, en he put des ez good face on it ez he kin, en he take down he walkin'-cane en sot out des ez big ez de next un. (p.89)

I must issue a few more warnings before you put this book into the hands of a young reader. Just thinking about the ending to the Russian tale 'The Story of Chernushka [Cinderella]' makes me shudder; it is a horrific vengeance too awful to contemplate. My other problem is with the Greek legend 'Perseus and the Winged Sandals', retold by the French writer Murielle Szac, in the sentences:



Hermes smiled. He had not forgotten the laughter of the child shut up in the crate.  
(p.99)

A young reader is very unlikely to be familiar with many Greek legends and so will not understand this reference and not know that this is an important memory which makes Hermes decide to accompany the young Perseus on the next stage of his dangerous quest.

My quibbles above will make me careful to whom I give this book and, when I give it, I will also give these warnings. However, I consider this book to be excellent, literate and sophisticated reading. It is a slim, well-produced, hardwearing paperback. It folds open easily without damage. For teen readers it provides an excellent introduction to folk and fairy tales. It could also be read to a young teen and would make for much entertainment and discussion, and would, I hope, encourage an enjoyment of folk and fairy tales. Pushkin Children's Books is certainly fulfilling its aim to get unusual books with an international flavour to children and young people.

**Jennifer Harding**

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### ***Nine Open Arms***

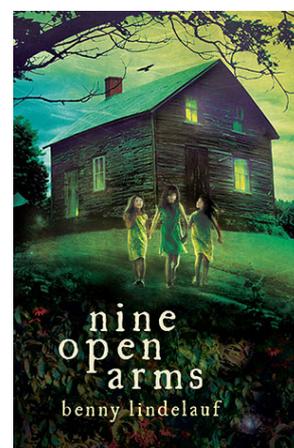
Benny Lindelauf, trans. John Nieuwenhuizen, London: Allen & Unwin Children's Books, pb. 978 1 7433 1585 9, £6.99, 2015, 257pp. (First published in The Netherlands 2004 as *Negen open armen*.) [Suggested age range 12+.]

Benny Lindelauf, an award-winning Dutch writer of children's fiction, has here produced a novel that is aimed at 12 year olds and over and has been translated into six languages. At the end of the first paragraph, which acts as a prelude to the main narrative, we learn about Nienevee 'from outside the wall' and Charley Bettleop, signalling to each other by 'drumming with their bones, deep under the ground'. This promises some intriguing developments and, while the narrative is, perhaps, rather slow to begin with, does carry the reader forward.

It's the summer of 1937, and 11-year-old Fing Boon, who is the story's narrator, her father, 'the Dad', who has had a succession of poorly paid jobs, her grandmother, Oma Mei, the consummate storyteller, with her 'swivel-eye' and a crocodile bag full of memories, and Fing's four brothers and two sisters, have all moved to a house not far from the German border. Once there, the girls discover that the house measures 'nine open arms' from one end to the other, and this is how the house gets its unusual name. In this creaky, leaky old house, the family sets about making it into a home. Fing gives it her own particular seal of approval: it 'was cool and it smelled safe'. But then the sisters discover a 'tombstone' in one of the three cellars and they hear strange moaning noises coming from deep under the cellar floor. Fing's younger sister Muulke, who has a vivid imagination, is convinced that a 'tragical tragedy' had happened there long ago, especially as they have overheard Oma Mei telling the Dad that they should never have moved to the place.

While the brothers in the family are a background male presence, the three sisters are well-defined characters: Fing is quiet and thoughtful, while Muulke is outgoing and popular with the other children at school; Jess, the youngest of the three, with her unstable back, her 'wreckbone' as they call it, and has to wear a straightener, is nervous and sensitive; and whereas the Dad is an impractical dreamer, Oma Mei is a strong, indomitable female presence in a motherless household. Against this backdrop, Oma Mei relates the history of those who were living in the house in the 1860s and how they connect with the Boon family. There are some surprising revelations and discoveries along the way too.

Australia-based John Nieuwenhuizen has received several awards for his translations of Dutch and Flemish literature, and here his translation gives us access to the world of



Lindlauf's imagination with its often colourful language and dry humour. Nieuwenhuizen has retained some of the Dutch words in this English translation and a glossary of these appears at the end of the book.

*Nine Open Arms* has received critical praise and several awards in The Netherlands as has its Dutch sequel *Heivisj's Heaven*, which was published in 2010 and describes Fing's rite of passage into adulthood against a background of the German invasion of The Netherlands and its effect on the Boon family as a whole. This sequel, aimed at 13–15 year olds, is available only in Dutch at present, but I hope that an English translation will be available in the not too distant future as those who have enjoyed the first story will surely want to learn more about Fing in its sequel.

**June Swain**

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### ***Black Waters***

Julia Jones, illus. Claudia Myatt, Chelmsford: Golden Duck, pb. 978 1 8992 6226 7, 2015, £8.99, 296pp. [Suggest age range 12–16.]

This is a fifth volume for the Strong Winds 'trilogy', (see earlier reviews in *IBBYLink* noted below) and once again it is an excellent twenty-first-century adventure story, infused with references to classic literature for children (especially Arthur Ransome), a powerful celebration of boats, and a sensitive examination of the complications of family life and its impact on succeeding generations. I make no apology for repeating this overall judgement that I made when the series started in 2011.

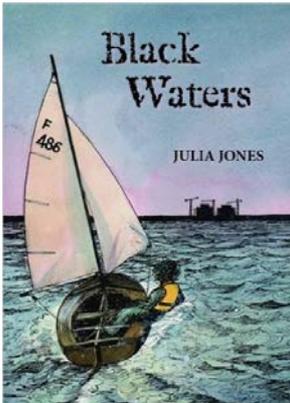
Like the last 'add-on', this novel centres on a tangential character in the three initial Strong Winds books. Xanthe Ribiero is a gifted teenage sailor for whom everything looks set for her to get into the Great Britain team. Until, that is, she faces a veritable storm of opposition in the form of Madrigal Shryke, the spoilt and vicious daughter of a rags-to-riches developer, whose abuse of Xanthe is devastating – mentally via social media and, in particular, racist. Xanthe, as feisty a heroine as Ransome's Nancy Blackett in his *Swallows and Amazons* series, resorts to hitting back, quite literally, and instead of training for the GB team, she ends up coaching a bunch of deeply disaffected townee teenagers who are learning to sail in the b(l)ackwaters of the Essex marshes. In the course of this, Xanthe uncovers a seething undercurrent of cruelty and crime in the village, resulting from grievances that date back to the Second World War, but which still pervade the inward-looking lives of the local families, and which results in tragedy for young and old alike.

Jones draws her characters with great skill, sharp insight, sensitivity and an understanding of the complexity of human nature, and in this particular novel we empathise deeply with both the young and the elderly victims of prejudice and hatred. As I have written in previous reviews, both as outstanding adventures with an unrivalled ability to describe the sea and sailing, as well as convey deeply insightful studies of adolescent and long-lasting family conflict and recovery, the Strong Winds series does indeed sail from strength to strength.

A review of *The Salt-Stained Book*, the first book in the Strong Winds trilogy, appeared in *IBBYLink* 32 (Autumn 2011), that of *A Ravelled Flag* in *IBBYLink* 34 (Summer 2012) and the final instalment, *Ghosting Home*, can be found in *IBBYLink* 36 (Spring 2013). A fourth novel, *The Lion of Sole Bay* was reviewed in *IBBYLink* 29 (Spring 2014). As I've indicated in those reviews, Julia Jones owns the yacht *Peter Duck*, one of a number of yachts belonging at one time or another to Arthur Ransome, whence comes her fascination with that author's books and life, and with sailing.

**Bridget Carrington**

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### ***Love and Other Perishable Items***

Laura Buzo, London: Allen & Unwin, 978 1 7601 1242 4, 2015, £5.91, 288pp. [First published 2010 as *Good Oil*.] Available at Amazon.co.uk. [Suggested age range 14–18.]

*Love and Other Perishable Items* is a coming-of-age story that concerns itself with the possibility of a relationship starting rather than a relationship that is already in progress. It focuses on Amelia, who begins working at the local supermarket and falls in love with Chris. Chris is funny and kind. However, there is a problem, Amelia is 15 and Chris is 21. She is at school and he is at university. Six years is a very large age gap, especially when there are so many other young women working in the supermarket who are older than her. Amelia thinks that Chris will never be interested in her, let alone go out with her. Chris not only considers Amelia to be too young for him, but he is still in love with his ex-girlfriend Michaela. They become friends but will their friendship ever go any further?

This story documents the trials of growing up and of first relationships. It discusses problems associated with low self-esteem, and is frank about teenage sex, drinking and drug taking. However, these things are talked about but not graphically described.

The book is set in the suburbs of Sydney and is therefore quite culturally specific. It talks about Bathurst, where many Australians from New South Wales go to university or college. It also uses some Australian terminology such as 'doona'. However, this does not interfere with the reader's enjoyment of the story.

The story is told from both Amelia's and Chris's points of view and we see the same situation through both their eyes. This is not done using alternating chapters but is arranged in sections. The first half of the story is from Amelia's perspective and the second half is from Chris's. The author really captures the voice of an intelligent and questioning teenage girl, but is perhaps less successful in capturing the voice of a young man in his twenties. The tone of Chris's diary entries towards the end of the book comes across as being somewhat similar to Amelia's.

The story also contains a lot of humour, and the verbal repartee between the two main protagonists is especially witty. Again, the author has managed to capture the fast-talking exchanges of a particular age group. However, towards the end, when the characters talk about feminism and women's rights, there is a slight tendency for the text to preach. This didacticism intrudes on the narrative slightly.

This book was originally published six years ago as *Good Oil*, and enjoyed great international success. It has now been republished and is still very good, but it occasionally felt slightly out of step with contemporary teenage culture, for example technology and social media do not feature in the story at all.

Overall, this is an enjoyable and extremely well-thought-out novel about teenagers and young adults. It successfully recreates their thoughts and feelings as well as all the social and emotional challenges they face.

**Andrea Rayner**

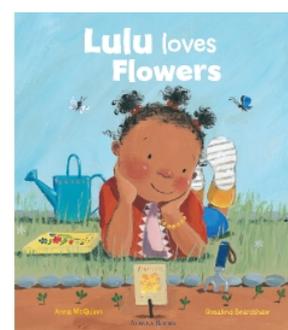
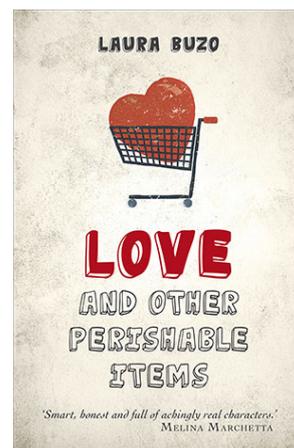
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## **Picture and Novelty Books**

### ***Lulu Loves Flowers***

Anna McQuinn, illus. Rosalind Beardshaw, Slough: Alanna Books, 978 1 9078 2511 8, £11.99, 2015, 32pp. [Suggested age range 2–5.]

The fourth book in the popular Lulu series, *Lulu Loves Flowers*, is another warm and charming story from Alanna Books' publisher Anna McQuinn and children's illustrator Rosalind Beardshaw. It tells the story of a toddler called Lulu who, with the help of her mother, takes inspiration from the poem 'Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary' and plants her own bed of flowers. It is a process that involves research, planning and patience: three



things not commonly associated with toddlers but which are fantastic to see role modelled for little ones learning to think beyond the immediate here and now, and which readers may enjoy using as a basis for their own gardening project.

McQuinn's text is economic and succinct, ideal for toddlers who are eager to recall the story in their own words, and works seamlessly with Beardshaw's illustrations that are simultaneously clear to read and rich in their painterly texture and detail. Beardshaw's choice of eggshell-blue skies and avocado greenery, contrasted with hues of terracotta, conjure up the bright clarity and optimism of Monet's impressionist landscapes, while her domestic scenes have an authenticity and sense of ease comparable with his contemporary, the nineteenth-century painter of modern life, Edouard Manet. Although obviously stylised, Beardshaw's illustrations pay careful attention to Lulu's toddler physique, soft skin and curly hair, lending McQuinn's character a genuine warmth and humanity.

There is a certain luxury to *Lulu Loves Flowers* that stems from the generous sense of time Lulu's parents have for her. The story opens with an image of Lulu and her mother reading a book that we know from the text is one they have read together before. Visual clues embedded in the image tell us their time together is important: Lulu's mother's cup of tea is allowed to cool beside the rocking chair, while birds carry on in the tree outside and Lulu's teddy remains on the floor where it was dropped. Later in the book, Lulu's mother can be seen looking on patiently as Lulu grapples with the craft scissors; her father holds the end of a string of bells as he waits for Lulu to climb the ladder to hang them. Such imagery makes *Lulu Loves Flowers* equally as valuable for parents, guardians and families looking for inspiration on how to empower and spend quality time with the toddler in their life.

**Anna Ridley**

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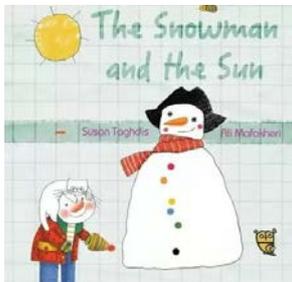
### ***The Snowman and the Sun***

By Susan Taghdis, illus. Ali Mafakheri, trans. Azita Rassi, London: Tiny Owl Publishing, hb. 9 781 9103 2810 1, 2015, £7.99, 24pp. [Suggested age range 3–7.]

Snowmen, standing in the sun, by their very nature, melt away. In this delightful picture book, Iranian writer Susan Taghdis tells us a gentle story of a little boy and his snowman, how they separate and meet again.

This is a book set in the outdoors, with a cool duck-egg colour palette complimenting and highlighting the minimalist figures on the page. Be it the snowman with his bright carrot nose, the boy with his colourful jumper and trousers, or the mysterious small red fish and the bike-riding bee that appear on every page, the effect is that of happy bursts of colour against a serene, expansive outdoors where a child, his cat and the snowman spend hours playing. The book starts with the yellow sun shining down on the snowman while the cat frolics around him. Gradually the snowman begins to melt, but not before he wonders what he is going to 'be' next. Every double spread that shows the snowman's transformation is preceded by prose saying what he is going to turn into next. For instance, the text explains he is melting, and, next, he will evaporate, and then the snowman wishes he could fly, which he does on the next page – as water droplets that form into a floating cloud. Eventually the erstwhile snowman reaches high up into the sky, the air turns colder and eventually, 'little by little, he turned back into snow and floated back down to the ground, flake by flake'.

For the adult reading to a child, there is a calm sense of a journey, the end which they can predict. For the child, there is the wonder of the snowman being able to change oneself, of being able to move from one form to another, of magical shape shifting. There is also the comfort of knowing that even though the boy misses the snowman when he has melted away, he hasn't lost him forever. Snow falls and lies in drifts and



soon the boy makes him into a snowman again: friends reunited, till the sun melts him again and the cycle starts anew.

The prose is soothing and simple and just enough to introduce and balance the images, while not over explaining them. On a practical level, the book could easily be used as an introduction to science topics like evaporation and condensation, explaining the formation of snow to slightly older children. Metaphorically, it is about friendships and relationships, and how change and the thrill of new experiences can coexist with a sense of security, continuity and comfort.

[Two inside pages can be seen at <https://wordery.com/the-snowman-and-the-sun-susan-taghdis-9781910328101>. Some double spreads are at <https://jillrbennett.wordpress.com/2015/11/03/the-snowman-and-the-sundandelions/>.]

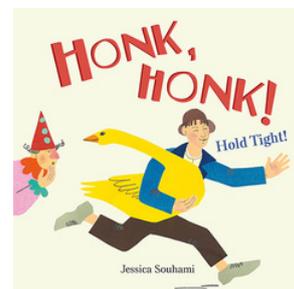
**Soumi Dey**

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### ***Honk, Honk!***

Jessica Souhami, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0540 9, 2015, £11.99, 28pp. [Suggested age range 3–6.]

This is another of Jessica Souhami's picture-book retellings of folk tales. Once again, she brings us a perfectly paced story in which characters, boldly created in bright collage, dance hand in hand with the text against a white background. This tale concerns a princess who would not laugh and a poor boy who wins her heart with the aid of a golden goose, to which a motley crowd of inquisitive people become magically and comically attached. The style of the illustrations offers just a suggestion of the Neapolitan origin of the tale, with fashions that belong anywhere between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries. The absence of a significant background setting in the pictures helps create a mood of timeless storytelling, and concentrates our attention on the larger-than-life characters, and the dramatic movement and eloquent gestures that Souhami creates to carry the story forward.



**Clive Barnes**

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### ***Woolly Mammoth***

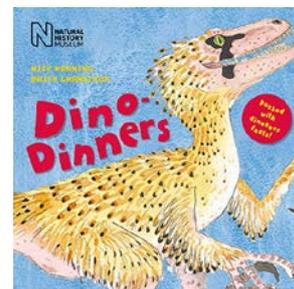
Mick Manning and Brita Granström, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books in association with the Natural History Museum, pb. 978 1 8478 0664 2, [2006] 2015, £6.99, 32pp. [Suggested age range 3–8.]

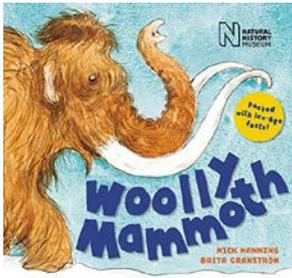
### ***Dino-Dinners***

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books in association with the Natural History Museum, pb. 978 1 8478 0665 9, [2006] 2015, £6.99, 32pp. [Suggested age range 3–8.]

Mick Manning and Brita Granström have won praise and awards for their information books for younger readers which feature authoritative bite-sized facts with entertaining and atmospheric illustrations. These two books, paperback editions of hardbacks published in 2006, take us back to prehistoric times and beyond.

*Dino-Dinners* is a bone crunching, veg chewing, and sometimes tongue twisting, catalogue of dinosaurs, each with a double-page illustration, a short large-print dino poem and a margin of dino facts, including a pronunciation guide. Some dinosaurs I recognise: Tyrannosaurus Rex and Triceratops, for instance. Others, like Edmontosaurus and Baryonyx will satisfy young dino nerds, of whom there are many, I'm sure, still roaming the playgrounds.



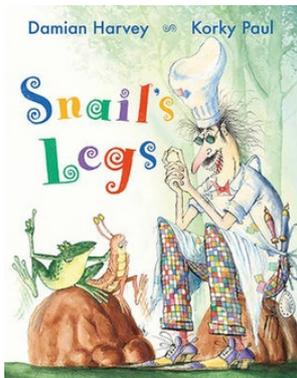


*Woolly Mammoth* uses the same format to introduce the life and times of the ‘big hairy beastie’ of the Ice Age and its relationship with other creatures, and with humans, who hunt the mammoth for meat, clothing and a host of other uses, even, rather unfairly, making aids to throwing spears out of mammoth tusks. The approach of both books is lively and humorous, including in *Dino-Dinners* a mention of dino farting and dino poo, guaranteed to go down well.

Each book conveys a great deal through the illustrations. *Woolly Mammoth* opens with a cool watercolour illustration of a herd dwarfed by an icy landscape. Subsequent illustrations of mammoths facing gales, digging through the snow and ice for their food, and hunters wrapped in furs confirm the inhospitable world in which all have to survive. Both books provide glossaries which introduce children not only to terms that have a particular relevance to the subject but to others that they might find more generally useful, like herbivore and omnivore, Stone Age and Pitfall trap. Both books also indicate how scientists work out the behaviour and appearance of these ancient beasts, whether from the fossil or (with the Mammoth) frozen remains, or by inference from the behaviour of existing animals. It’s all done carefully and attractively. The only quibble I have is with the suggestion that ‘There are still some Stone-Age peoples living in the world today, in the Amazon rainforest for example.’ This is to confuse past peoples of whom we have only the vaguest notions of their way of life with present day indigenous peoples whose way of life is relatively well documented and is likely to be different, particularly if we are comparing the Ice Age and the present-day Amazon.

**Clive Barnes**

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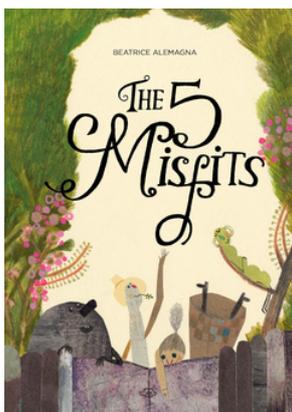
### ***Snail's Legs***

Damian Harvey, illus. Korky Paul, London: Frances Lincoln Books, pb. 978 1 8478 0712 0, [2006] 2015, £6.99, 32pp. [Suggested reading age 5–11.]

This bizarre tale first appeared in hardback in 2006. Possibly inspired by the fable of the tortoise and the hare, with some additional suggestion from Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories*, it concerns rival champion athletes: the just past-it Frog and the new young record breaker Snail, who, in this story, just happens to have two quick and powerful legs. Frog and Snail are firm friends but Frog resents his loss of status a bit and sometimes teases Snail that he can still beat his young rival in a fair race. Matters are brought to a head when the King’s chef arrives and offers the prize of a visit to the King’s palace to the fastest animal on two legs. Frog is really taken with this opportunity so he goads Snail into a race. Snail sets off as fast as he can but, realising how much the visit to the King means to his old friend, hides for a while and lets Frog pass him and win. But the visit to the castle does not turn out well and Snail decides that in future it might be politic to keep his legs under the shell that he had previously worn as a hat, at least during the day. This habit continues to this day and explains why most people don’t realise that snails have legs. Korky Paul’s characteristically quirky and crowded illustrations match the tale’s sardonic humour perfectly.

**Clive Barnes**

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### ***The 5 Misfits***

Beatrice Alemagna, London: Frances Lincoln Children’s Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0637 6, 2015, £12.99, 40pp. (First published in Italian, Milan: Topipittori, 2014.) [Suggested age range 4–11]

Prize-winning Italian illustrator and writer Beatrice Alemagna has come up with a wonderfully unusual, allegorical book for primary readers entitled *The 5 Misfits*. They live together in a ramshackle, lopsided house on the point of collapse, perfectly happy despite their shortcomings. Misfit 1 has a body full of holes like a sieve or a piece of

paper that has been hole punched several times. Misfit 2 is made from a French newspaper with a body folded in half, ready for posting. She has a stylish red handbag, umbrella and a striking upright headdress. Misfit 3 is floppy, lazy and constantly dropping off to sleep, while Misfit 4 is an upside-down lady. Misfit 5 is a total catastrophe. We are told that they spend time arguing as to who was the worst made and find this to be extremely amusing.

An extraordinary fellow visits them from out of nowhere. He is pink coiffed and carries a brown case. He quizzes the quintet on what they are doing and questions their futile existence. Their responses to him are surprising and challenge the stranger's mode of living, reducing him to a gaping fool, whilst they share their friendship and are happier than ever.

These soaring flights of fantasy are skilfully executed using a subtle palette with cool colours that convey a sense of calm applied to the Misfits and their dwelling with its fresh, green setting. All the illustrations are produced using a flat collage with items placed one on top of another, or incomplete so that the pages themselves do not provide a frame. This imaginative method of working by the artist challenges perspective just as the narrative does. The majority of the pages are set on a light beige background. The handsome stranger, with his sublime head of pink hair and matching coloured pantaloons, is echoed in the endpapers, which are, in striking contrast to the earlier beige, a shocking fuchsia pink. The simplistic eyes, noses and mouths resemble early sketches of people by young readers. Skilfully positioned on the page, with their matchstick arms and legs and simple gestures, they are full of fun.

This book is thought provoking and philosophical. Alemagna conveys a tremendous amount of joie de vivre and fun, whilst reminding us that there is room for all kinds in our world, the value of friendship, looking after one another and working together.

[For some inside pages and a marketing trailer:

[http://magpiethat.com/2015/08/07/the-five-misfits-by-beatrice-alemagna/.](http://magpiethat.com/2015/08/07/the-five-misfits-by-beatrice-alemagna/)]

**Susan Bailes**

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### ***Elliot's Arctic Surprise***

Catherine Barr, illus. Francesca Chessa. London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, (developed in conversation with Greenpeace UK), hb. 978 1 8478 0741 0, 2015, £11.99, 32pp. [Suggested age range is 3–8 years.]

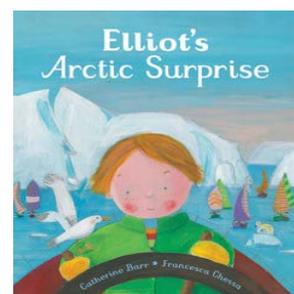
This is a fine example of a children's book with a message. The time-honoured character of Father Christmas finds a new persona in this quest for environmental knowledge. Coupled with Francesca Chessa's warm and dynamic illustrations, Catherine Barr captures how far ranging the effects of long-term climate change could be, distilling them into language that is direct and accessible.

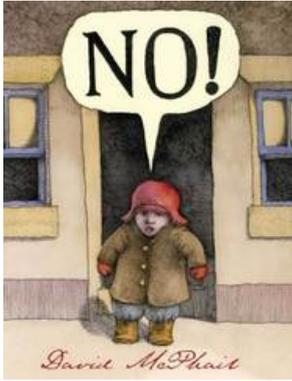
To start sowing the seeds of change, a dialogue must be started with the generation that will be dealing with the inherited issues surrounding climate change and facing them head on. This is what Barr has done with *Elliot's Arctic Surprise*.

The link with Greenpeace UK adds credibility to her assertions, and acts as a great portal should readers be interested in knowing more – just like Elliot!

**James Hatton**

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### **No!**

David McPhail, London: Francis Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0713 7, £7.99, 2015, 35pp. (First published by Roaring Brook Press in the USA in 2009.) [Suggested age range 4–13.]

This almost wordless picture book, endorsed by Amnesty International, describes what happens when a little boy, featured on the front cover saying a big 'NO!' enclosed in a speech balloon, goes out to post a letter that he has written. On his way to the postbox, he encounters many acts of aggression: there are aeroplanes overhead that are dropping bombs on the houses below; there is an armoured tank in the street that, with its liquid flame gun, has reduced a house to burning rubble. Also there are faceless, jack-booted soldiers armed with bayonet rifles, who are forcing their way into a family's home while the frightened children look on, and there is an aggressive-looking policeman with a fierce dog chasing a man who has dared to draw a moustache on a picture of the president's face on a poster. Up to this point the pictures, in clearly defined black line and watercolour, are wordless and the boy appears to show only a slight response to the violence that he sees.

But when, at the postbox, the boy encounters a bully who knocks his hat off and is about to strike him, he has clearly had enough of witnessing violence, and he responds with a shout of 'NO!' This stops the bully in his tracks. 'NO?' the bully responds looking momentarily puzzled, but then decides he will hit the boy anyway. But this time the boy really does mean 'NO' as we see from his body language: his arms are bent and his shoulders are thrust forward as he shouts in the face of the bully who recoils in shock. This one word is larger than in the previous pictures and this time is not contained within a speech bubble, and that effectively suggests just how loudly the word has issued from the boy's wide-open mouth.

This is the turning point in the story, and on the boy's return journey along the same street we see a different scenario: the once aggressive policeman and his fierce dog have now befriended the offender that they have been chasing; the once aggressive soldiers, and we can now see their faces, offer gifts to the once-besieged family; and the tank that had obliterated a house is being used by a farmer to help till his soil. The final act of reconciliation occurs when one of the aeroplanes, which had been dropping bombs, has now parachuted down a bicycle, and the boy and the repentant bully ride off on it together.

In the final illustration we see that the letter that the boy had written is addressed to 'The President', and the boy tells him that at his school they have rules: no pushing and no punching. Then he asks boldly 'Do you have any rules?' This is a thought-provoking picture book that raises issues about war, about bullying, and about courage and friendship, and it encourages discussion for young readers and adults alike.

Some inside illustrations can be viewed at <http://us.macmillan.com/no/DavidMcPhail>.

### **June Hopper Swain**

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### ***Flyaway***

Lesley Barnes, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0645 1, 2015, £10.99, 16pp. [Suggested age range 3–5.]

A princess keeps a bird in a cage, and every morning, the bird sings to her. Then one day, the bird escapes. The princess chases the bird around various rooms in the castle, including the kitchen and the attic, and finally catches it in the garden. However, the bird does not sing again once it is back in its cage. This makes the princess realise that the bird wants to be free, so she lets it go. That evening, the princess is rewarded for her compassion by the bird returning to visit her.

*Flyaway* is exquisitely crafted and designed. Its format and size (31mm × 16 mm) is reminiscent of simple and stylish picture books from the 1960s, such as *I Am a Bunny* by Richard Scarry. The decorative artwork is also influenced by 1950s' marketing illustrations with its use of flat colour, geometrical shapes, contrasts, patterns and two-dimensional or distorted perspectives. The distorted perspectives at times show an influence of M.C. Escher, with the castle on pages 8 and 9 looking like an *Alice in Wonderland* version of Escher's *Ascending and Descending*.

However, this does not mean that the book is inaccessible to young readers/listeners. It is interactive with a flap on each spread that enables the reader to free the bird. There are also ten things to spot on each spread, including pears, butterflies and horns.

The drawings form clever patterns and are retro in style. Lesley Barnes uses a limited colour palette with up to five or six colours on each spread. These colours are deep but delicate, and include blue, rose pink, yellow, turquoise and peach. Black and white are cleverly used to provide detail and emphasis.

The story is set out like a fairy tale, and is deceptively simple, but it has a much more complex theme concerning love and freedom. Love and freedom are interconnected and essential to each other; for example, 'You must free/give freedom to those you love, and if they truly love you, they will come back/return to you.'

This link between freedom and love is inspired by the famous quotation, 'If you love something set it free. If it comes back, it is yours. If it doesn't, it never was.' It is an anonymous quotation, but it was first written about by Jesse Lair in 1969 and is attributed by him to an anonymous exercise in one of his classes. However, some sources cite it as being far older than that.

All these elements mean that the book operates on different levels. It is an interactive picture book that will appeal to young children, but it is also a clever and carefully thought out story with deeper insights and gorgeous drawings that will appeal to the parent/carer reading it with the child. It is a beautiful book that will also make a lovely gift.

Some inside pages can be seen at [www.redcapcards.com/posts/shes-it-again-flyaway-lesley-barnes](http://www.redcapcards.com/posts/shes-it-again-flyaway-lesley-barnes) and at <https://jillrbennett.wordpress.com/tag/lesley-barnes/>.

**Andrea Rayner**

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## Information Books and Non-Fiction

### *One Day on our Blue Planet ... in the Antarctic*

Ella Bailey, London: Flying Eye, hb. 178 1 9092 6367 3, 2015, £11.99p, 32pp. [Suggested age range 3–7 with an adult companion.]

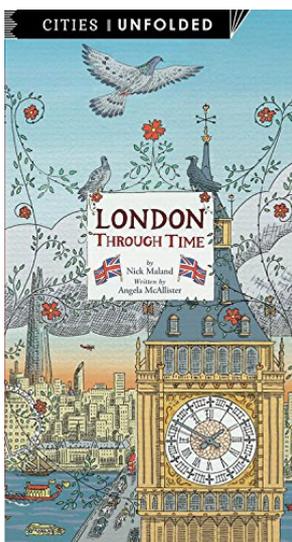
Following Ella Bailey's *Savannah*, this next in the series of animals and their habitats looks at Antarctica, introducing it through the story of an Adelie penguin chick. The scene is set with glorious endpapers introducing the other creatures of the region: the front is of life above the ice and the back of life under the ice, in the sea. The colour palette is restricted to blues, greys and blacks with the occasional splash of pink for squids, beaks and claws, creating a cold icy feel to the book. Each individual creature is distinctively drawn as it comes into contact with the Adelie penguin chick, and the life story is explored through the narrative of the journey. This is a beautiful introduction to the region and Ella Bailey is an exciting new talent to watch.

Some inside pages can be viewed at <http://flyingeyebbooks.com/shop/one-day-on-our-blue-planet-in-the-antarctic/>.

**Pam Dix**

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### ***London Through Time***

Angela McAllister, illus. Nick Maland, London: Frances Lincoln, hb. 978 1 8478 0689 5, £7.99, 2015, 16pp. [Suggested age range 6–9 years.]

This book consists of eight cardboard panels printed on both sides, each side relating to a dated phase in London's development and illustrated with a sparse accompanying text.

The episodes illustrated range from the Roman occupation in AD 50, through the medieval period of the Black Death, the advent of printing in 1500, the Great Fire of 1666, the luxury of the Georgian era, the wealth generated for the few by the Empire in 1865 contrasted with the poverty of the many, Victorian factories polluting the city, women demonstrating for the vote in 1905, the departure of troops for the Great War in 1914, the pandemonium of the Jazz Age, war again and the Blitz, the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, the swinging sixties and, eventually, the present day.

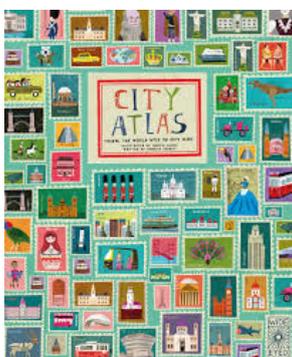
The illustrations (by which the book really stands or falls) are precise, detailed and evocative. They are printed in full colour. On the final panel a range of 15 objects is presented such as a paddle boat and a chimneysweep's brush. Children are invited to say to which epoch each of these objects belongs.

The book will prove helpful to children who find the textual study of history challenging, or who find that the study of history still too closely approximates the old-fashioned model where strings of monarchs and dates need to be memorised. It will prove helpful to teachers of Key Stage 1 history who value a visual introduction to their subject.

In a global world, however, this introduction is frankly and undisguisedly anglocentric, a limitation that later study of this history will have to address.

**Rebecca R. Butler**

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### ***City Atlas, Travel the World with 30 City Maps***

Georgia Cherry, illus. Martin Haake, London: Wide Eyed Editions, hb. 978 1 8478 0648 2, 2015, £20, 64pp. [Suggested age range 7–14.]

Following Wide Eyed's successful *Atlas of Adventure*, their new *City Atlas* is a highly original tour of a selection of 30 of the world's greatest cities. A beautiful object in itself with high production values, this book is in a large format with an exciting cover design reminiscent of stamp albums of the past. Core facts about each city (country, language, population and flag) are only the start for each exploration, which includes key landmarks and icons, and famous people, plus fun things to do and see with an emphasis on child-friendly activities. Each city mixes the iconic and the quirky, and has five hidden objects to seek, encouraging children to look more closely and really engage with the illustrations. Martin Haake has a distinctive illustration style and his visual representation of each city picks up on its essential geography in a simplified and easily understandable way. His illustrations are humorous and culturally specific. This style allows the book to be accessible in many ways and for many ages, and it will stimulate young readers' curiosity and excitement about the world, and for the youngest it provides plentiful opportunities for discussion with adults or older readers.

This is a fun way to learn and develop knowledge and understanding of the world, and will leave readers wanting to find out more. It would be easy to point to cities not included, so hopefully these will be in a possible second volume, and the book would benefit from a world map so that the cities could be easily located. But these aside, this is a wonderful way of finding out about what the publisher calls the 'personality' of each city.

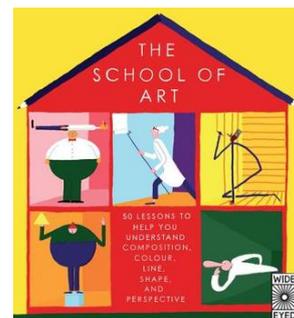
**Pam Dix**

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### ***The School of Art: Learn how to Make Great Art with 40 Simple Lessons***

Teal Triggs, illus. Daniel Frost, London: Wide Eyed Editions, hb. 978 1 8478 0700 7, 2015, £14.99p, 96pp. [Suggested age range 7–14.]

*The School of Art* is a unique approach to the concept of teaching the components of art to young people. Written by Teal Triggs, a professor at the Royal College of Art and illustrated by a former student, now a successful illustrator, Daniel Frost, the book creates five professors who teach about their specialisms to imaginary students, the readers of the book. These are the professors of Ideas, Form, Senses, Making and The Planet. Each is a quirky individual who explores their subject through a series of 40 lessons introduced with the lightest of touches and Frost's illustrations to demonstrate the concepts. Once the skills have been covered, then the approach by the professors is broader with an emphasis on collaboration and experimentation. This is a novel approach and one that will really benefit the non-specialist primary teacher exploring art with their students or a parent with a budding-artist child. Another large format, stylish book from Wide Eyed.



**Pam Dix**

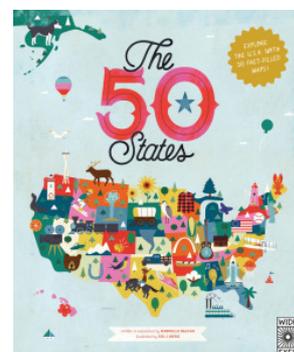
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### ***The 50 States***

Gabrielle Balka, Illus. Sol Linero, London: Wide Eyed Editions, hb. 978 1 8478 0711 3, 2015, £20.00, 112pp. [Suggested age range 8–12.]

*The 50 States* is yet another book from the Wide Eyed Editions' large format (34.5mm × 28.5 mm) factual gift-book series.

At the front of the book there is a map of the USA with the states shown in situ. This also acts as a contents page. It is followed by an introduction that explains how the book works and shows the reader how to use it. Then the 50 states are organised alphabetically, each covering a double-page spread. A list of presidents comes after the last state, followed by the index and some key references and further reading. Finally, at the back of the book are the state flags.



Each entry for the individual states contains a Welcome Box, which introduces the reader to the state and tells them a little bit about it. This background information is carefully selected to give the reader an idea of the character of the state.

Next to this is a Moments to Remember box with notable events in it. These are not just historical events but significant dates that shape the identity of the state, such as sporting events, inventions and commerce.

Below the Welcome Box is the Key Facts box. This contains 12 facts: the capital, the three largest cities, the state bird, what the state is named after, its statehood date, its statehood order, its flower, its postal code, its region, the main time zone, its tree and its motto. These short and succinct facts give the reader a quick overall profile of the state. As well as the information boxes, there are six inspiring people who have a strong connection with the state, and a selection of state icons that illustrate the state's famous people, places and history. Finally there are spotlight bubbles that are designed to enable the reader to find out more about particular places in the state.

The text is full of interesting detail and useful information. However, it does not overload the reader with too much information. The illustrations are clear and attractive, and the maps are pictorial rather than following a cartography scale as they are designed to 'tell the story' of the state rather than present dry facts.

*The 50 States* is a very helpful book for young readers (or indeed anyone) studying or interested in the USA. It is extremely accessible and engaging, and has been cleverly designed to inform and delight in the most enjoyable way.

Some inside pages can be seen at [www.gabriellebalkan.com/the50states](http://www.gabriellebalkan.com/the50states) and at <https://rhapsodyinbooks.wordpress.com/2015/10/25/review-of-the-50-states-by-gabrielle-balkan/>.

**Andrea Rayner**

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### ***The Wonder Garden***

Jenny Brown, Illus. Kristjana S. Williams, London: Wide Eyed Editions, hb. 978 1 8478 0 647 5; 2015, £20.00, 48pp. [Suggested age range 7–10.]

*The Wonder Garden* is a beautifully presented large format (34.5 × 28.5 cm) non-fiction book looking at a selection of global habitats. These include rainforest, reef, desert, forest and mountains. It covers the Chihuahuan desert, the Amazon rainforest, the Black Forest, the Himalayan mountains and the Great Barrier Reef.

Each area is covered by a chapter, and each chapter breaks down into eight pages. These pages contain a visual cornucopia of flora and fauna relevant to the area. The very short text is in the form of an introduction and five short and subtly designed fact boxes. After this are four pages giving the reader information about the animals who inhabit this particular ecosystem. The pages contain a very brief introduction to the animals, who are numbered and accompanied by a paragraph of information that identifies and describes them. At the end of the book, there is a two-page index, as well as a very short section recommending appropriate websites and books.

On the cover, the illustration is visually intricate, with additional gilt detail. Inside the book, the illustrator has created a bold and innovative look that is very much in keeping with Wide Eyed Editions' large format gift-book series.

*The Wonder Garden* uses a very unusual illustrative style for a factual book. It consists of a plethora of visual elements that seem almost to hover above or float on an unreal or 'fantastical' background. These elements give the illustrations a magical feel and are reminiscent of Victorian *découpage*. However, in opposition to this, the animals are carefully represented. These illustrations show a nostalgia for botanical and biological drawings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Another contrast is the disparity or lack of realism in sizing or scale, which gives the book a sense of the fantastical. An example of this, is the huge mushrooms on the title pages of 'The Black Forest' chapter, which are drawn hundreds of times bigger than their actual size and are indeed larger than the foxes, badgers and deer represented there. This gives the illustration a dreamlike quality and could easily be a visual reference to the way size is distorted in *Alice in Wonderland*.

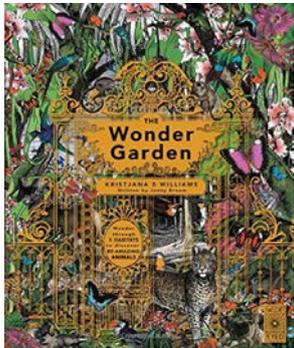
In terms of the colour palette of the illustrations, reds, greens and yellows dominate. The way the animals interact with an elaborate background of plants and other natural elements creates an atmosphere of exoticism and danger similar to that in Henri Rousseau's painting *Tiger in a Tropical Storm* (1891).

Unusually for this type of book, text is minimal. This is because the aim of the book is to impart information in a fun and accessible way. The illustrations dominate. There are a lot of illustrations that identify the animals but there is very little text, and the illustrations' clever backgrounds are designed to inspire inventiveness rather than instil information.

Finally, there is a sense both of spectacle and the spectacular in the book, and the limited text and copious visual details invite the reader to explore and enjoy it. It is not just a book that imparts information but one that also encourages the reader to imagine and create.

**Andrea Rayner**

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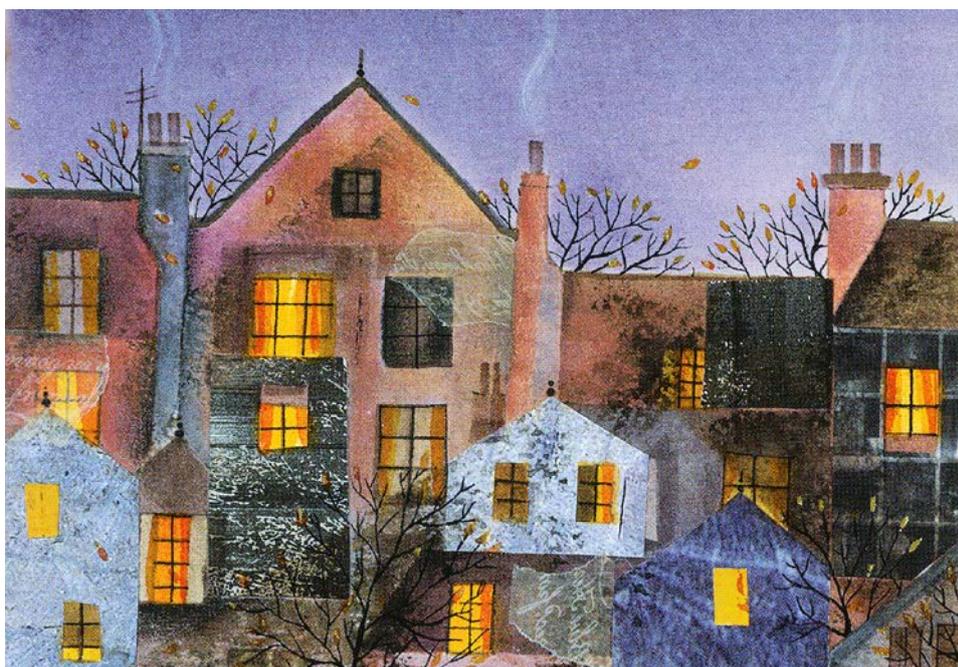
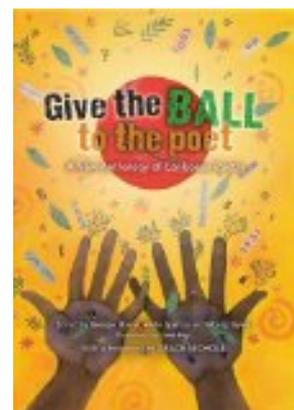


## Poetry

### ***Give the Ball to the Poet: A New Anthology of Caribbean Poetry***

Georgie Horrell, Aisha Spencer and Morag Styles (ed), illus. Jane Ray, London: Commonwealth Education Trust, pb. 978 1 9099 3100 8, 2012, £9.99, 128pp. [Suggested age range 11–16.]

The title refers to the opening section of two poems that were commissioned, as the book was published in time for the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games. I opened the book with excitement, only to be horrified as the small font used for the poems and a background that made the white text hard to read. Why do publishers give lip service to accessibility but don't carry it out? In this case there is plenty of space on the page for a larger font and no need for the excessive line spacing. See the first poem's page shown here in the margin. Part of my excitement was that the book is illustrated by Jane Ray. The illustration below is for Mervyn Morris's (Jamaica) 'Montage' that starts 'England, autumn, dusk ...', which it so evocatively describes.

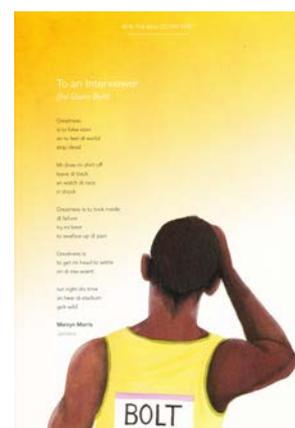


From 'Montage'. Illustration © 2014 Jane Ray. Reproduce courtesy Jane Ray.

The book is structured in sections. After the first section with the two commissioned poems, the other sections are:

Di Stadium Go Wild  
I Must Share These With You  
Rap 'n' Roll  
Running Wild  
Family Matters  
Seasons of the Heart  
The Only Thing Far Away  
Until

With 90 poems by 48 poets, I can pick only a few to give you a flavour! Many of the poets are well known in the UK: Grace Nichols (who has written the Foreword), John Agard, James Berry, Valerie Bloom, Kamau Brathwaite, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Kei Miller, Dorothea Smartt, Derek Walcott, Benjamin Zephaniah, ..., but others less so. There is a mix of Creole and Standard English and a glossary of Creole words and phrases at the back. A list of the poets' origins is also long: the islands (including those not in the West Indies cluster), also Cuba, Ghana and the UK. I leave you to guess from which section I have chosen my examples. My choices are from poets with which I am not familiar in the hope that they whet your appetite too.



Linda M. Deans' poem 'JoJo Johnson (Chant for a Cricket Hero)' reminds us of the importance of cricket in the West Indies. Her roots are given as UK/Barbados. Here is the first verse:

Five feet high  
they call him a giant  
I wonder why

with the chant 'JoJo Johnson' before each verse. In the bottom right and flowing into the page opposite is a group shown from behind, holding up their hands in acclamation at a stadium match. The lovely bright colours of their clothing seem to indicate their enjoyment and excitement.

Fredrick Williams from the UK has a poem in Creole. Here is the second verse from an excerpt from the longer poem 'Me Memba Wen':

When we go all a wood bush, we roast  
Breadfruit an eat wid pear,  
We eat guava, tinken toe, jimilin,  
Sweet cup, custard apple,  
Grapefruit, jack fruit, tamarind,  
Den we boil jackfruit seed ina black pan.  
Bwoy dem da days use to sweet.

The background is shades of yellow containing bees at various angles and honeycombs of all sizes. The bees are flying round the text.

Is this a rap or a roll? (See the section title.) A verse from 'Modern Poetry' by Jamaican Babra Zencraft:

A poem's a poem, man  
keeping in time,  
With modern poetry, man  
You don't have to rhyme!

Three butterflies with handwriting on their wings curve round on the right and below the words.

An excerpt from 'Dreamer' by Jamaican Jean Binta Breeze doesn't describe someone 'Running Wild' – the title for the section! However, it is very descriptive of a dreamer. The illustration of a girl with her eyes shut almost eclipses the poem as it is so stunning.

roun a rocky corner  
by de sea  
seat up  
pon a drif wood  
yuh can fine she  
gazin cross de water ...

and you will have to buy the book to read the rest!

Apart from my grumbles at the beginning of this review, this is a magnificent book. It will calm your nerves, get you worked up and thrill you – depending on which page you are viewing. I say 'page' as the poems would not have the same effects without the illustrations.

*Carousel*, March 2015 has an [article](#) on the production of this book. The book was shortlisted for the 2015 CLIPPA (CLPE Children's Poetry Award). If illustration had been the major factor, this book would surely have won!

A performance by a school group of 'Still Hip-Dad Looks Back' is at [www.poetryline.org.uk/resources](http://www.poetryline.org.uk/resources).

### ***I Wish I Had a Pirate Hat***

Roger Stevens, illus. Lorna Scobie, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books (Janetta Otter-Barry Books), pb. 978 1 8478 0618 5, 2015, £6.99, 80pp. [Age range 5–8.]

This book is one of the 2015 issues in Janetta Otter-Barry's affordable poetry series for young readers. Roger Stevens has written many poetry books and stories for children. He runs the children's poetry website [The Poetry Zone](http://ThePoetryZone.com), where aspiring young poets can send him their own pirate poems.

As with the rest of the series, the book is small (198 mm × 129 mm) and so easily portable. The illustrations are black and white; they dart about the page, dodging the text, and adding to the feeling of fun or sadness as appropriate. These dragons are not very fierce – the poem being titled 'Pictures of Dragons'.

We made paper dragons  
We painted on the big paper sheets  
with dragon colours  
green scale paint  
and big splodges of red fire paint ...

So a pity the illustrations are not in colour. However the poem will surely inspire the reader to draw his/her own colourful dragons. The author adds under the poem: 'I wonder if you could draw a picture of a more terrifying dragon than these?'

The book is divided into three sections: Fun Time, School Time and Home Time.

'Pictures of Dragons' quoted above is in School Time. There are lots of other imaginative poems in this section, including those titled 'Is the Moon Made of Cheese?', 'Birds Flying South' and 'Being Sad'.

The title poem 'I Wish I Had a Pirate Hat' in Fun Time is for chanting – with its repetitive lines:

I wish I had a pirate hat  
a pirate hat  
a pirate hat, a pirate hat  
like my mate Jack's  
pirate hat  
...

with slightly different phrases repeated in each verse.

The Home Time section has the inevitable 'Monsters', also poems on eating and drinking, a rabbit, cat and spider, and bedtime 'Good night, Mister Moon' – my favourite.

Good night Mister Moon  
Lighting up the sky  
Night time has come  
Now it's just you and I  
  
You sail like a ship  
In an ocean of stars  
Passing comets and satellites  
Venus and Mars  
  
Over lions in Africa  
Crossing the seas  
Above temples in India  
And tall redwood trees  
...

I shall have peaceful dreams of exotic places as I go to sleep after reading this poem.



I worry whether this series of cheaply produced poetry books will attract buyers – children or adults – with their rather drab pages and black-and-white illustrations. The covers, however, are very attractive. I hope I am wrong. I have every book in the series and often reread them and choose one for my ongoing poem learning by heart.

**Jennifer Harding**

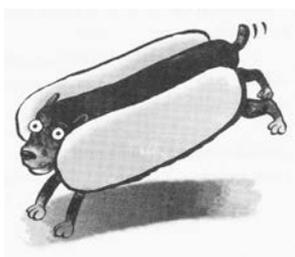
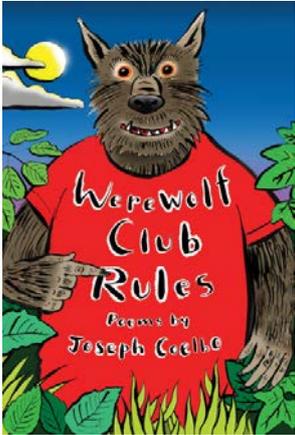
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### ***Werewolf Club Rules***

Joseph Coelho, illus. John O’Leary, London: Frances Lincoln Children’s Books (Janetta Otter-Barry Books), pb. 978 1 8478 0452 5, 2014, £6.99, 96pp. [Age range 8–10.]

This book is one of the 2014 issues in Janetta Otter-Barry’s cheaply produced poetry series that include a debut author each year, Joseph Coelho being that year’s choice. He is primarily known as a storyteller and that reflects very much in these poems. To see him perform two poems from this book, look at the website <http://joseph-coelho.com/video/> and search YouTube with ‘Joseph Coelho’.

The book is on recycled paper and, as with the rest of the series, is small (198 mm × 129 mm) and so easily portable. The illustrations are black and white as per this series. I didn’t find the illustrations very inspiring – they just seemed to follow the poem without adding much to it. However, I couldn’t help laughing at the illustration of ‘Hotdogs’.



The book has 49 poems with plenty of variety. Quite a few are to do with school, so I am surprised to see that it is the winner of the 2015 CLIPPA (CLPE Children’s Poetry Award). Not because I dislike the poems, quite the opposite, but the chair of the judges is quoted as saying that one of the criteria for the shortlist was not to have ‘tired theme[s] (dragons or teachers)’. However, the school/teacher poems in this book are dead on, so perhaps the chair considered his criterion of ‘truly original or innovative’ as more important (*Books for Keeps* 213, p.14). I was also surprised at the use of ‘Miss’ in some poems as surely pupils of 8–10 nowadays use Miss/Mrs with the surname? This use made these poems sound a bit old-fashioned. Some of these poems have a slight educational edge as in ‘Wool’:

The wool of your jumper,  
the leather of your shoe,  
were all much happier  
before skinned and put on you.

And ‘Prove it’, with its first and last verses:

‘Water’s got skin,’ I said.  
‘Prove it,’ suggested Miss Irwin.  
‘Come here and look,’ I said.  
‘Prove it,’ challenged Miss Irwin.

Miss Irwin gave a smile,  
impressed by my questions,  
then gave an incredible lesson  
about a thing called water tension.

‘Hampster! Hampster!’ is another poem of the classroom that starts:

Awwwww, he is soooooo deliciously cute

but then

he BIT ME

changes the narrator’s tune to

he is soooooo perfectly horrid.

You can hear the storyteller performing here.

Other poems play on words as in 'Aardvark'. Here is the first verse:

I know an aardvark  
He works in a prison  
as a guardvark.

All the poems enter a child's imagination and inventiveness. Here are two verses from 'I am a writer':

I am the clash and collide of the stars  
because I create worlds.

...

I am the blade in the sharpener  
because I make nibs vanish.

I will just choose one more as I can't resist showing you the variety in this very imaginative book. Do you remember:

If all the world were paper  
And all the sea were ink,  
If all the trees were bread and cheese  
What would we do for drink?

Well, here is the first verse of Joseph Coelho's version. You can see him performing this at <http://joseph-coelho.com/video/>. You may find this poem hard to scan if you just read it, so give it a telling with actions.

If all the world were paper  
I would fold up my gran  
and take her everywhere I go.  
I would laminate my baby sister in bubble wrap  
and lay her to sleep in unbound fairy-tale book pages.  
And should she get scared,  
rip up every fear,  
shred every scream,  
tear by tear.

I have thoroughly enjoyed this book. It contains not just catchy, easy rhymes of events we all experience or have experienced, but has poems that shock you by moving suddenly to something unpredictable, and ideas that pull you up sharply and give food for thought. A pity the illustrations are not more telling. A book that was shortlisted this year and in the same Janetta Otter-Barry poetry series, Rachel Rooney's *My Life as a Goldfish and Other Poems*, illustrated by Ellie Jenkins, shows that imaginative illustrations without colour and on recycled rather rough paper can be achieved. See my review of this book in *IBBYLink* 42, Spring 2015.

Performances by the winning school groups of the Shadowing Scheme of some of the poems at the award ceremony can be viewed at [www.poetryline.org.uk/teaching-sequences/werewolf-club-rules-1202](http://www.poetryline.org.uk/teaching-sequences/werewolf-club-rules-1202).

**Jennifer Harding**

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The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 46, Summer 2016 (copydate 31 March 2016), and will be on the subject of refugees.

Articles on other subjects are also welcomed. Contributions to Ferelith Hordon: fhordon@aol.com.

If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for *IBBYLink*, contact Judith Philo: jphilo@waitrose.com. New reviewers are always welcome.

#### **Titles for Review**

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* should send them to Judith Philo at 194 Tufnell Park Road, London N7 0EE; jphilo@waitrose.com.

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