

## The Baltic States

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An advertisement for the Bikibuks numbers 67 to 72. See the article on page 13.

## EDITORIAL

It is all too easy to concentrate on our own publishing world; it is so rich and has a long history. However, it is exciting and salutary – indeed imperative – to move beyond these shores to discover what other countries can offer. Next year the London Book Fair will feature the Baltic countries – Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – as the market focus. What better than for us to look east as well in this issue of *IBBYLink*. They are all members of the IBBY family and engaged in the creation of books – imaginative, lively, interesting books.

Sadly many of us will have little acquaintance with these three countries, hidden for so many years behind the Iron Curtain. Perhaps we will have joined detective Kurt Wallander as he travels to Riga in pursuit of a case, or maybe we remember that one of the characters in Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* travels to Vilnius. These are border countries in our minds.

What preconceptions! Here we are introduced to three countries all with their own histories as well as shared experiences. Their publishing scenes are vibrant and active, looking both out and in as we quickly realise from our contributors. Estonia can offer an inspiring Children's Literature Centre, a hub for books and activities, while Lithuania has *Rubinaitis*, a quarterly journal providing information on children's literature to a wide audience, and Latvia has the Children and Young

Adult Jury, successfully promoting children's literature. Then there are the Bikubuks. These are miniature books all illustrated by well-established Latvian artists and featuring – poetry! Santa Remere describes the vision that has led to this innovative project.

History is always important and its exploration can turn a spotlight on corners that will come as a surprise. The collaboration between V. Geetha and Giedrė Jankevičiūtė to uncover a little known aspect in the publishing history of Lithuanian picture books is fascinating. Who could have imagined a connection between the Baltic and India? And through what agency? Surely this provides much food for thought and the possibility of identifying other such journeys.

Because books travel, and so do authors. Ruth Sepetys may live in the United States but she is Lithuanian – and this is a connection that is reflected in her novels, though she herself is an example of the diasporas that are such a feature of world history. And, here again, her interest, as she herself tells us, her responsibility in fact, is to tell the stories that are on the borders of history; hidden histories that have been lurking behind the Iron Curtain of received narrative.

Welcome to centre stage, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – the Baltic countries.

**Ferelith Hordon**



Illustration by Estonian artist Catherine Zarip. Text by Aino Pervik. *Rändav Kassiemme* [The Wandering Cat], Tallinn: Tammerraamat, 2012.

**1. Could you tell us a bit about the publishing scene in Estonia, especially for young people. What is the size of the market? How many children's publishers and how many books are published each year? Do you publish many books in translation (what percentage), i.e. from the UK/USA or other countries? Is there a popular genre and what ages do publishers target – early years, young readers, middle grade, young adult?**

With its population of 1.3 million Estonia is indeed small, but it has one of the world's highest annual statistics of children's books published per capita. In 2016, 3,794 books in Estonian were published in the country. Works were published by 833 publishers, although the majority of these (68.8%) published only one work. Children's literature was published by 78 publishers, less than half of these (35) published only one work. Twenty-eight publishers published 2–10 titles and 10 publishers put out 11–50 titles. Five publishers published more than 50 titles a year. Based on the number of titles, the largest publishing house is Egmont Estonia, primarily a publisher of film and activity books, which published nearly 150 children's books last year, mainly translations. The greater part of the publishing companies are not specialised, but publish school textbooks and workbooks, books intended for adults or reference literature, in addition to children's literature. The majority of Estonia's larger publishing houses also concern themselves with children's literature. There are a few publishers who publish only children's literature.

In 2016, 778 children's books were published in Estonia, nearly half of which consisted of works of popular science for children and activity books. Nearly 30% of the fiction intended for children is made up of original works, and a little more than 70% are translations. About half of translated works are translations from English, with American and British literature being translated in almost equal amounts. From American literature, many teenage books by John Green, Kathleen Glasgow and Neal Shusterman are translated, in addition to commercial fiction. From British literature, more children's books by David Walliams, Francis Hardinge and Wendy Meddour are translated into Estonian than by other British authors. The second largest group consists of translations from the Scandinavian countries – in particular, we see many books by Swedish authors (Martin Widmark, Åsa Larsson, Ingela Korsell and Katarina Mazetti) and Finnish authors (Mauri Kunnas, Timo Parvela, Tiina and Sinikka Nopola) published. Of the other European languages, the most well represented are German, French and Dutch. Children's books from our southern (Latvian and Lithuanian) and eastern neighbours (Russia) are relatively little translated. The majority of the works published – 67% last year – are aimed at young children. Some 26% of the children's books published were intended for ages 8–12. Only 7% of the total number of works published were intended for teenagers (13+).

**2. Historical influences. So little is known here about the Baltic States that to learn about the links with Scandinavia, Sweden and Germany that have created a distinctive Estonian voice, and, of course, the Soviet influence, which form part of your heritage, would be very interesting and enlightening.**

The foundation of Estonian children's literature is folklore, but it was mainly German textbooks and applied literature with enlightening content (ABCs, spiritual texts, etc.) which played the most important role at the birth of Estonian children's literature in the middle of the nineteenth century. The nascent Estonian intelligentsia knew at least three of the local languages (Estonian, Russian and German), which naturally brought a

larger influence from these cultures into our children's literature. The Republic of Estonia, born in 1918, created conditions for the integration of these influences and the finding of itself. Our children's literature burst into bloom.

The Second World War and the Soviet occupation brought considerable changes. Some children's authors fled from their homeland to Sweden, Canada or elsewhere, others were deported to Siberia. Those who remained in the homeland had strict exhortations to write as the authorities required. Children's authors were able to hide in fantasy literature, and this strengthened the fantasy-literature genre in our children's literature. Estonia's independence was restored in 1991, and the changed circumstances brought the publishing system into disarray. At first fewer books were published, but the world, which had expanded, was soon accommodated. Noticeably more influences from Europe and the English-speaking world reached Estonia. If German and Russian influences were more clearly evident in earlier years, then today contemporary children's literature is more likely to be influenced by the Nordic countries. But regardless of the origin of the influences, Estonians – having been at the meeting place of different cultures over centuries – have always been able to take the best from each culture and transform it into a natural part of their own culture.

### **3. Reading promotion activities. How do you reach your markets, reading challenges/initiatives, booklists, book fairs, school provision, public libraries? I understand you have a wonderful cultural institution – we should love to hear about it.**

In Estonia, the publicly funded Estonian Children's Literature Centre (ECLC) sits at the core of children's literature and children's reading. The Centre collects, preserves and mediates children's and youth literature for all enthusiasts as part of Estonia's cultural heritage meant for use towards research, education and entertainment. On the ECLC's initiative, all Estonian babies receive their first very own book, which contains classic Estonian children's literature and the best examples of our authors' recent works.



At the Centre children are welcome to visit the library with its rich collection and take part in various activities relating to children's literature. Seminars and courses are held for adults – for parents, teachers at nursery schools and schools, librarians and university students. Here, one can find information about Estonian children's literature as well as about children's literature from around the world. The creators of children's literature – authors, artists and publishers – are indeed frequent visitors to the ECLC. The ECLC also recommends and promotes their works abroad, participating in

international book fairs (Bologna, Frankfurt, London, etc.), among other activities. The ECLC compiles a list of recommended newly published children's books, which is actively used by teachers as well as librarians. Recommended books are marked with stickers at two of Estonia's larger bookshop chains. In order to bring forward the best literature, a monthly book review (*Kuu raamat*) and the web publication *The Children's Literature Observer* (*Lastekirjanduse Uudistaja*) are published on the ECLC's webpages once a month.

The ECLC is also a centre for research of children's literature, with a working group of researchers from all over the country. So far, the group's cooperation has resulted in a collection of articles *Estonian Children's Literature 1991–2012* (*Eesti lastekirjandus 1991–2012*, 2014), *The Dictionary of Children's Literature* (*Lastekirjanduse sõnastik*, 2006), and six issues of *Transactions of the ECLC* (*Eesti Lastekirjanduse Keskuse toimetised*, 2004–2015).

Public libraries and schools across the country as well as voluntary organisations (the Estonian Section of IBBY and the Estonian Reading Association) work in close cooperation with the ECLC. Both international important events (International Children's Book Day) as well as local notable days are jointly celebrated. One of the most important of these is the Mother Tongue Day on 14 March, when children's authors, illustrators and literary researchers are welcome guests at children's educational institutions and libraries. On the Read Aloud Day on 20 October, children as well as adults are encouraged to read books aloud to each other.

There are more than ten children's literature awards in Estonia. The most significant of these are the Cultural Endowment of Estonia's annual children's literature award for best original children's book; the Nukits competition award, which is bestowed on the best author and illustrator; the Karl Eduard Sööt Children's Poetry Award, and the Tower of Babel Honour Diploma for best translation. Illustrators, researchers and advocates of children's literature have their own acknowledgements.

#### **4. What do you feel is special about Estonia? What makes you particularly proud?**

Now, when Estonia has been independent for a quarter of a century in succession, our children's literature is outstanding. Estonian children's literature is characterised by an abundance of imagination, colourful characters and the philosophical content of the text. Fantasy books are often also closely connected to the problems hidden in contemporary life: e.g. children's loneliness, the search for one's identity, and relationships to parents and friends. As far as appearance is concerned, Estonian children's books are also of a high standard; they are illustrated by professional and distinctive book artists (Catherine Zarip, Ulla Saar, Regina Lukk-Toompere, etc.).

Estonian children's literature is like a well-kept secret, which has begun to be discovered and translated into other languages only in recent years. The countries to which one work has reached swiftly have other works translated as well. In 2015, 17 Estonian children's books by seven authors (Mika Keränen, Aino Pervik, Eno Raud, Kertu Sillaste, Kätlin Vainola, Andrus Kivirähk and Piret Raud) were published outside the homeland. German, French, Polish and Latvian were among the most common target languages.

The most translated author of children's literature as well as Estonian literature as a whole is Piret Raud (b. 1971), who illustrates her own works. Raud's work has won many Estonian awards and sits enthroned at the top of charts over most-sold and borrowed books. Her work is characterised by unique features that combine reality and fantasy in a captivating manner. Outside Estonia, most of her books have been published by the French publishing house Rouergue (six books).

Children’s books by Andrus Kivirähk (b. 1970), one of Estonia’s most beloved novelists, playwright, radio host and columnist, are also much translated. Kivirähk is a multi-talented individual who is gifted and successful in many areas – children’s literature is but one of them. Kivirähk’s children’s literature is characterised by abundant fantasy and a unique sense of humour, which form a fascinating whole, together with a fast-moving plot. Kivirähk has continuously been praised by critics and children alike.

[Jaanika Palm (b. 1973) is a children’s literature scholar in the ECLC. She is also the coordinator of the Children’s Literature Research Group. She graduated from Tartu University in 1998 with a BA in Estonian philology. She did her MA in 2010 on Estonian children’s literature’s criticism and theory up to 1940. She is one of the co-authors of *The Dictionary of Children’s Literature* (2006) and the review *Estonian Children’s Literature in 1991–2012* (2014). She has published several articles and reviews on children’s literature in Estonia in international culture newspapers and magazines, and participated in several literary conferences and seminars in Estonia and abroad (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Iceland, Great Britain, etc.).]

**Article translated by Laura Neill.**

## Children’s Literature in Latvia

*Ilze Stikāne*

### 1. The publishing scene for young people in Latvia.

In recent years 10–12 publishing houses have published some children’s literature every year.

Around 17–20% of the published books are aimed at children. These include fiction and informative literature.

#### Number of titles and copies for children and young adults published each year

Year	Number of titles	Number of copies
2013	385	853,876
2014	361	744,106
2015	438	957,992
2016	409	767,426

Approximately 30–40% of the published books each year are translations: in 2016, 175 titles (from 409, i.e. 42.7%); in 2015, 128 titles (from 438, i.e. 29.2%).

Most are translated from English (UK/USA/Canada). In 2016, 59.43% and 54% in 2015. Other translations were mainly from the following countries (2016, 2015):

Sweden (7.43% and 10.16% );	Norway (0.57% and 0.78%):
Germany (6.86% and 11.72%):	Czech Republic (1.56% in 2015):
France (1.71% and 7%):	Hungary (1.56% in 2015):
Italy (5.14% and 2,34%);	Denmark (0.78% in 2015):
Russia (4% and 2,34%);	Ireland (0.57% in 2016):
Finland (1.71% and 3.91%);	Poland (0.57% in 2016):
Lithuania (2.86% and 0.78%):	Bulgaria (0.57% in 2016):
Estonia (1.14% and 1.56%):	Iceland (0.57% in 2016):
Spain (2.86% in 2016):	Greece (0.57% in 2016):
Ukraine (1.14% and 0.78%):	Uruguay (0.57% in 2016).
The Netherlands (0.57 and 0.78%):	

In recent years the number of picture books has grown significantly, both original Latvian and translated picture books.

About 50% of new original Latvian children's literature are fairy tales, fantasy and science fiction for young, middle-grade and young-adult readers. We have very few stories and novels depicting real life. This deficiency is compensated by many good translations.

The prosperity enjoyed by fantasy and science-fiction literature over the last five or six years in Latvian literature had become a widely discussed phenomenon. At present, 2013–2017, the number of Latvian original fantasy and science-fiction books continues to grow – altogether 29 works have been published, targeting a wide audience, from teenagers to adults.

Poetry for children is one of the basic types of Latvian children's literature, both in the past and nowadays. In all times, writers for children have found poetic means appropriate for revealing the beauty, variety and complexity of the world.

## **2. Insight in the history of Latvian children's literature.**

In Latvia up until the middle of the nineteenth century, German publishers dominated. The publishing of books for children in Latvian became more popular only in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and before the First World War several publishing houses were established.

Latvia is one of the three Baltic countries and shares its historic fate with Estonia and Lithuania. During the inter-war period in the 1920s and 1930s all three Baltic nations had established independent states that both intellectually and physically belonged to Europe. The cultural and educational level of the Baltic States corresponded fully to European standards – in 1935 the number of literate people in the towns of Latvia had reached 94.06%, in the countryside, 85.02% and on average in Latvia the number of literate people was 88.85%. (Salnītis and Skujenieks, 1938, p.98). Book printing was a flourishing industry.

The movement of establishing libraries in the territory of Latvia started as part of the national awakening in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the 1920s and 1930s libraries functioned in all kinds of educational institutions: folk schools, vocational schools, secondary schools and universities.

The Soviet occupation and the Second World War put an end to the prosperity of the Baltic States. After the agreement signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union about the zones of influence, Soviet troops entered the Baltic countries in June of 1940, and all three countries, under the pressure of the military power, joined the Soviet Union. The official Soviet claim was that the Baltic peoples 'voluntarily' consented to their incorporation into the USSR, and this became the legal basis for nearly five decades of Soviet rule (O'Connor, 2003, p.116).

The level of life in the Baltic countries during the years of Soviet rule decreased considerably. The economic system was strictly controlled by the state and turned out to be ineffectual. Shops lacked goods that were needed both for people's physical and intellectual existence. Books, too, were difficult to purchase. There functioned only state-run printing houses and their number was small. In 1980s five publishing houses functioned in Latvia.

Although the Soviet power implemented the policy of Russification, the Baltic nations made every effort to protect their national identity, language and culture. Culture became a collective form of resistance of the three small nations against the endeavours to dissolve their identity into the Soviet nation and culture dominated by the Russian people. The intelligentsia, including writers, took an important place in the public protests and frequently became figures of cult in the Baltic countries (Kestere and Stikāne, 2015, pp.47–50).

After the restoration of independence in 1991, the publishing sector was the first to be privatised. New publishing houses were founded, and the number of new titles has increased annually.

### **3. Reading promotion activities.**

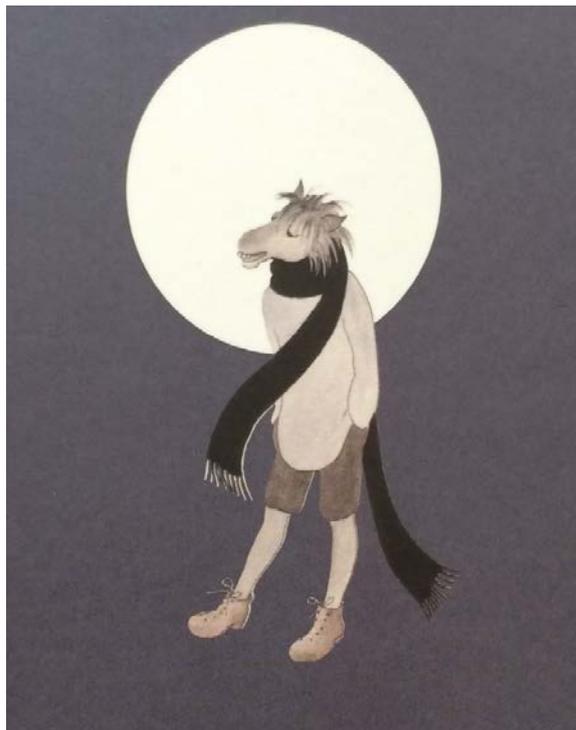
The most important reading promotion programme in Latvia is the Children's and Young Adult Jury. It is a successful programme that purposefully consolidates government and municipally financial support for reading promotion.

Since 2001 when the Children's and Young Adult Jury was created and implemented by the Children's Literature Centre of the National Library of Latvia, the improvement in children's literacy and the development of children's literature in Latvia has been substantial. In the last five years this initiative has attracted 17,000–20,000 participants every year in Latvia and in Latvian community centres in other countries. The best and most exciting books are distributed to up to 700 libraries and Latvian centres abroad. The programme works according to simple, easy-to-understand principles – step by step involving its participants into reading, discussing and evaluating different books that develop their critical thinking, together with reading and writing skills. Every year professional experts choose the best books by Latvian authors and translations, and include these books in the collections of the programme for four age groups: 5+, 9+, 11+ and 15+. The participants have to read 6–7 books intended for their particular age group and give their evaluation, putting them in first, second and third place (Cielēna, 2015, pp.4, 40).

### **4. Some special persons and characters in Latvian children's literature.**

Both during the Soviet period and the 26 years of independence, poetry has been the genre of Latvian children's literature, with the many published books and the richest content. Poetry also produced the most courageous and innovative books.

The giant of Latvian poetry Ojārs Vāciētis (1933–1983) excelled in this particular genre, rising high above the limitations and restrictions of the Soviet time in which he lived, and inventing striking and inimitable modes of expression. From his poetry numerous unique characters have emerged, one of the most striking is the mysterious horse that sings at night, the symbol of freedom of a creative soul.



**A horse that sings at night, illustration by Laima Eglīte.**

One of the poets who continued the traditions of folklore and classical poetry in revealing the closeness and ties between man and nature was Jānis Baltvilks (1944–2003). His contribution is some 30 children’s books of poems, prose and non-fiction. The author’s live contact with readers and his collaboration with schools and libraries consolidated his image among readers. His family name ‘Baltais vilks’ – ‘White Wolf’ – has become a sort of totem in Latvian children’s literature. To preserve the outstanding poet’s memory and to promote children’s literature, the Baltic Sea Region Jānis Baltvilks International Prize in Children’s Literature and Book Art has been established (in 2005). Winners are now announced on 24 July, the birthday of the poet, and prizes are awarded to a writer, an illustrator, and a foreign writer and their translator of the work into Latvian.



## JĀŅA BALTVILKA BALVA

Logo of the Jānis Baltvilks prize, designed by illustrator Anita Paegle.

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- [Ilze Stikāne studied philology at the University of Latvia and holds a PhD in Latvian literature. She is a professor at the Faculty of Education, Psychology and Art of the University of Latvia. Her academic interests include history and the actual process of children's and youth literature, and the history of Latvian literature. She is the author of one monograph, numerous articles and ten textbooks in literature for grades 4–9. Since 2003 she has been president of the Latvian Section of IBBY, and since 2008 the member of the Latvian Section of the International Literacy Association (ILA).]

# Children's Literature in Lithuania

*Kęstutis Urba*

**1. Could you tell us a bit about the publishing scene in Lithuania, especially for young people. What is the size of the market? How many children's publishers and how many books are published each year? Do you publish many books in translation (what percentage), i.e. from the UK/USA or other countries? Is there a popular genre and what ages do publishers target: early years, young readers, middle grade, young adult?**

I suppose it is worth mentioning that we are a nation of three million. This helps putting facts and figures about publishing for children and young readers in perspective. I guess you will be surprised to learn that there are nearly 50 publishers working in this line of business. However, some of them publish just a few titles a year or don't publish anything some years. So the bulk of production comes from three or five publishers. Most of them publish for adults as well, but there is one publishing house that has focused on children's literature for nearly 15 years and managed to be particularly demanding about the quality of the text and illustrations.

There are new publishers which have plans to focus only on children's literature. The number of titles and copies varies, depending on the economic situation of the country. Recent years have seen the situation settle down to around 600 titles. Nearly half of them are for the smallest audience, mostly preschool or primary grades. This trend is easy to explain. The books are fairly thin, and young parents feel an obligation to invest in their offspring and are a fairly active customer base. It is disheartening, however, that quite a few of those books are not good. You wouldn't admire them for their artistic or pedagogic value. Lithuanian writers and artists account for almost 35% of all titles, which include reprints.

We have nearly 100 new books by Lithuanian authors published annually. Some of them are published by amateurs, the remaining come from professional authors. As a country we are big in translations for children. Around 75% of all books are translations from other languages. After 1990, when we regained our independence, we translated many classic books that were not accessible to our readers before. Authors include Alcott, Burnett, Montgomery, Porter, Rowling, Preusler, Krüss and others. These days we have many translations from contemporary authors, particularly for young readers. Some of them are purely commercial publications, but a significant portion of them are books of value. Our publishers started taking an interest in publications that have received Hans Christian Andersen or Astrid Lindgren awards. Newbery or Carnegie medals ring a bell too. Of course, most books are translated from the English language and predominantly come from UK or USA authors. However, Lithuanians have a sweet spot for Scandinavian literature. For many years Astrid Lindgren was and probably still is one of the most popular authors. Overall, it is good to note that recent years have seen the arrival of a new generation of translators who can translate from virtually any language. It is not surprising to have books translated from 20 or 30 languages in some years. I think that the number of titles is fairly substantial for a country the size of Lithuania. The print runs, between 1500–2000 copies, are a different story. It is always sad to see significant classic books published in small numbers.

**2. Historical influences. So little is known here about the Baltic States that to learn about the links with Scandinavia, Sweden and Germany that have created a distinctive Estonian voice, and, of course, the Soviet influence, which form part of your heritage, would be very interesting and enlightening.**

I suppose I have to remind readers of several historical facts first. Differently from other Baltic countries, the Lithuanian language was banned from Lithuanian public life for nearly 40 years by the Russian tsarist administration in the period from 1864 to 1904. Publishing in Lithuanian was also banned. Lithuania became an independent country in 1918 and remained independent until 1940. These two decades were highly significant and in the middle of 1930s we already had professional children's literature in place. So the tradition of children's literature was very young. We also saw the first translations at the same time. After 1920, three significant authors emerged and had their fairy-tale collections published. These were the Grimm brothers, Hans Christian Andersen and Wilhelm Hauff. These books stuck in the memory of the generation of my parents and grandparents. They were reprinted in the twentieth century. Recent years also saw new translations of these classic fairy tales. I may be subjective, but my guess is that it was due to the influence of these authors that the genre of the literary fairy tale has been so prolific for a long time, irrespective of the fact that Mark Twain, Carlo Collodi, Edmondo de Amici, Jules Verne, Harriet Beecher Stowe and other classic authors had been translated during the same decade.

As regards translations and their impact on our literature, we can't help mentioning Pranas Mašiotas (1863–1940), a highly significant and interesting personality. He was a mathematics teacher and also wrote for children himself and did much to encourage others to write and translate. He spoke Russian, Polish and German, and translated 60 books himself. He mostly translated from German so it is not a coincidence that German authors figure most prominently in his body of work. He felt an affinity with Scandinavian literature too and translated 12 books written by Scandinavian authors. Now, when we look back at his work, we find it particularly important that it was Mašiotas who introduced a large range of significant authors: Daniel Defoe's and Jonathan Swift's adaptations, Hugh Lofting's *The Story of Doctor Dolittle*, Erich Kästner's *Emil und die Detektyve* and Johanna Spyri's *Heidi*, to mention just a few. He felt close to the so-called realistic literature, in particular the topic of nature. It is obvious that translations exerted a significant influence on his own work and on children's literature of the period.

For 50 years Lithuania had been annexed by the Soviet Union. It is a very long period of time. Soviet propagandists controlled all Lithuanian culture. Effectively, all the translations were done only from the Russian language. Books by the so-called Western authors could only be published after prior publication and approval by Moscow. The amount of Soviet propaganda in children's books published between 1945 and 1955 is staggering. Later on, however, our authors managed to acquire a certain level of independence. Quite a few books from that period have become classics. The period from 1963 to 1969 was particularly fruitful. At that time our literature was still aiming at developing norms of morality in children, but did so in a playful and amusing way, closely mimicking the psychology of children. However, the Soviet oppression gave rise to an unexpected phenomenon – a range of allegorical and philosophical literary fairy tales. Some children's books published in the period between 1975 and 1985 used Aesop's language to deliver quite a few politically 'dangerous' messages. Dangerous to such an extent, that they were never referred to in the mainstream literature.

**3. Reading promotion activities. How do you reach your markets, reading challenges/initiatives, booklists, book fairs, school provision, public libraries? I understand you have a wonderful cultural institution – we should love to hear about it.**

Quite a few book promotion activities come from IBBY Lithuania. We aim to educate adults so that they are better at knowing what valuable children's literature is. Another aim is to make sure that our teenagers get their hands on as good literature as possible. We actively celebrate International Children's Book Day. On this day IBBY

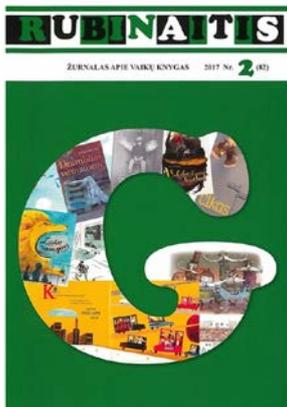
Lithuania makes nine awards to children's writers, illustrators and researchers. We also have a tradition of inviting children to a theatre on that day and together watch a play based on a literary work for children. It costs nothing to them. It is also important that there are quite a few events and festivals in local schools and libraries. There are some 2500 libraries in Lithuania and nearly all of them have a children's literature section. Nearly every school has a library.

We have had the Most Significant Book of the Year Award for ten years now, where votes are given for the latest books by Lithuanian authors. Alongside the best book for adults, Children's Book of the Year and Young Adult Book of the Year have their spots too. The commission usually comprises IBBY members, a shortlist of five books and finally readers cast their votes for the one book that they like most. This campaign results in a great deal of activity in libraries. Children are actively involved in the whole process. Recent years have also seen teenager involvement grow because of the increase in titles focused on the needs of this particular group of readers.

Several public institutions and libraries are also actively involved in reading promotion activities. 2016 was the Year of Libraries in Lithuania. The National Library of Lithuania launched the Book Quiz project, which involved visiting a large number of libraries and focused on community building around libraries and an interactive approach to reading. Apart from these high profile events, there is a lot going on too on a regular basis.

Libraries regularly host reading-aloud events, followed by some creative activities; the week of Nordic libraries takes place annually, there are book clubs and so on. Children also have websites where they can find information on the latest books, share their impressions and creative endeavours with their peers; the most active readers may win prizes. Public organisations are actively cooperating with the national broadcasting service, which regularly runs reading promotion campaigns on TV.

It's good that you asked about book fairs. Every February Vilnius hosts an international book fair, which is very popular. It is not only a place to buy books. Young readers have a dedicated space where they can draw, create books and meet with writers and illustrators. Foreign authors also visit the fair every year.



*Rubinitis*, a quarterly *Bookbird* equivalent, is a handy resource for teachers, librarians and parents who want to know more about good literature for children and young readers. As far as I know, it is the only publication of this kind in the post-Soviet bloc.

The success of IBBY Lithuania hinges on the fact that we have fought our way to recognition and are now supported by the Lithuania government. It is also very important that we work hand in hand with the National Library of Lithuania.

#### **4. What do you feel is special about Lithuania? What makes you particularly proud?**

I've just mentioned *Rubinitis*, which we are really proud about. We are also proud about *100 Books for Children and Lithuania*, our project that marks the centenary of independence of our country. We composed a list of 500 books and asked adults readers from all walks of life to vote. The resulting list and a list comprised by experts then formed the ultimate list. We currently have a booklet called *100 Most Significant Lithuanian Books for Children*. I am referring to this project because it helps to cast light on the specificities of Lithuanian children's literature. It is truly amazing to see as many as 30 books of poetry in the top 100. Lithuania has very old and strong traditions of poetry for children and adult readers alike.

It is unfortunate, however, that this tradition is clearly declining. Second, all the Lithuanian folk literature books made it to the final list. Fairy tales feature very prominently and this signifies a long-running respect for our folk culture. I also have to note that poetry and literary fairy tales draw inspiration from our folk culture too.



I'd like to go back to translations now. We are very fortunate to have access to this great variety of children's literature. It is easy to strike a conversation when travelling abroad as there is usually a book or several books that have been translated into Lithuanian. This does not, of course, mean that we don't love or appreciate the work of our own authors. We love them and we are proud about them, in particular when they are published abroad. Kęstutis Kasparavičius and Lina Žutautė are just a few names that readily spring to mind. One special thing about Lithuania is that it has no shortage of great illustrators who chose to accompany their drawing with their own writing. It's good you don't have to translate illustration into other languages.

[Kęstutis Urba is a Doctor of Humanities, Docent of Vilnius University, where he teaches children's literature (almost 40 years), chairman of the Lithuanian section of IBBY since 1992 until now, editor-in-chief of the magazine *Rubinaitis*, dedicated to children's literature criticism (from 1994 until now), translator of approximately 30 books for children and young adults (he uses penname (pseudonym) as translator).]

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## Poems with Crumpled Corners

### *Santa Remere*

Named after an onomatopoeic poem by Latvian poet Jānis Baltvilks, the little Bikibuki or Bicki-Buck Books are so popular among the reading families of Latvia that 'bicki-bucks' has become almost a generic Latvian name to refer to a special kind of palm-sized poetry book for children that contain only one poem. Under a project run by the publishing house Liels un Mazs, 100 such books are to be published by the centenary of Latvia's independence in 2018. The books appear to have changed the artistic quality criteria for Latvian children's publishing to the point that the Latvian Section of IBBY is considering adding a new category to the Children's Literature and Book Art competition: Bicki-Buck Book of the Year. The 24 booklets released every year thus far have been illustrated by diverse Latvian contemporary artists, and they all have been serious candidates for the Book Arts nomination or even the main prize. What is the secret of Bicki-Buck Books: thin, palm-sized, poetry books decorated with a curious roe deer that contains only one poem, stretched over 10 to 12-page spreads? What has made them so popular among young readers and appreciated by the critics?

The idea of 'painting old poems in new colours' came to artist Rūta Briede six years ago while she was reading her own favourite childhood poetry books to her little daughter. She regretted seeing her beloved poems presented without much attention to the illustration; after all, the visual perception of the world is crucial during the first years

of a child's development. Arranged in thick volumes with numbered pages, the poems seem inaccessible to young children who cannot read independently. The adult can read the poem to the child, which can be a wonderfully imaginative aural experience, but interaction between the child and the physical carrier of the poetry – the book – is lacking. When a poem is hidden in the book's uniform pages, it is more difficult to find it and to ask the parent for it; it is impossible to read it at your own pace, lingering on your favourite lines as many times as it takes before the poem gets absorbed with all its meaning and sound, which is basically how we, the adults, read and perceive poetry. Nobody would deny that children's poems are a perfect way to learn words through playful sounds along with new world experiences, stunning ideas, memories, associations and cultural values. But it is so easy for parents to lose their motivation for a joint poetry reading when the listener is not eager for it, which is especially true for old, long-standing poems.

A determined mother and talented illustrator, Rūta Briede decided to resolve the situation by launching a different poetry reading experience for children: slow, attentive, visual, tangible, reflective and interactive. One hundred Latvian poems written in the last 100 years by some 60 different poets were selected in collaboration with the Liels un Mazs team, then presented to 98 contemporary Latvian artists – illustrators, animators, sculptors, stage designers, textile designers, graphic artists, renowned painters, poetic landscapists, rebel street artists, experimenters, etc. As a result, a set of six books of illustrated poems – a joint effort between poets and artists – has been made available to young Latvian readers each quarter since 2012. They can be purchased in packs, or the readers can pick their favourites, collect, exchange and sort them according to their taste, and they can also attend Bicki-Buck Book release parties and readings.

Bicki-Buck Books have become items of fashion and culture in Latvia. They range from childishly colourful to very serious and modest, and from lyrical and stylish to grotesquely scary. When the poems materialise in page-layered rectangles, their striking diversity suddenly becomes very apparent – they have literally each got their individual colour, which has sometimes slipped past us or has changed along with the context.

The Bicki-Buck Books are not united by an overriding theme, era or style; sometimes the only common element in a set is their 14.5 × 10.5 cm format and the fact that an entire page is allotted to each line of poetry – just enough space to let the line be pondered and interpreted. Each poem comes coupled with an illustrator's interpretation, but there is also the reader's and the listener's version to be added. That makes no less than four interpretations of the meaning! These are not always contradictory, but they inevitably remind one that poetry has more than just one way of being approached. And your own answers to the riddle matter in making the poem happen.

The illustrators for Bicki-Buck Books have seriously studied and analysed the poetic material, to transmit not only the sense and information of the poem, but also its rhythm and pace.

For example, in painting the *cloudy* poem 'The Chimneys' by Aivars Neibarts ('Skursteni', Bicki-Buck Book #048), artist Zane Oborenko put the spaces between the lines in a way that makes the reader take a breath in the wrong places, creating the effect of a rush of excitement or climbing. Perhaps an actor or maybe the poet himself would pronounce it with such a gasping breath, but in this case, we are exposed to the illustrator's declamation, i.e. the accents and pauses are chosen by her. It is interesting that two other artists also used the motives of a shifting wind and breath-taking heights to illustrate poems by this same author (#017 and #060), which suggests that the breath-taking lightness is probably inherent in the author's expression, irrespective of the story being told.

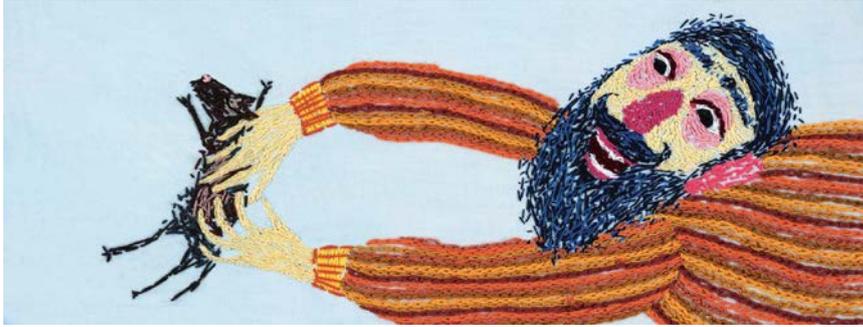


Illustration by Dārta Stafecka.

Many illustrators try to find a visual equivalent to rhetorical elements – repetition, metaphors and hyperbole – and some try to imitate the rhymes and metre using graphical symmetry. Or, on the contrary, a canonical rhythmic poem is given an abstract, non-linear visual appearance that highlights its universal message. In some cases, the illustrator’s interpretation reveals quite another idea, which is nevertheless rooted in the text of the poem. For example, the cheerful and catchy poem by Arvīds Grigulis ‘The First Line’ (‘Pirmā svītriņa’ #046) about the trouble with the whimsical line in a calligraphy lesson, loses its didactic tone when illustrated by Ieva Maurīte, who is the master of uninterrupted line in Latvian art. She paints ‘with the first stroke’ and leaves her lines in their initial shape. As opposed to the uniform standards of Soviet calligraphy lessons, the artist emphasises the importance of individualism in the act of creation; however, similarly to the poet, she recognises the importance of improving throughout life.



Illustration by Reinis Pētersons

In a different example, Jāzeps Osmaniš’ sententious poem about the importance of cleanliness ‘The Riddle of the Rain’ (‘Lietusmīkla’ #075) aligns with contemporary themes of global ecology and green thinking via the illustrations of Ella Mežule.



Illustration by Ella Mežule.

Kristaps Zariņš, whose masterful paintings always present an expressive image of women, brings a somnambulistic Ophelia into the plot of Māra Cielēna’s poem ‘The Comb Named Emma’ (‘Ķemme Emma’ #084), about a hair comb that gets lost in the tangled hair.

Talented stage designer Ilmārs Blumbergs turns the classic Latvian poem by Rainis 'The Wives of the Rain' ('Lietus sievas' #038) into a bright visual show with bold dramaturgy by interchanging font sizes and colour intensity. I could go on in this manner to describe every booklet.



**Illustration by Ilmārs Blumbergs.**

With a laconic definition of their handwriting, favourite styles, technique and tonality, these 100 books are probably the most complete catalogue of Latvian illustrators. For the insatiable art theorist, this project is a demonstration in the visual language laboratory with unexpected combinations of 'artist + poet' and contains much evidence that a poem exists 'in the air' before it is written down on paper. But most importantly, this is a great way to introduce children to the technical and aesthetic diversity of works of art.

In many books, the artists reveal the background of their work, their failures and personal struggles with the drawing, which coincides with the young readers' everyday learning process. The Bicki-Buck Books are, in a way, the artists' dedication to the next generation, as well as their duty towards the past, when they were children themselves.

The images express a lot of nostalgia that has found its place in today's reality. With the frequent references to the sense of belonging to the place, local traditions, culture space, city architecture and urban legends the little books provide a connection with their country of origin to the diaspora of emigrated Latvian families whose children no longer learn the Latvian language. The Latvianness in the visual language of Bicki-Buck Books is not folksy romanticism contemplating the ancient past; it is diverse, contemporary and cosmopolitan.

A considerable proportion of the books is devoted to the avant-garde and dissident art of the Third Awakening (1986–1991) and the restoration of Latvia's independence. It is not an easy conversation, but we can only admire how self-evidently children perceive provocation, absurdity, irony and other complex concepts. There are books to be read upside down, from back to front or to look through. The conceptual artist Andris Breže has cut such a big hole in his Bicki-Buck Book so that there is only the husk of a book left ('Ciku caku caurā tumba' by Hardijs Lediņš, Juris Boiko #088). And on this husk, like on the edge of a crater blown up by a bomb, people continue to live, work, exercise, dance in discotheques and pull the asphalt roller of perestroika.

In our family, we have not missed a single release of a Bicki-Buck Book, and we have been reading them with our eldest son since he was 18 months old. He has grown up with them and each release of six booklets always seemed to coincide with his developmental milestones (repeating sounds, learning colours, recognising his surroundings, first letters, first drawings, first words, first attempt to make his own book, first ability to quote a poem in an appropriate life situation, first understanding of the inexpressible, etc.). And many other parents have noticed these coincidences too, regardless of the age group, since there are so many Bicki-Buck Books and there is so much in them.

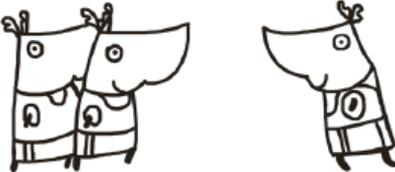
Our son's favourites have twisted and chewed corners, while the ones he didn't like were cast aside, but they will be secretly read later, as he is unable to resist his curiosity. I don't know if I would have noticed these preferences if the poems had a different physical shape. The Bicki-Buck Books are his toys; he sorts them, counts them, makes big puzzles and card houses and has a strong sense of ownership of them. Seeing them on his peers' bookshelves is his first steps in a collective experience, and leads to making friends around common interests – which, for a change, are not associated with global toy brands.

# Project summary

The project was launched in 2012



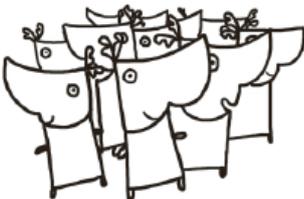
In all, 100 titles will be published



The book's logo features the time when each poem was written: pre-1940; between 1940 and 1990; post-1990



60 poets and 98 illustrators have been involved in the project



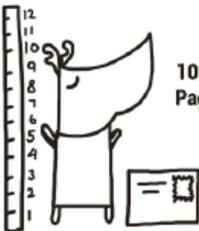
The books are numbered for more convenient collecting in the home library



A first print run of 1000 to 2500 copies for each title



Size:  
10.5 cm x 14.5 cm  
Pages: between 20 and 32



Around 12 different styles and genres have been featured



Finally, a bit about myself. Like many young parents in Latvia, I was born in the Soviet Union, a country whose books and culture have been instinctively rejected as unnecessary, wrong and inappropriate since the restoration of Latvia's independence. We truly hated those yellowish pages associated with outdated values, unconditional obedience, compulsory literature listings and uncritical reading of poems, whose lines had to be learned by rote. As far as I remember, in school and later on there was

always a denial of everything Soviet and resistance to the teachers who carried on the outdated methods. We built our new identities on the basis of an idealised pre-war cultural heritage, rapidly – sometimes too fast and without understanding – assimilating everything that came from the West and was the opposite of our recent past.

But those six rejected years I spent in the USSR were the beginning of my memories that suddenly started to return when I wanted to read or sing something to my own child. My favourite poems, lullabies and counting rhymes were scattered in old-fashioned, didactic and controversial books. I often did not know how to regard the word combinations and infectious stanzas that turned in my mind and were the first words that for me touched the concepts of beauty, tenderness and motherly love. The naive verses we used to express our affection for our parents at a time when saying ‘I love you’ was not popular. Words that meant love to me, whatever their real meaning.

To be honest, I have often lacked role models on how to live in the Western world when making life choices or giving explanations about the course of events. But now I need clear and convincing answers to my children’s many ‘whys’.

By involving a large group of artists of several generations, the Bicki-Buck Books’ project may not give all the answers about how our past and our culture can be looked at. To a certain extent, the Bicki-Buck Books have given me back a basic sense of who we are. We have a past and we have poems – indeed, we have at least 100 of them.

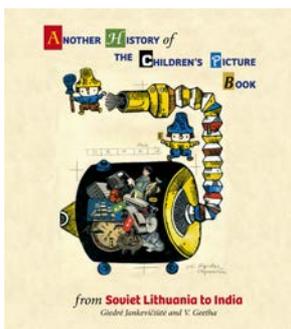
[Santa Remere is a Latvian art critic who specialises in visual communication – from children’s books, to art installations, animations and cinema. She has an MA degree in engineering from Tokyo Waseda University, but mainly uses the written word as her means of self-expression. She regularly translates theatre plays from several languages into Latvian and writes critical and analytical articles for the internet magazine [satori.lv](http://satori.lv).]

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## Another History of the Children’s Picture Book

*Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and V. Geetha*

### What drew you both to this project?



**Geetha:** The idea for the book came from an exhibition of children’s books’ illustrations from Soviet Lithuania that was on display in Bologna in 2011. Giedrė had written the catalogue for that exhibition, along with her colleague Jolita Liškevičienė. At the Bologna book fair, my colleague Gita Wolf of the Indian publisher Tara Books met with friends from Lithuania, book lovers and designers, who asked her if she would like to have the exhibition travel to India – to be hosted by Tara Books. Gita was excited by the idea – she and I belong to a generation that was familiar with children’s books from the Soviet Union and which were part of almost every middle-class household that bought books for children. Further, Tara had a sizeable collection of these books. So we thought that this would be a great occasion to recall that moment in our history, when Indian children got to read Soviet children’s books in their various languages.

Working with the Lithuanian Culture Institute (LCI), particularly Rūta Nanartavičiūtė for getting the exhibition to India, was a great experience. We brought our own histories of reading and publishing children’s literature from the Indian context to the exhibition, and designed a couple of panels featuring Soviet books in Indian languages.

When the exhibition opened at Tara Books in 2014, Giedrė of the LCI was brought in as a curator–speaker, courtesy of the LCI. Spending time with her, I was taken in by her erudition and her critical yet generous understanding of her country’s (Soviet) cultural past. In discussion with Gita, we decided that we would work on a book project

featuring the exhibits, along with a set of extended essays. In the planning, discussion and dialogue over email, the book grew into a large history project – and we realised we were actually suggesting another perspective to the history of the children’s picture book, with the Soviet Union as its hub.

**Giedrė:** When I came for a visit to Chennai from Lithuania and joined Geetha for the preparations of the opening of the exhibition at the Tara Book building, I realised that I was among like-minded people – much more than elsewhere. We had so much in common in terms of themes to do with and after the exhibition that it seemed a shame to stop with the latter, and with the memory of its wonderful opening day. And so that’s how we came up with the idea of the book. The authorship of this idea belongs to Geetha; however, the book is unimaginable without Gita Wolf’s participation – Gita is the founder of Tara Books, and also the motor that drives the publishing house.

Why was Tara Books interested in Lithuanian children’s books of the Soviet period? There could be two reasons from my point of view. First, Tara Books is known for publishing interesting and very beautiful handmade books, but it also specialises in and has a history of working with graphic design. In fact it has a very particular approach to this subject – and if we are to speak in art theory terms, this could be attributed to the approach of social art history, focused on the interrelationship between art and society. The second reason is the popularity of Soviet children’s books in India in the second half of the twentieth century and the importance of this phenomenon. This last was a surprising discovery for me, and I guess would be for many people who have no experience of Indian everyday life of this period. India was a territory of special interest for the Soviet Union then, and it wanted to expand its sphere of influence there. And, for this purpose, and along with various other efforts, the Soviet Union made available children’s books in English as well as in Indian language translations – sometimes the print runs for these books went into the 1000s. They also cost only a few rupees and were sold in the streets.

This is why we have ‘a story’, written from two different perspectives, the Indian and the Lithuanian. So you have two different experiences of contact with Soviet culture, and the exercise has been very interesting and illuminating for both of us.

**Lithuania and India – one would not immediately link them together. How have you managed to weave the stories since you are each coming from a different background/perspective. What are the common links? What are the differences?**

**Geetha:** I think I have answered part of the question above. How did we put our narratives together? Well, for me, the book project was exciting and important because it had the potential to bring together two aspects of a cultural history as it unfolded in the Soviet Union over several decades. One part of the story, and an extremely well-researched one, was what Giedrė had to tell. And this has to do, as readers of the book know, with Soviet cultural policy and how Lithuanian publishers, authors and artists engaged with its changing and unchangeable features – particularly with respect to children’s books. Giedrė treats these books as important cultural productions, and places them in the context of a complex political and cultural legacy – and in the event tells a great story of children’s book publishing, illustration and design in Soviet Lithuania, which is also a story of culture as such.

The other, and smaller, part of the book had to do with how at least two generations of Indians engaged with Soviet cultural history. The first generation was one that came of age in between the war years, and if socialist minded, looked to the Soviet Union as an iconic example of the good society; and which hoped to draw on that history for their own anti-colonial and pro-socialist struggles. I dwell briefly on this in the book – and here is where we have different perspectives to offer. Contrary to how cultural policies proved menacing, difficult and compromising for Soviet Lithuanian citizens, for Indians, enamoured of the Soviet Union, the latter’s culture and education policies held

important lessons – they held out hope for advancing learning and aesthetic refinement in a vastly unequal, class-divided and mostly non-literate society. In this context, I also dwell briefly on how Soviet policies to do with childhood, education, schooling and publishing for children evolved – and here I draw on exciting contemporary research on the Soviet Union, particularly on childhood. This section throws into relief Soviet Lithuanian developments – placing them within the context of epochal changes that affected all of the Soviet Union and the rest of the world.

Ultimately what holds the book together is a shared commitment to the children's picture book. As publishers of children's picture books and illustrated books for adults, we value the visual as much as the word, and believe that pictures communicate in radical ways – challenging not only how we see, but also our understanding on that account. To us, doing this book has meant tracing our own genealogy as publishers who look to an interlinked world for inspiration.

**Giedrė:** As Geetha pointed out, our book is not just about illustration and children's book art. It is also about publishing politics, and culture politics in general, about ideology and censorship, the reception and perception of literature, of reading and evaluating practices, and of attempts to expand the borders of imagined, literary worlds and, by implication, the borders of the real world that were narrowed and restricted under pressure from the politics of the Soviet state. So, in this sense, these are not local issues at all, and since we are both deeply interested in these issues, it wasn't difficult for us to weave our stories.

On the other hand, our common concerns notwithstanding, each of us came to them from different angles, from our own historical perspectives and personal experiences. While in Chennai, in and through our conversations, Geetha and I realised that there were many intersecting points to our narratives, and that this would make for a successful collaboration. I'd like to add one more thing. Talking to Geetha and Gita and to Indian visitors to the exhibition, I realised that they actually understood what I said about Lithuanian life, culture and art under the Soviet regime – more than other people like them who lacked these experiences. I felt encouraged on this account to go ahead with our project.

**In the introductory text to the book it says 'This book calls for a reimagining of global picture-book history'. What do you see this as meaning?**

**Geetha:** Most accounts of the evolution of the children's picture book, at least in Anglo-America and western Europe, look to mid and late nineteenth century developments to do with publishing, printing, the evolution of illustration as a profession in its own right, shifting notions of childhood, children's taste, suitable reading for children and so on. While nuanced accounts point to other linkages, including with the early twentieth century avant-garde, when child art became a topic of debate and dissection, these seldom help illuminate what was afoot in the world beyond Europe and America.

Our project unsettles this understanding – and points to how we may tell another and equally important story of the children's picture book if we look eastward and take seriously the logistically complex and enormously ambitious Soviet publishing enterprise that put out books in a hundred and more world languages, and which catered to children in west Asia, parts of Africa, South-East Asia, China and South Asia. We suggest the outlines of such a history by looking at two specific geographies and histories, one that has to do with places within the Soviet Union and the other outside the Soviet Union.

**Giedrė:** I agree with Geetha that very little research has been done with regard to the immense world of modern children's books beyond the English-speaking countries. I hope that through this book we have managed to show that it's worth looking at what has happened in other continents and countries. Importantly, the book also shows that

this world is not so fragmented as it appears at first glance. I don't want to go into the details – except to point out that we have so many children's heroes in common. This then means that we share not only stories, but also values that are expressed by these stories and that we are connected across our different contexts. I would imagine it would be very interesting for people to know about how their favourite children's-book characters, such as Lewis Carroll's Alice, Tove Jansson's Moomins, Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Longstocking and A. A. Milne's Winnie-the-Pooh, and to go beyond books, e.g. Disney's Mickey Mouse, fared outside their original worlds – and how they brought much joy and colour into the grey and gloomy world of thousands and thousands of children who lived behind the Iron Curtain.

**In researching, what aspects did you each find particularly interesting or surprising? Did you find preconceptions challenged?**

**Geetha:** For my part, this is very little studied in the Indian context – the world of Soviet children's publishing and how that brought books to our shores, and what that did to our local literary cultures. While establishing this connection with very broad brushstrokes for this project, I realised that we need to do a lot more research, especially of influences on Indian children's publishing, on authors, artists, on attitudes to do with the children's picture book, etc.

**Giedrė:** We had very good artists illustrating children's books during the Soviet period. So, for a long time research focused on their art, on the development of their individual styles and the connections their art had with the international avant-garde. For many of them this connection was important, since it represented an attempt to resist the pressure imposed on artists during Communist rule. But it became clear that we needed to do more. While preparing for the exhibition in Bologna in 2011, we had actually widened our perspective on how we wished to frame children's illustrations, but it was Geetha who inspired me to pay more attention to some other aspects of publishing in Soviet times – e.g. the publication of translated works, the distribution of commissions among artists and the impact of these developments. For instance, books by foreign authors when published in Lithuania featured the original illustrations and this proved very stimulating to local artists, and also defined different aesthetic criteria for their readers, both children and their parents.

Also Geetha suggested that I think and write more on the people who were behind the publishing in all its various stages. As I went about addressing these questions, I came to discover new things about people whom I thought I knew, but clearly I did not know them well enough. But these are yet initial steps in that direction, and a lot of work needs to be done before we understand better and can explain with some depth the phenomenon of the children's book in Soviet culture, and, as we show in our book, its complex, multifaceted character.

I've mentioned Mickey Mouse earlier, and for children in Lithuania he seemed an icon of early Western pop culture. While working on our book I found out that such elements of children's pop culture circulated in other ex-socialist countries as well – books and cartoons, which had nothing to do with ideological clichés, circulated across a wide area, from Czechoslovakia to Cuba and from Poland to Angola. Of course, if we want to describe that phenomenon, we should look at the children's book primarily as a political phenomenon and not only as an aesthetic creation.

**How did you collaborate? Did you write your theses separately or did you work closely together? Did this produce surprises? Was it easy to write?**

**Geetha:** We wrote our essays separately. And the book falls into two parts, with the first and shorter part to do with Indian developments and concerns, and the second and longer part to do with Soviet Lithuania. But we worked closely together nonetheless, reading each other's scripts and poring over the art. The surprise in all of

this is the Soviet Union – its unreality so to speak, that it had these various faces, and how often one face was unaware of the other.

**Giedrė:** Unfortunately due to the distance between Vilnius and Chennai and the high travel costs we had no choice but to work separately. Of course, the long conversations that we had when I was in Chennai in July of 2016 proved very helpful. We started out with me sending Geetha an initial draft of my text and she responded with a long list of questions. I took off from those questions and it made my task easier because all I had to do was answer them!

**Why do you think this approach is important? Do you think there are other areas within the picture-book world where surprising juxtapositions might be discovered?**

**Geetha:** Comparative studies, I think, are very important because they free us from our own immediate culture areas and help connect our concerns with comparable ones elsewhere. However, having said that, I think we need to be precise and historical about what we wish to compare – in other words, we cannot bring about surprising juxtapositions at will, rather we need to travel down historical paths that are interlinked, and to find out what paths link and how it is exciting. With respect to the children’s picture book, I think there is more that needs to be done, both within the various regions of the Soviet Union, and also the relationship that each of these regions had with places and histories outside the Soviet Union. Likewise, in Africa and Asia, where childhood as we understand it today did not exist until a few decades ago, we need to also link backwards to traditions of storytelling and art that addressed children and adults, and understand how these have been carried forward in time, and have been refined or changed by influences from outside our contexts.

**Giedrė:** This book proves how important children’s books are or can be; how new things come into our lives and cultures through children’s books. But the problem is, however crucial, childhood constitutes just around one fourth of an average human life. We live out our time as adults for much of our lives, when our problems seem large, the questions we have appear complex and we are caught up addressing them. This is perhaps why we accord children’s literature, rather research to do with children’s books, somewhat of a marginal place in general cultural history. But if we bring a fresh perspective to children’s books, adopt the comparative method and also approach these books from the point of view of social-culture theory, this might result in something new – i.e. we might be able to change the way we see children’s books habitually as occupying a lower rung in the cultural hierarchy.

Another History of the Children's Picture Book



Telesforas Kulakauskas, cover art and illustrations for the Lithuanian edition of *Dr Aiblit* (Chukovskij, 1957) for the Russian children's writer Kornei Chukovskij; illustrations show the Russian influence, particularly, of Vladimir Suteyev.



From *Another History of the Children's Picture Book* p.88. Telesforas Kulakauskas, cover art and illustrations for the Lithuanian edition of *Dr Aiblit* (Dktaras Aiskauda, 1957) by Russian children’s writer Kornei Chukovskij; illustrations show the Russian influence, particularly of Vladimir Suteyev.



(Left)  
Adasa Skliutauskaite,  
illustration for cover,  
using paper-cuts, *Genys*  
(1962, No 2)

(Right Top)  
Kastytis Juodikaitis,  
illustrations, *Genys*  
(1963, No 2)

(Right Bottom)  
Jonas Petrauskas,  
illustrations for *Genys*  
(1959, No 5), featuring  
old cars and new ones



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From *Another History of the Children's Picture Book* p.103. (Left) Adasa Skliutauskaite, illustration for cover using paper cuts, *Genys* (1962, No.2); (Right top) Kastytis Juodikaitis, illustrations, *Genys* (1963, No. 2); (Right bottom) Janas Petrauskas, illustrations for *Genys* (1959, No. 5), featuring old cars and new ones.

[V. Geetha is editorial director, Tara Books, Chennai, India. A writer, translator and historian, she works on contemporary Tamil culture, modern Indian history, and has written widely on gender, birth-based inequality, labour and education.

Giedrė Jankevičiūtė is an art historian, critic and exhibition curator based in Vilnius, Lithuania. The main area of her professional interest is Central–East European art of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. From 2010 she started to research the history of Lithuanian graphic design and published several books and catalogues on the subject. Among her publications on graphic design are: *Illustrarium: Soviet Lithuanian Children's Book Illustration* (2011), *Okupacijos realijos. Pirmojo ir Antrojo pasaulinių karų Lietuvos plakatai* [The reality of occupation: The poster in Lithuania during WWI and WWII (with Laima Laučkaitė, 2014) and *Telesforas Kulakauskas (1907–1977)* (2016). She is a member of the Lithuanian art historians association (AICA), the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies (EAM) and the Association for the Advancement of Baltic Studies (AABS). Bibliographic details of the book discussed: *Another History of the Children's Picture Book: From Soviet Lithuania to India* (with V. Geetha, Tara Books, Chennai, India, 2017; also in German: G. Jankevičiūtė, V. Geetha, *Eine andere Geschichte des Kinderbilderbuchs. Vom sowjetischen Litauen bis nach Indien*, Tara Books, Chennai, India, 2017).]

## *Salt for the Sea*

*Ruta Sepetys*

**Growing up were you conscious of your Lithuanian heritage? Did you read books by Lithuanian authors – or indeed have access to any?**

Growing up with the name 'Ruta Sepetys' always raised questions. People constantly asked about the origin of my name, so discussion of my Lithuanian roots has been a strong part of my identity since childhood. My mother, however, was American so we

were raised speaking English in the house and, as a result, I can't read the Lithuanian language well. So that prohibited me from reading books in the Lithuanian language.

**When did you know you wanted to write and specifically write for young people? Were you always drawn to the historical genre?**

I've always known that I wanted to write for young readers. Books we read as teens have the opportunity to make a profound, lasting impression that stays with us into adulthood. Young adults are deep thinkers. They process story with an intense emotional truth. They have a profound sense of justice and they are an honest and tough audience.

Yes, I've always been drawn to the historical genre. Writing historical fiction is like being a detective. I love discovering secrets, hidden facts, and hidden heroes. Sometimes history can be perceived as boring. But through characters and story, historical statistics become human and suddenly we care for people we've never met, we can find their country on a map, and then – the history matters. Through historical fiction we can give a voice to those who will never have a chance to tell their story. That inspires me!

**How did you discover the 'lost histories' that have attracted you? Both in *Between Shades of Grey* and most recently *Salt for the Sea*? Was there a family/personal connection at all to either of these histories for you?**

I'm drawn to hidden history and stories of strength through struggle, so I look for topics that contain those elements. *Salt for the Sea* and *Between Shades of Grey* both contain themes of hope, courage, love and loss. Yes, I have a family connection to both novels. My father's family was deported to Siberia and that inspired *Between Shades of Grey*. My father's cousin was part of the refugee evacuation in 1945 and had a passage on the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. She is the one who inspired me to write *Salt to the Sea*.

**Do you do a lot of research? How did you go about this? Were there any special or interesting aspects that helped bring the period/situations alive?**

I adore the research process. For research, I first read all the non-fiction sources available. I speak with academics and historians. I then travel to the country where the story takes place to explore the landscape, the culture and the people. I generally interview dozens of people while researching a book. I then weave stories from many people together into one character so that way I'm representing a larger human experience and not just one person.

**Where did your characters come from? Though in *Between Shades of Grey* your characters are Lithuanian, in *Salt for the Sea*, they all have very different backgrounds and nationalities. Was it difficult to create distinct voices for them?**

The characters in *Between Shades of Grey* were inspired by many people I interviewed during my research and also by people I know or admire. While researching *Salt for the Sea* I was reminded of how many regions and countries were affected and suffered during the evacuation. When I interviewed people from those different countries, I realised that human beings may experience the same event but will have dramatically different interpretations of it. Every human being views history through their own cultural lens so I created characters who would give a voice to a particular regional experience and allow the reader to look through their lens.

**Do you feel that authors – particularly those writing for young people – have a real responsibility to bring these lost incidents to light? Do you feel a responsibility not just to an audience who will have never learnt about them, but also to an audience for whom it is part of their history?**

I hope that by sharing difficult parts of history with young people they will study them, learn from the mistakes of the past, and strive to create hope for a more just future. I feel a responsibility to strive for accuracy and authenticity.

[Ruta Sepetys is the author of the 2017 CILIP Carnegie Medal winning book *Salt for the Sea*.]

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## REVIEWS

### About Children's Literature

#### *Children's Literature*

Pat Pinsent, London, Palgrave, pb. 978 1 1373 3546 3, 2016, £19.99, 202pp.

[About Children's Literature. Keywords: contextualisation; criticism; crossover; digital texts; fantasy; genres; theoretical approaches; translation; visual texts; book production; book history.]

First and foremost this book is an invaluable resource for a student, or anyone interested in studying children's literature. It provides the reader with pointers to some of the most significant critical writing in this relatively recently established academic subject. This is one of a series of Reader's Guides to Essential Criticism. The consultant editor, Nicolas Tredell, summarises their purpose on the back cover, 'The Guides offer a full account of the ways in which the works and genres have been received and debated by academics, critics and the public.' Pat Pinsent, is well chosen as author. A Senior Research Fellow at Roehampton University where, with Kimberley Reynolds, she founded the MA in Children's Literature, Pinsent has considerable expertise in the field. She explains in her introduction that the historical contextualisation of literature was well established long before the 1970s when children's literature became regarded as a suitable academic study in its own right.

It is a daunting task to attempt to provide such an overview of children's literature in a single volume of 189 pages of text with 13 pages of additional material. Pinsent has risen to the challenge and offers us a chronological approach, starting from the end of the Second World War up to developing contemporary perspectives and even gives hints of the future. She certainly fulfils her brief. There is a clear, logical structure: Part I focuses on 'Readers', Part II on 'Genres' and Part III on 'Theoretical Approaches'. As well as including notes and a bibliography, Pinsent also provides the reader with an index of 'Critical Writers' with page references, along with an index of 'Topics'. I looked up 'toys' as an example and was impressed to find two very informative pages that included Margaret Blount's classic critical text *Animal Land: The Creatures of Children's Fiction* (1974) and Lois Kuznets' *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis and Development* (1994). Brian Alderson in his review for *Books for Keeps* No. 221 (November 2016) acknowledges that,

Pinsent's book exhibits a tremendous amount of reading on her part (a typical single page, chosen here at random, contains ten diverse references to works on 'Visual Texts') and she also has a gift for deftly summarising the contents of the many works that come under her peers in the academic trade.

Pat Pinsent acknowledges the contributions made by Clare Walsh, who has written Chapter 11, in which she examines young adult and crossover fiction, and that of Slovenian Darja Mazi-Leskovar, who shared the writing of Chapter 9 and provides a perspective of the problems related to translation, as well as the relationship between literature and national identity. She has incorporated information gleaned from Catherine Butler in the area of fantasy and Valerie Coghlan for Irish children's literature. She openly admits that her survey is dominated by Anglophone sources and English-speaking scholars, rather than their European counterparts.

It is especially gratifying to see the creation of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in 1953 included as part of the interest shown in national and international features of children's literature and the creation in 1980 of the International Research Society for Children's Literature (IBSCL). Attention to picture-book artists from the rest of the world can be seen in papers given at IBBY conferences, including those by Penni Cotton in 2004 and 2008.



Interestingly, Pinsent identifies a trend for future studies to examine book production and book history with a bibliographical focus demonstrated in the work of Matthew Grenby, as well as the increasing importance in young readers of digital texts, including picture books.

As this volume evidences, there has been a burgeoning of children's literature criticism and an increasing number of academic institutions now provide PhD and Masters in children's literature. Our author concludes that her survey provides a landmark 'at this moment in time' although she rightly adds that 'comments on the texts considered will provide a basis for judgment concerning the relevance and value of additions on the now increasingly substantial corpus of children's literature criticism'.

As a past MA Roehampton student, I found this informative book reminded me of earlier critical works I had encountered such as those by Peter Hunt, Jacqueline Rose, Barbara Wall, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jack Zipes, Bruno Bettelheim, Marina Warner and Vladimir Propp and helped me to appreciate the many ingenious ways academics have further explored this fascinating subject. This is not the book for a reader seeking where to find children's literature collections such as the Opie, Renier, Osborne and Seven Stories archives or a detailed examination of texts or genres, but that is not its purpose. I believe it should herald a sequel in the coming years as it is such an authoritative, thought-provoking, whilst practical, guide.

**Susan Bailes**

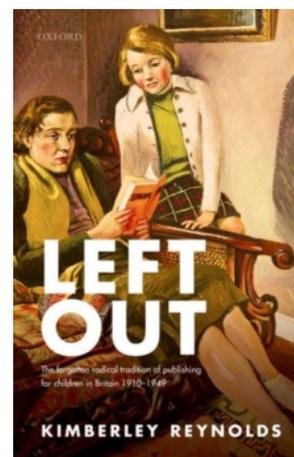
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## About Children's Literature

### ***Left Out: The Forgotten Tradition of Radical Publishing for Children in Britain 1910–1949***

Kimberley Reynolds, Oxford: University Press, hb. 978 0 1987 5559 3, 2016, £35, 272pp. [Keywords: academic; illustrated; left-wing politics; aesthetics; radical writing; publishing history 1910–1949; avant-garde and modernist art and design; progressive schooling.]

Students of children's literature are typically pointed towards the 'golden ages' of writing for young people. These have been variously defined by the great and good of the academic world as the period between the mid-nineteenth century and 1914 (the first Golden Age), with the second starting after the end of the Second World War, and flourishing particularly in the 1950s and 1960s. In the first, authors such as Lewis Carroll, L.M. Meade, Kenneth Grahame, E. Nesbit and Frances Hodgson Burnett are identified as writing for children, with childish interests at the heart of their work. In the second Golden Age we are told, writers such as Rosemary Sutcliff, William Mayne, Philippa Pearce, Lucy Boston, Alan Garner and Joan Aiken provided a new beginning after the fallow inter-war years. Kimberley Reynolds's aptly titled *Left Out* sets out to challenge this apparent gap in innovative writing for children, and provide evidence that these years were not the 'culturally disengaged backwater' (p.5) dismissed by such grand old men of children's literature as John Rowe Townsend and Peter Hunt. Though not quoted by Reynolds, Townsend viewed this as 'on the whole a dreary time', while, as Reynolds records, Hunt found this a time of 'pervading quietism' (p.5).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as she points out in her extensive Introduction, many of the authors identified as significant contributors to the second Golden Age (though not discussed in this book) – Edward Ardizzone, Eleanor Farjeon, Kathleen Hale, Arthur Ransome, Noel Streatfeild, etc. – were already writing between the wars. Tellingly, as Reynolds notes, Geoffrey Trease, best known as a novelist but also another historian of literature for children, later removed some of his more overtly left-wing references in his books. The textual history of his ground-breaking socialist novel, published in 1934, shows that *Bows against the Barons* suffered this fate for its republication in 1948, and by 1966 a further revision, excusing its authorship as 'a young man's book' (Trease, 1966: 152).<sup>2</sup> Reynolds



states that in his historical survey *Tales out of School* (1964) he had considered that children's books between the wars 'failed to reflect the changing values of the age' (Reynolds, 2016: 5). Curiously, Trease's original *Bows* had perfectly reflected an important ideology of the 1930s, but he seemingly preferred to airbrush out the whole genre of radical writing to which he had once so enthusiastically contributed. Reynolds' remit is to restore the years 1910 to 1949 to their rightful (or, as we discover, more aptly termed leftful) place in the history of children's literature.

In the six chapters which follow, Reynolds embarks on her mission 'to strip away preconceptions and attempt to understand how readers originally received these works' (p.39).

Using her assertion that '[r]adical children's literature was the product of three areas of life in early twentieth-century Britain: left-wing politics, modernist and avant-garde art and design, and progressive education' (p.10) she places her argument within these areas, with chapters on books about war and peace, representations of the Soviet Union, aesthetic radicalism, rural radicalism, health, fitness and sex education, and rebuilding Britain. This final section looks at books that promoted a modern and better built environment which the future generation deserved, as the progressive alternative to the largely imaginary and certainly over-valued 'Merrie England'. Readers will probably be more familiar with some of the illustrations in this section, in which Noel Carrington's revolutionary (in a publishing rather than political sense) *Picture Puffins* brought outstanding images and colour to information books for younger readers. One of the highlights of Reynolds' book as a whole is the wealth of illustration it offers the reader, something that is frequently absent from academic texts that discuss images at length but provide no illustrations. Of course, the remit of *Left Out* is largely to rediscover and celebrate those books which were at the time highly influential but are now missing from our understanding of children's literature as a whole, and, in order to do so, image is as important as text.

The book is well served by its Appendix, which defines the criteria used to select the books Reynolds discusses, and then provides separate lists, categorised by decades, of books for young readers. They are listed by subject matter which addresses social and political radicalism and aesthetic radicalism, followed by an extensive and detailed bibliography of archives and collections, interviews and correspondence, specific archival material cited within *Left Out*, children's books and secondary works. Reynolds has used material from several of the remaining progressive schools she discusses to interrogate the reading provided for their students, as well as interrogating the students' own records. She also cites several well-known people's memories of their childhood reading – Jenny Lee, Alexei Sayle and Michael Rosen – but it would have been interesting also to examine where possible the book collections retained in (admittedly probably more affluent) houses of the era. Overlooking some editorial and proofreading slips, the single disappointing area of the book is the index. Again proofreading could have been more careful, as incorrect page numbers appear at times, but for an academic book the indexing is frustratingly lacking in depth and detail. Nevertheless, this is an immensely interesting, informative and, above all, readable book. I very much hope that, like the books that are its subject, *Left Out* will be read by the general, and not just the academic, reader, and, despite its cost, hopefully via the services of what was once the university of all ages: the public library. While it imparts a vast amount of information, I found it also stirred up a wish to rediscover books I had forgotten about, and even more so, to discover for myself those other radical books for children from these years, which Reynolds has revealed so eloquently.

In her Conclusion – considerably shorter than her Introduction – Reynolds considers the legacy of the forgotten tradition of radical publishing. Its young readers and their children were, as she writes, in adulthood, 'responsible for seeing that the young Welfare State flourished, for making Britain part of Europe, and for placing it at the

centre of popular youth culture and fashion' (p.216). How sad it is in 2017 to reflect that one of these triumphs of radical thinking will disappear within the next two years, and another is potentially mortally sick.

## Notes

- 1 John Rowe Townsend (1997) *The History of Children's Books 4: Between Two Wars. Books for Keeps* 107: 10–11.
- 2 Geoffrey Trease (1966) *Bows against the Baron*. Leicester: Brockhampton Press.

**Bridget Carrington**

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## Storybooks, Novels and Tales

### *A Wisp of Wisdom: Animal Tales from Cameroon*

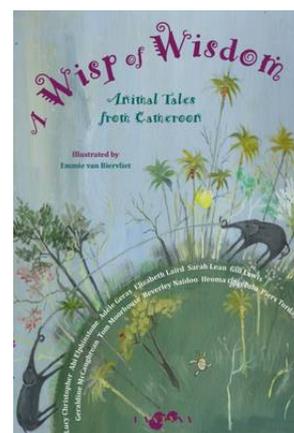
Lucy Christopher, Abi Elphinstone, Adèle Geras, Elizabeth Laird, Sarah Lean, Gill Lewis, Geraldine McCaughrean, Tom Moorhouse, Beverley Naidoo, Ifeoma Onyefulu and Piers Torday, illus. Emmie Van Biervliet. London: Lantana, hb.978 1 9113 7306 3, 2016, £25.00, 164pp. [Folktales; 7–12 years. Keywords: folktales; Cameroon; Africa; animals.]

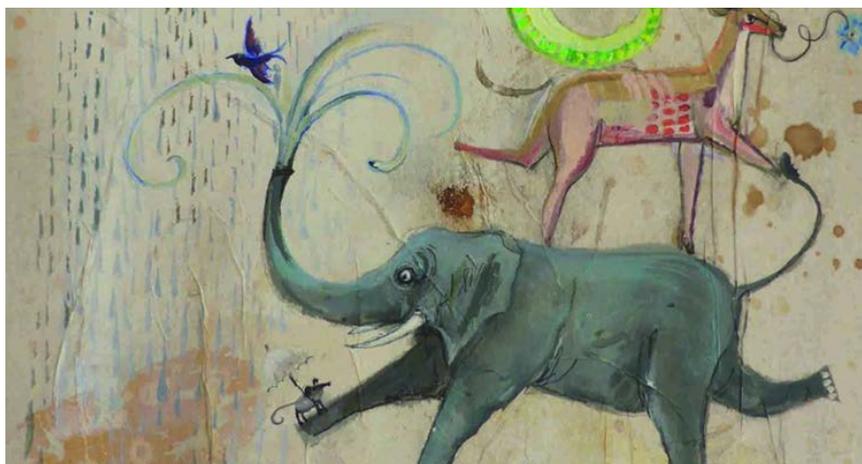
This collection of retold folktales is part of a community project that started in the Korup National Park in Cameroon, one of Africa's oldest rainforests. Korup shelters a rich diversity of flora and fauna and supports a population mainly dependent on subsistence and cash-crop farming, with little access to formal education. It has been the subject of fitful conservation efforts since the 1930s when it was created a Forest Reserve and is presently supported by the Korup Rainforest Conservation Society, a group of mainly local conservationists.

Society members have gathered the stories in this collection orally from local tribal elders with the aim of creating a book that could be printed in large numbers and distributed free in the Korup so that, in the words of Tom Moorhouse, one of the principal movers of the project in the UK, '2,000 children in the Korup will have a copy of the book. They will have something to read. They will know their stories.' The authors who have put the stories into words and the illustrator whose pictures support them have given their talents without payment. The publishing costs are being met by crowdfunding and proceeds from the sale of the book (which may explain its unusually high price).

It is a quality production from Lantana, a new, award-winning publisher with impeccable credentials in promoting diversity in publishing. A glance at the authors represented here reveals both an array of writing talent and of commitment to the principles of conservation, human rights and social development that the project represents. Each of the writers brings their own talents and styles to their allotted tales, so while the stories might feature the same cast of animals in the same natural setting, the reader is offered a variety of storytelling voices.

The cast and themes of the tales are mostly unfamiliar to me. I recognise only the tale of 'How the Monkey Defeats the Crocodile' as finding its way into other retellings collected from sources both in India and Africa. I had not come across tales of the tortoise as trickster before, which are well represented here. But quick research reveals that these are found widely in West Africa. Indeed, the second tale, of how the tortoise earns the dents in his shell, turns up in next door Nigeria too. Some of the stories are, like Kipling's *Just So Stories* (1902), tales of the possible origins of animal appearance and behaviour (etiologically tales). Of course, behind the animal masks, they also contain perceptive observation of human behaviour and social mores, and offer warnings and advice about how to behave with other people and in the natural environment.





From *A Wisp of Wisdom: Animal Tales from Cameroon*. Copyright © 2017 Emmie Van Biervliet and Tom Moorhouse.

Emmie Van Biervliet's full-colour illustrations are scattered generously through the text. They are not only individual works of art in their own right – vibrant, imaginative and rich in character and atmosphere – but they maintain a perfect balance between reality and fantasy: the animals are portrayed in recognisable forms, while their environment is often subtly abstracted or distorted. All in all, this is a book whose execution in words and pictures matches the high aspirations of the project that gave rise to it.

#### Clive Barnes

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### ***Black Ships Before Troy: The Story of the Iliad***

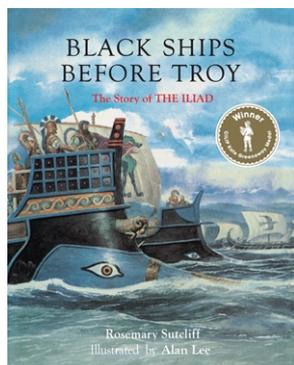
Rosemary Sutcliff, illus. Alan Lee, London: Frances Lincoln, 978 1 8478 0995 7, 2017, £12.99, 128pp. [Myth; 7–11 years. Keywords: Myth; legend; conflict; honour; Olympus.]

This is a striking book. It is highly illustrated with full-colour pictures. Some pictures spread over more than one page though none takes a whole page. There is plenty of text so it could not be described as a picture book.

This retelling of the Iliad was awarded the 1993 Kate Greenaway Medal for Alan Lee's illustrations when it was first published. Rosemary Sutcliffe divides the story into 19 conveniently sized episodes. These can't really be used as separate stories as the understanding of each new narrative depends on knowledge of what comes before. Sutcliffe has managed to provide all the detail we need, yet she brings the stories to life. She maintains a good narrative balance and there is some dialogue on almost every page. She keeps a pleasing gender balance, giving us the stories of the men who go into battle and also of the women who wait at home. She includes the Amazons – the women who go to war. Naturally we also get some insight into the lives of the gods. These stories are important for children. They are a significant part of our culture. Sutcliffe's text is also useful for adults who may have forgotten the story. It reminds us of these events in a very palatable form.

The illustrations work in a very special way. They are three-dimensional and very realistic. In particular Alan Lee gives us very effective facial expressions. For example, on pages 24 and 25 we see the warriors in discussion. We can see assertiveness, contemplation and respect in the men's faces. On pages 30 and 31 we see Aphrodite throwing a cloak of invisibility over Paris, and Menelaus is left holding an empty helmet. We see the puzzlement in Menelaus's face and the tension in Paris. On page 89 we see a very thoughtful priestess looking at the sleeping men.

Many adult readers may prefer not to have such detailed illustrations. We find richer ones in our imagination. Yet Lee's pictures work in a different way here. The detail is



important for the child who may not know this world. He provides much information about the setting: what people wore, where they lived and worked, which tools they used, for example. His illustrations also stimulate the other senses: we hear the noise of the battle (pages 98–99), the hissing of the great sea-serpent (pages 114–115) and here we can also hear the sea and smell the salt air, possibly also feeling the sea breeze on our faces. On pages 58 and 59 we hear and smell the horses and the sea. The pictures stimulate the imagination here, rather than replace it, and the multi-sensual film can carry on in our own heads. This book would make an excellent library resource for children aged 7–11. It would also be welcome in any adult’s study.

**Gill James** is a writer and editor. Her work includes fiction for young readers. She lectures part-time at Salford University and offers workshops on creative writing, including writing in other languages. Before becoming an academic she taught modern languages in schools for 23 years.

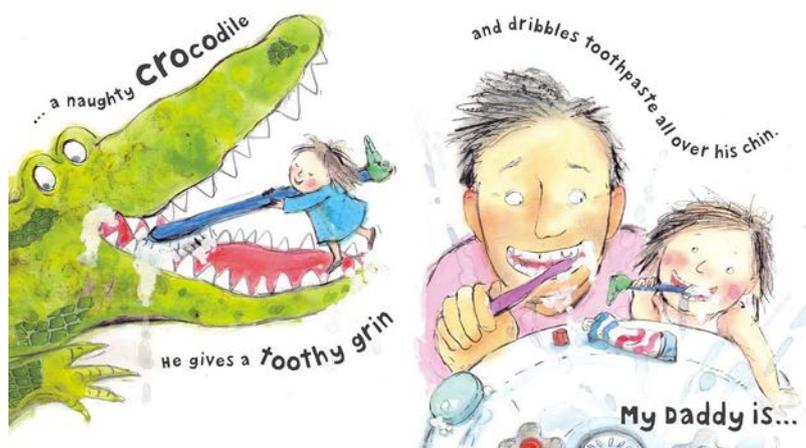
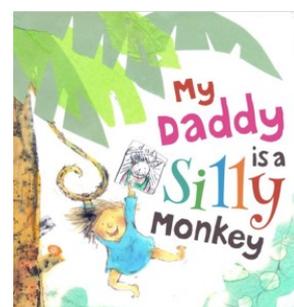
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## Picture Books, Picture Storybooks, Comics Books and Novelty Books

### *My Daddy is a Silly Monkey*

Dianne Hofmeyr, illus. Carol Thompson, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, hb. 978 1 9109 5913 8, £11.99, 2017, 32pp. [Picture book; 3+ years. Keywords: fathers; single parent; love; rhythm; rhyme; fun.]

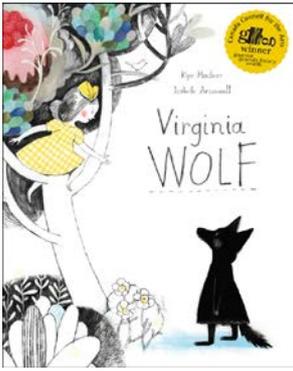
This lively picture book, aimed at three-year-olds and over, depicts a typically hectic day in the life of a little girl and her single parent dad. The love between them is beautifully conveyed on every page. The little girl likens her multitasking dad to various animals: first thing in the morning he is a ‘great BIG bear’ who is grizzly and grouchy and ‘scratches and yawns’, then at breakfast he spills the milk and burns the toast while sending a txt, his arms like a ‘whirly twirly swirly octopus’. At the swimming pool he is a ‘humungous whale’, an interesting-sounding and challenging adjective for the young reader, and with rhythm, rhyme and alliteration abounding, the text is fun to read aloud. The text and images work well together, with the words weaving their way around the illustrations to carry the narrative forward. The colourful illustrations are in mixed media and collage, and the loose, sketchy lines give the images a spontaneous and energetic quality.



Dianne Hofmeyr, who has two IBBY Honour Books among several other awards, and Carol Thompson, who illustrated Shutta Crum’s *Thunder-Boomer!* (2013), a picture book that was awarded School Library Journal Best Book of the Year among other accolades, have created an entertaining picture book that will be a delightful addition to the young reader’s bookshelf.

**June Hopper Swain**

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## **Virginia Wolf**

Kyo Maclear, illus. Isabelle Arsenault, Bristol: Book Island, hb. 978 1 9114 9603 8, 2017, £9.99, 32pp. First published in Canada by Kids Can Press, Toronto, 2012. [Picture book, fictional biography; 4–8+ years. Keywords: Virginia Woolf; Vanessa Bell; sisters; wolves; sadness; painting; confusing emotions, power of imagination.]

Virginia Woolf continues to happily haunt adult readers and the play *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* has been recently revived in London. Book Island, now based in Bristol UK, are continuing their quest to bring poignantly crafted and illustrated stories from across the globe to English-speaking markets.

*Virginia Wolf* is the story of her life for younger readers. Allusions to the distinguished author and her sister Vanessa Bell, the painter, will appeal more directly to parents and primary-school teachers but that will do nothing to inhibit the delight that younger readers will take in this beautiful book. They may be a little afraid of Virginia Wolf. It cannot be easy to have a sister whose sadness makes her look and behave just like a real wolf with pointy black ears and nose. Even scarier is her desire to fly to far off places, such as ... Bloomsbury, of course! Parents may need to explain that one.

The illustrations make use of an ingenious combination of deep charcoal black and gentle pastel colours. Their combination serves to highlight the relationship between the fear of what is happening to Virginia and the underlying affection between the two sisters. I won't spoil the ending but all does end well. It's painting together not flying that makes us feel better. Imaginative calligraphy complements beautifully the artwork as well as the story. This is a truly astonishing storybook that will become its own sort of classic.



[For a trailer of this book, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vm5ulczGhc>.]

**Margaret Strain, with a little help from husband John**

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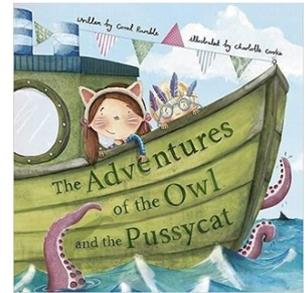
### ***The Adventures of the Owl and the Pussycat***

Coral Rumble, illus. Charlotte Cooke, London, Wacky Bee Books, pb. 978 0 9956 9724 9, 2017, £6.99, 32pp. First published by Paragon Books, 2013. [Poetry; 3+ years. Keywords: Owl; pussycat; sea; boat; honey; money; runcible spoon; treasure chest; nonsense.]

‘The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea’, the story begins, ‘In a box on the living-room floor. They sailed away for a year and a day. And these are the things they saw. ...’ But there is no honey, no money, not even a hint of a runcible spoon, until finally, ‘... hand in hand, they sailed back to land and slept by the silvery moon.’

The opening and closing lines of this retelling of ‘The Owl and the Pussycat’ by mother-and-daughter team, Coral Rumble (text) and Charlotte Crook (illustration), are just as Edward Lear wrote them. They provide the same compelling invitation to adventure and the same magical resolution of sleep without quite letting the story die.

Between opening and closing lines, there are 11 beautifully illustrated encounters with aquatic characters and objects, each of them described in boldly metered rhymes.



**Boat.** Copyright © 2011 Charlotte Cooke.



**Octopus.** Copyright © 2011 Charlotte Cooke.

Eels dance with seals, bottles bob and there is a jangling treasure chest dangling from an octopus. Younger readers will be quicker than I was to spot ‘the cat on the fin of the shark in a spin’. But everyone will be thrilled by the clownfish ‘playing the flute, in a bow tie and suit’, to the delight of contentedly smiling fish filling every seat in the circus. It is just one wonderful panorama in a beautifully illustrated picture book in

which colour is used with great subtlety to portray this lovely maritime night's dream. Ocean blue and seaweed green combine with octopus pink and goldfish gold. It is a book that brings widespread delight to primary-school age children. Parents will be able to encourage younger children to point to the happy fish and sea birds and to share with them that same delight in words and rhyme that the author shares with Edward Lear. Her story has less nonsense than Lear's, but more vivid encounters and characters. I missed some of Lear's precious nonsense, but felt more than compensated by the literary and artistic imagination that Coral Rumble and her daughter Charlotte Cooke bring to this very readable book.

**Margaret Strain, with a little help from husband John**

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## Information Books and Non-Fiction

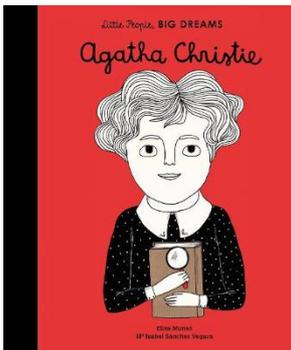
### *Agatha Christie*

Isabel Sánchez Vegara, trans. Raquel Plitt, illus. Elisa Munsó, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0959 9, 2017, £9.99, 28pp. [Non-fiction; 5+ years. Keywords: biography, crime, drugs, toxins, detective.]

This book belongs to a series entitled Little People Big Dreams. It presents a simplified biography of the amazingly prolific crime-fiction writer Agatha Christie. It explains how when she was a child her mother would read young Agatha storybooks, and Agatha would always propose alternative endings. During the First World War Agatha became a nurse. The drugs she dispensed to patients gave her a knowledge of toxins that would later stand her in good stead as a writer. The first important character she devised was the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, who believed that any crime could be solved by effective use of the human brain. Poirot was a great success. He was followed by Miss Marple, an aged spinster who left the official police miles behind in solving crimes. Miss Marple was designed to rebut the prejudice that old people deserve to be ignored. Both these characters still thrive on today's TV networks. She wrote more than 100 books and played an important part in rescuing crime fiction from being regarded as an inferior genre.

**Rebecca Butler**

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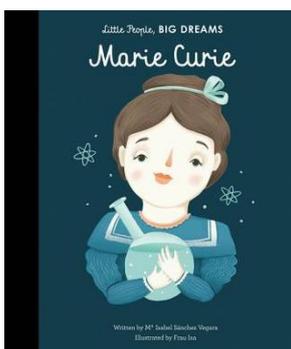
### *Marie Curie*

Isabel Sánchez Vegara, illus. Frau Isa, trans. Emma Martinez, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0961 2, 2017, £9.99, 28pp. [Biography; 7+ years. Keywords: Science; chemistry; physics; higher education; prejudice.]

This book belongs to a series entitled Little People Big Dreams. It presents a highly simplified account of the life of the great scientist from her girlhood until her triumphs with her husband Pierre, discovering radium and polonium. She won Nobel prizes both for physics and for chemistry and still remains the only woman to have made this double achievement. Mme Curie's career might have been ended before it began. She was born in Warsaw. In Poland at that time female candidates were not allowed to enter university. Most young women might have abandoned their plans for higher education. Instead Mme Curie migrated to Paris where female scholars were more welcome, though she had to learn to study in a foreign language. The value of this little book is that it reveals the girl and the woman behind the celebrated public figure. Despite her accolades, she was a human being. Any girls or young women with ambitions that might be thwarted by prejudice will benefit by the story of this famous woman's triumph over the barriers erected by a prejudiced society – and even more so if those ambitions happen to be scientific.

**Rebecca Butler**

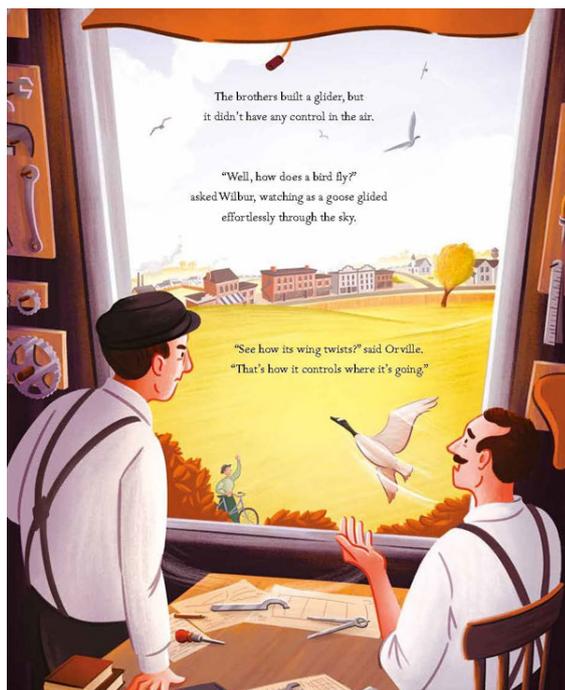
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## ***Taking Flight: How the Wright Brothers Conquered the Skies***

Adam Hancher, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0928 5, 2017, £11.99, 30pp. [Biography; 7+ years. Keywords: Flying machines; aerodynamics; innovation; patience; persistence; passion; motivation.]

This picture book tells the story of Wilbur and Orville Wright, the brothers who created the first heavier-than-air flying machine and hence laid the foundations for the jet age in which we live. The story begins, intriguingly enough, when the brothers were children. Their father brought them a toy from France: it was a small wind-up helicopter. The principles of powered flight took hold of their imaginations at an early age. The first powered flight took place in 1903. But rumours of their accomplishment were greeted with scepticism. They did not stage a public demonstration until 1908 and on that occasion their passenger died in a crash. Such were the obstacles the brothers had to overcome.



Now they needed somewhere to test out their new glider... somewhere windy, sandy and, above all, secretive.

Out came the map.

**From *Taking Flight: How the Wright Brothers Conquered the Skies*. Copyright © 2017 Adam Hancher. Published by Frances Lincoln Children's Books, <https://www.quartoknows.com/Frances-Lincoln-Childrens-Books>.**

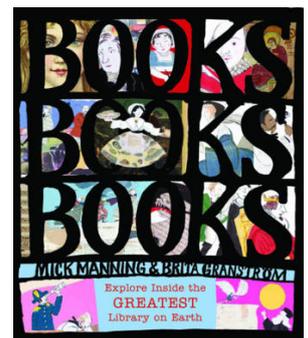
In this simple and well-illustrated text Hancher conveys the difficulties the brothers had to resolve and the passion and patience they needed not to abandon their quest. Today's children, accustomed perhaps to a world where instant gratification has become the norm, may learn from this book just how hard a road must be traversed by those in search of genuine innovation. I would like to think of a child reading this book on a big Jumbo jet heading for some distant destination.

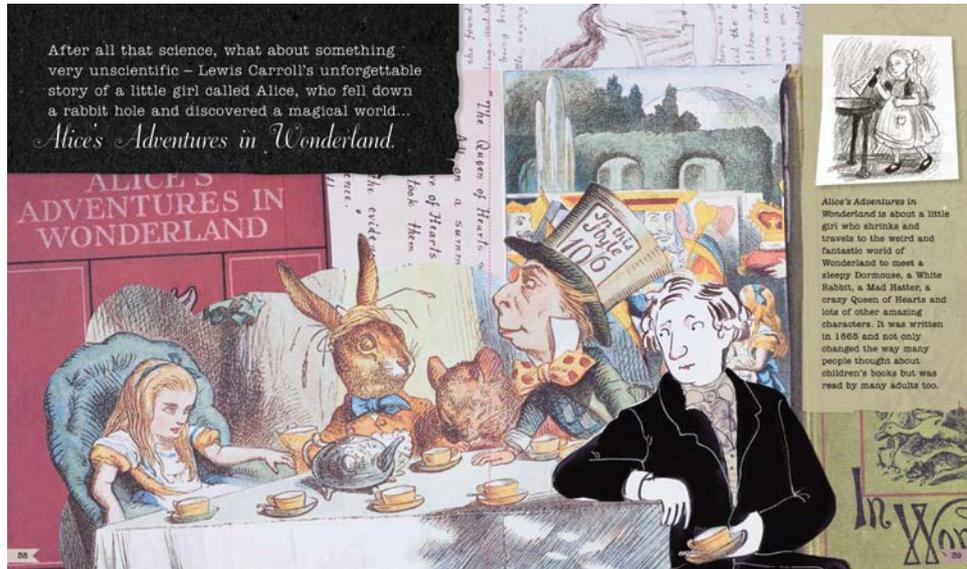
**Rebecca Butler**

## ***Books Books Books!: Explore inside the Greatest Library on Earth***

Mick Manning and Brita Granström, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, hb. 978 1 9109 6998 8, £14.99, 48pp. [Information book; 7+ years. Keywords: Archive; library; catalogue; category; acquisitions; newspapers; journals.]

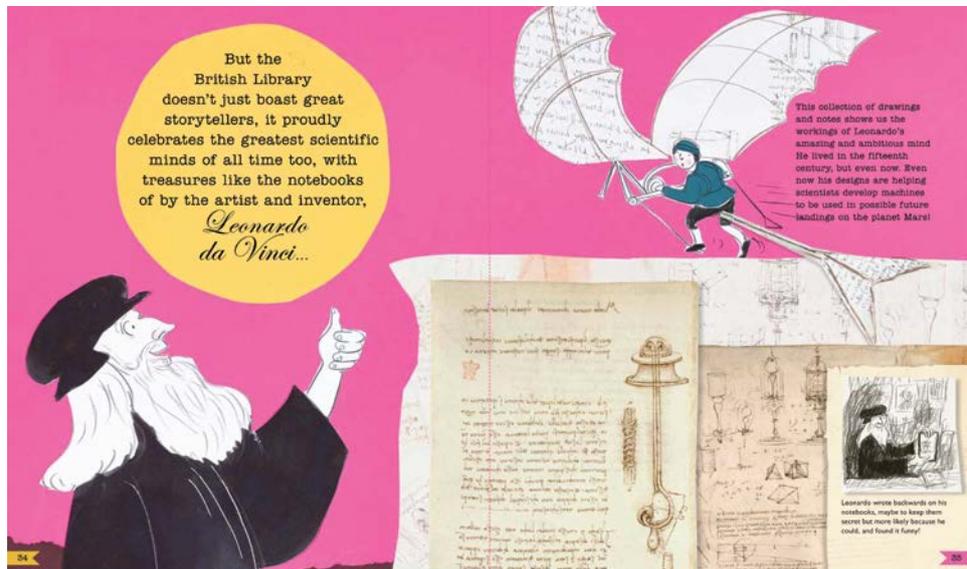
This guide to the British Library explains first the purpose and method of the library, namely to hold a copy of all published books. The book then goes on to introduce 21 examples of the library's most significant acquisitions, ranging from early gospels, the Magna Carta and Shakespeare, to modern newspapers and Sherlock Holmes, stopping off at Jane Austen and Charles Darwin en route.





**Alice in Wonderland.** Illustrations copyright © 2017 Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom, from *Books! Books! Books!*, published by Otter-Barry Books.

This book has many virtues to commend it. The illustrations are vivid and imaginative. The photographs of the objects are exemplary. But the book's main virtue is to encompass the scope of an age-old historical collection in a single brief volume. Every reader will doubtless miss certain elements that might have been present. Why is there no room for J.K. Rowling? Yet every reader is inclined to set aside personal gripes in admiration of the scope and depth of the choices actually made. Manning and Granström have succeeded in taking what might seem to young readers an impenetrable and intrinsically adult cultural edifice, giving them a licence to find their way through its fascinating corridors.



**Leonardo da Vinci.** Illustrations copyright © 2017 Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom, from *Books! Books! Books!*, published by Otter-Barry Books.

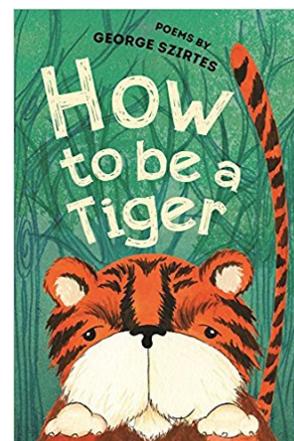
Rebecca Butler

## Poetry

### *How to Be a Tiger*

George Szirtes, illus. Tim Archbold, Hereford; Otter-Barry Books, pb. 978 1 9109 5920 6, 2017, £6.99, 96pp. [Poetry; 5+ years. Keywords: nature; humour; philosophy; everyday life.]

You can 'Look Inside' this book to read some of the poems on Amazon UK: 'You Have a Body', 'Learning to Walk and Run', 'Running Poem' and 'Ladder'. These titles give you an idea of the range of these poems. And here is a double spread from the books website to further encourage you to buy this book for a 'child' of any age, including yourself.



#### The Leaping Hare

Darts down the road,  
Melts into grass, stock still,  
Drums on the still moon,  
Is hunted and, grey with age,  
Leaps. And is gone.



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#### November Hare

The November hare  
is neither here nor there.

As the cold squeezes in  
it is where it's been

though it's hard to know where.



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The book is in the usual small schoolbag-sized format with black and white illustrations and on recycled paper. I have praised many of the books in this series in previous reviews in *IBBYLink*.

George Szirtes previous book of poetry for children, *In the Land of Giants*, won the 2013 CLPE Poetry Award, however he is probably better known for his poetry for adults, as a translator and as for many years a judge on the Stephen Spender Prize for poetry in translation. This prize includes classes for 14 and under and 18 and under, as well as an Open class. So it will be no surprise when I say that this book is in a class of its own. These poems can be read and reread many times and give food for thought. Here is the start of 'How Old Are You Now'.

Bang the drum and blow the horn.  
Your born!

It's the biggest thing you've ever done!

The time creeps up  
And then you're *one*

Then *two*  
Then *three*

Unusually there is no illustration.

Fairy tales are invoked in 'The Princess and the Bad King', 'Rumpelstiltskin', 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Hansel and Gretel', but all with a new view. 'Hansel and Gretel' starts

There runs a mouse with a story to tell  
About two lost children.

And 'Sleeping Beauty':

Sleeping Beauty  
(what a cutie)  
Slept a very long time  
(far too long for this rhyme).

There is a series on nature, including a set 'In the Park' with a poem for each season.

There are other allusions to well-known children's book and film characters such as Captain Hook and the Three Little Pigs. 'A Huge Wind' is an example:

Listen to that Wind!  
Just listen to its *huff* and *puff*  
(like the wolf in the story  
with the three little pigs)

A book to savour, enjoy and to learn some poems by heart. I was not all that taken with some of the illustrations that include a person's face but the emotions and atmospheres are excellently depicted, as are the animals.

To view some more inside spreads, see [www.otterbarrybooks.com/how-to-be-a-tiger](http://www.otterbarrybooks.com/how-to-be-a-tiger).

**Jennifer Harding**

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The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 51, Spring 2018 (copydate 31 December 2017), and will be on fairy tales.

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.

The IBBY UK annual conference will take place on Saturday 11 November 2017 at the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), 44 Weber Street, London SE1 8QW. For details and to book your place: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/happily-ever-after-the-evolution-of-fairy-tales-across-time-and-cultures-tickets-36889298886?aff=es2>.

#### **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.

#### *IBBYLink* 50 Autumn 2017

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To sponsor a future issue of *IBBYLink*, contact Ferelith Hordon, fhordon@aol.com. 8 Terrapin Court, Terrapin Road, London SW17 8QW.

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