

## Fairy Tales

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### CONTENTS

#### EDITORIAL

#### A Therapeutic Ogre

Beth Webb

#### 'Old' Ladies in New Spaces: Cinderella and Little Red in Modern Cities

Dalila Forni

#### A Flying Wheelchair and a Deaf Fairy: An Exploration of Disability in Fairy Tales

Rebecca R. Butler

#### One Story, Many Voices

Delaram Ghanimifard

2

3

7

12

14

#### A Puss without Boots: John Burningham's *It's a Secret!*

June Hopper Swain

#### Seven Miles of Steel Thistles: Reflections on Fairy Tales by Katherine Langrish

Judith Philo

#### Nursery Rhymes, Fairy Stories and Children's Games: An Appreciation of the Pioneering Work of Iona and Peter Opie

June Hopper Swain

#### REVIEWS

16

20

23

26



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## EDITORIAL

'Once upon a time ...' at those words the audience goes quiet, ready for the story. Will it be about princesses or tricksters? Talking animals, ogres and stepmothers? The format seems timeless and we are transported to a world divorced from the real world. But fairy tales are not novels, composed by an author, the form and style set in stone. We sometimes forget this. Fairy tales are more interesting, flexible, chameleon like. We were reminded of this at the IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference as speakers presented the concept of the alternative fairy tale. This theme is carried into this issue as Beth Webb explores how the fairy tale – the traditional tale with all its usual ingredients – can be used to help troubled adults or children to confront fears or issues; there is value in the traditional when both teller and audience take ownership of the story, transforming the template into something personal. Dalila Forni examines how an artist, Roberto Innocenti, takes that traditional landscape and makes it familiar through the visual language he adopts, enriching and extending the reader's response to the archetypal story.

Fairy tales will have almost certainly had a place in all our childhoods whether in a traditional form or given the Disney makeover. Delaram Ghanimifard recalls her experience of fairy tale as she grew up in Iran, experiences that have fuelled her passion to publish fairy tales that will cross boundaries today and inspiring her to create a new series One Story, Many Voices in which a new version of 'Cinderella' makes its debut. Cinderella, of course, is the

princess and perfect. But how do fairy tales reach an audience that may have a disability? Rebecca Butler takes the fairy tale to task; too often disability is seen as evil. However, there are models for good practice as she demonstrates – the fairy tale does not have to be locked into such outmoded ideas. There is room for a great deal more.

Indeed, authors and illustrators have always seen the fairy tale as a rich source for inspiration. June Swain reviews John Burningham's postmodern take on 'Puss in Boots'. Here is a perfect example of what a great illustrator-storyteller can do with the traditional ingredients of the fairy tale, reassuring the audience with the familiar, and delighting with new. Fairy tales are fascinating. We are reminded of this in *Seven Miles of Steel Thistles: Reflections on Fairy Tales* by Katherine Langrish, here thoughtfully presented by Judith Philo who not only highlights the central themes in the essays (or blogs) written by Langrish, but ensures we also will want to read them ourselves.

'... and so they lived happily ever after', that satisfying ending. But as has been suggested this need not be the expected or assumed. The fairy tale can surprise, enchant, support. It is constantly being interrogated and constantly being renewed to reflect the world it inhabits. It belongs to no one, but is owned by everyone. What is your fairy tale?

**Ferelith Hordon**



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# A Therapeutic Ogre

*Beth Webb*

I was thrilled to be invited to talk about fairy stories as family therapy at IBBY UK/NCRCL MA's 'Happily Ever After' conference in November 2017. But instead of giving a paper in the normal way, I turned my ideas into a brand-new fairy story – 'The Ogre's Wood' – and told it.

A couple of weeks later I received a phone call from Ferelith Hordon, *IBBYLink's* editor. 'I loved your talk,' she said, 'but why did you tell it as a story?'

'Pure mischief,' I replied. 'This was a conference on the future of fairy tales; I'm a professional storyteller as well as a children's author, so it seemed a logical thing to do. I think I was also daring myself to see if I could do it.'

But more seriously, it was also a way of testing several areas of my talk's hypotheses:

- 1 Storytelling helps us take one step away from reality to make sense of and manage the chaos of real life. (A synopsis of the story will be on the new IBBY UK website when the transfer has been completed from the old website.)
- 2 But this is a perilous adventure; grown-ups and children need each other's experiences and perspectives to find the way through their own 'Ogre's Wood'.
  - (a) Children need to read fairy stories with a trusted adult (nearby) to teach them essential life-skills: dragon taming and maze negotiation, etc., and also to reassure them and bring them back to reality when the stories get too scary.
  - (b) Fairyland is rarely finished with grown-ups. Sadly, we often forget this. Reading with children takes grown-ups back to fairyland, where, if we keep our minds and hearts open, we may just find treasure maps for our tangled lives.

If I could make some of these ideas work as a told story, I'd demonstrate the strength of storytelling both as communication and a therapeutic tool. I also hoped to take my listening adults on a trip back to fairyland!

I based the thinking for 'The Ogre's Wood' on the work of my friend Patricia Stewart, a clinical psychologist with many years of expertise in the field of child and family therapy (Patricia Stewart BA (Hons), MA (Child Psychology), C.Psychol., AFBPsS, HCPC Registered Clinical Psychologist, EMDR Therapist). She uses both traditional and bespoke made-up stories to help her clients make sense of what is happening to them.

Some very traditional storytellers may be shocked at the thought of adjusting ancient stories to the needs and interests of the listeners, but both Patricia and I believe this is a vital part of the process. After all, stories are mirrors of humanity's thoughts and experiences. As our culture and circumstances change, so must our tales.

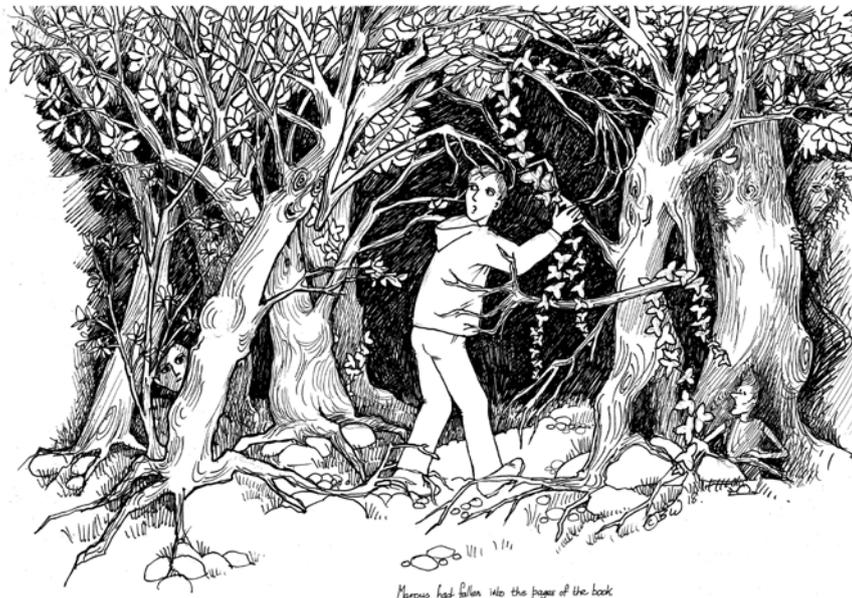
Of course, it's important to treasure a dramatic recording of an immortal tale, but stories are like babies. They have to grow up. They long to travel. They will come home different, maybe with a foreign partner who needs to be loved, into our family narrative. In return, our changed child and their sweetheart will enrich us with their new stories.

We change. The world changes. Stories change. Even archetypes change.

In 'The Ogre's Wood' the main character identifies as 'the Witch' and the listener is uncertain whether she's planning to cook and eat her young visitor (Marcus), or to save his life. I tried to keep this uncertainly dangling as long as possible, while the Witch examines her own narrative. Deep inside, she's scared she'll accidentally put Marcus, not the roast, into her nice hot oven (i.e. damage him) because that's what witches and step-mothers do. This is because she's allowed ossified archetypes, fear and doubt to

determine her life. She has allowed the Ogre's Wood to grow right up to her cottage walls. There's no escape unless she can learn that stories provide the tools to take creative ownership of her present and her future.

When Marcus gets lost in the Ogre's Wood, the Witch knows only that she can save him, but dare she? Fairyland's shadows still terrify her.



#### **'Marcus had fallen into the pages of the book'**

As the story unfolds, the listener realises the Witch is in a relationship with Marcus's father but she's terrified of becoming a step-mum – in case she gets it wrong. The archetypal role models of Snow White's and Cinderella's step-mums aren't much help – neither is Marcus' trendy teacher – full of rules and modern theories, but little warmth or humanity.

In the end, the Witch discovers that the love and trust she and Marcus share is magic enough to see them through all the mistakes to come. With this mere 'twig' of a magic wand, she cannot only dispel the shadows from her own childhood, but also help Marcus through his.

Similarly, Marcus helps the Witch name and use the shadowy figure lurking by the hollow oak in her nightmares. Once this is achieved, she and Marcus take ownership of the Ogre's Wood together, and the prospect of becoming Marcus' step-mum becomes a joy, not a terror.

In this way, traditional story archetypes (all witches are evil, all shadows are to be feared) become useful starting points – but the listener needs to examine these, questioning their aims and motivations, then to look for, or even demand, change. This is a two-way process: the listener must learn to become a story-maker, manipulating the tale, but they must also allow the characters to live, acting out new stories so they can try out the fresh ideas; see what works, what doesn't – and why. This process becomes a safe dummy run for reality.

If a storyteller (rather than a book) is involved, they must give up all ownership of the tale, allowing the listener to become a story-maker. They can then recreate the story as they need it to be, whether it's assigning new roles to the characters, or acting out an updated version of the tale. This allows the story-maker to put names and faces to their dreams and nightmares, but in difficult situations, it's very important to work with a trained counsellor or therapist. (You can find a good therapist at <https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist/>, <http://thecounsellingdirectory.co.uk/> and <https://www1.bps.org.uk/bpslegacy/dcp.>)

Most people's internal terrors are unnamed; there are often no words for saying the unsayable. Using metaphors, similes and archetypes breaks this impasse. There is real power in the naming of things. It isn't just folklore. This approach isn't just for people in therapy, for even the most balanced of us can use stories to navigate our own 'Ogre's Wood'.

So far, I've applied my comments to adults. Obviously, everything applies equally to children. As a storyteller, I'm horrified that people assume stories are for kiddies. As I've said before, adults are never finished with fairy tales, and fairy tales have rarely finished with us. Throughout our lives, archetypes still ferret away in our subconscious, trying to make sense out of the grief and chaos. The adult addiction to books and films like 'The Game of Thrones', 'Lord of the Rings', and even 'James Bond', as well as fantasy computer games and cosplay, all point to this. Adults without stories find the world a difficult and lonely place.

Quick questions:

- Which fantasy character do you identify with?
- Now ask yourself why. Write it down and think about it.
- What does that say about you?

OK, this approach doesn't work for everyone; some people just don't 'get' stories, thank goodness we're all different. However, this approach to coping can be a lifesaver. But be warned, whether told or read, the story-tale world of the imagination can become dangerously real, a place where it's perfectly possible to become lost and face real danger – as happened to Marcus. This is why children need a loving adult nearby to read their eyes and body language, keeping them in a safe place, reminding the child, 'Don't worry, it's only a story. We'll all come safely home at the end – even if 'home' isn't where you thought it was, and it's a nurturing wolf, not a granny who'll care for you.'

If you make time to read with a child, you'll also improve their literacy skills and give you both happy memories.

Let's look at how stories work. Essentially, a strong metaphor that is told and explored (whether written, drawn, told or danced, it doesn't matter, it's all storytelling) becomes a way of experiencing difficult things vicariously.

A child reads 'Red Riding Hood' and can then discuss with their grown-ups how to deal with strangers who want to know where they're going and what they're doing. This works as a sort of dress rehearsal in the mind, so when that young person does meet someone who's asking too many questions, or offering unwanted attention, they've already rehearsed what to do and say. They aren't thrown off balance. They cope much better with keeping themselves safe.

Again, the metaphor is essential here. A direct story about a hairy man approaching a girl in a red hoodie at the bus stop on the way to Grandma's, could be terrifying for a sensitive child. Similarly, children are often given pets to help them learn how to care – and more importantly, how to cope with life and death – although it doesn't always work. A friend of mine gave a hamster to her children with exactly this in mind. While this lady was away on business, the hamster died. The kind friend who'd been looking after her children, phoned my friend to tell her about the hamster's demise. 'Don't worry,' she said cheerfully, 'I've got an identical replacement, the children will never know Hammy snuffed it.'

Revisiting the tales from an adult perspective enables us to take on different personas within the tale. The character we'd have identified with as a child, or even five years ago, may be very different from the name you wrote down in response to my first question above.

As adults, we need to allow that process to help us understand ourselves, whatever our age. For adults to read, or even better create, stories with children, as Marcus and the Witch did, enables us to find our prince/ss in shining armour, to kiss the frog we've ignored and feared for years, or to take ownership of the spooky wood outside the front gate of our minds. The child's perspective may help us see things in a way we'd forgotten.

Do try story making with your children or grandchildren. It may prove to be a way to talk about things that both of you have found unsayable for a long time. You don't have to be brilliant at creative writing, you need only to love stories – and the young person you're talking to. (And personally, I'd prefer to say all that in a good story rather than deliver an academic paper – if I can possibly get away with it.)

### **Addendum**

This addendum is by Patricia Stewart whose vast experience with children, young people and their families gave me the ideas and the psychological theory for 'The Ogre's Wood'. She says: 'My inspiration for narrative therapy comes from traditional stories, but I am deeply grateful to quite a few writers from a wide variety of backgrounds for their thoughts and insights in how to actually use the stories.'

A people are as healthy and confident as the stories they tell themselves. Sick storytellers can make nations sick. Without stories we would go mad. Life would lose its moorings or orientation ... Stories can conquer fear, you know. They can make the heart larger. (*A Way of Being Free* by Ben Okri)

The earliest storytellers were magi, seers, bards, griots, shamans. They were, it would seem, as old as time, and as terrifying to gaze upon as the mysteries with which they wrestled. They wrestled with mysteries and transformed them into myths which coded the world and helped the community to live through one more darkness, with eyes wide open and hearts set alight. (*A Way of Being Free* by Ben Okri)

Like the shaman, the storyteller is a walker between the worlds ... someone who communes with dragons ... able to pass freely from this world into non-ordinary reality and to help us experience those other realms for ourselves. (*The Shaman and the Storyteller* by Michael Berman)

From the ancient stories of the Prophets, to the parables of the New Testament, from the Nordic tales to medieval romance and modern TV soaps, humans and their children have used stories and storytelling to make sense of their worlds.

We think and speak in metaphor, we tell tales and bear witness to our lives. The person without a story, who has lost their autobiography, is someone who has fundamentally lost their identity and meaning. There is less than a breath between the 'Once upon a time there was' to the therapist asking 'tell me what happened', and then the tales unfold; loss and hope, dreams and betrayals, grief and courage, all there.

The therapist can consciously access these dreamtimes, these tales and archetypes to co-construct new possibilities of hope and survival, and a possibility that they can together find the lights in the darkness.

Rather than psychotherapy texts, I set my students to read John Connelly's *The Book of Lost Things*, a fantasy novel that takes a fresh look at traditional fairy tales, following a child's journey into adulthood. But perhaps the all-round human need for stories is best summed up by Philip Pullman: 'After nourishment, shelter and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world.' (From an interview for Scholastic Kids Club at [https://clubs-kids.scholastic.co.uk/clubs\\_content/7922](https://clubs-kids.scholastic.co.uk/clubs_content/7922).)

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*Out of the Wreckage*: George Monbiot (Verso 2017).

*Coming Home to Story*: Geoff Mead (Jessica Kingsley 2013). Originally published 2011 Vala Publications.

*A Way of Being Free*: Ben Okri (Head of Zeus 2014).

*The Shaman and the Storyteller*: Michael Berman (Superscript 2005).

*Poetry and Story Therapy*: Geri Giebel Chavis (Jessica Kingsley 2011).

For help with the story-making process, have a look at my 'Advice to Writers' pages: <https://www.bethwebb.co.uk/advice-for-writers>. If you or your child is in therapy, it's worth discussing story making with the therapist and getting some guidance.

## Further references

The Psychology of Storytelling:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/habits-not-hacks/201411/the-psychology-storytelling>.

The Art and Science of Storytelling Therapy: <http://storytellingtherapy.com/>. The purpose of this website is to inform and educate the reader about storytelling therapy; a powerful, fun and exciting method of psychotherapy.

Everybody has a Story: The Role of Storytelling in Therapy:

[blog.oup.com/2014/01/therapeutic-storytelling](http://blog.oup.com/2014/01/therapeutic-storytelling) by Johanna Slivinske. When was the last time you told or heard a good story? Was it happy, sad, or funny? Was it meaningful? What message did the story convey?

## Books that cross the divide

*What to Do when you Worry too Much*: Dawn Huebner (Magination Press 2005).

*The Boy and the Cloth of Dreams*: Jenny Koralek (Walker Books 1995).

[Beth Webb is a children's and young adult author, storyteller and illustrator. She divides her time between dreaming up fantastic derring-do and illustrating very down-to-earth books for adults with learning difficulties (<https://booksbeyondwords.co.uk/>). She studied psychology and sociology at university, but found dragons and the fair folk far more interesting. Then she discovered they were essentially all saying the same thing, which made her very happy. She lives in Wells with two very demanding cats and a garden full of weeds. [www.bethwebb.co.uk](http://www.bethwebb.co.uk). Beth is represented by Hannah Sheppard at [www.dhhliteraryagency.com](http://www.dhhliteraryagency.com). Patricia Stewart is an independent clinical psychologist who has worked for over 25 years with children, young people and their families. She specialises as a narrative therapist using story making as an essential part of the healing process. See her website <http://www.prometheus-therapy.co.uk/team/patricia-stewart/>.]

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## 'Old' Ladies in New Spaces: Cinderella and Little Red in Modern Cities

*Dalila Forni*

Roberto Innocenti is an Italian self-taught artist who has gained worldwide success illustrating many classic fairy tales and adapting them to his peculiar style. The artist often chooses to set his illustrations in contemporary times: 'For Innocenti, magic and mystery do not belong to a far-away realm but rather form an integral part of the world in which we live' (Myers, 2008).

In this article, two picture books illustrated by the artist will be explored: *The Girl in Red* with text by Aaron Frisch (2012) and *Cinderella* with text by Charles Perrault (1983). These retellings share an important characteristic as they both take place in modern spaces: the former is set in a contemporary New York, the latter in 1920s London.



*The Girl in Red* with text by Aaron Frisch (2012) is a contemporary retelling of Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood'. Marshall (2015: 163) defines it a 'fusion text', that is, a text with characteristics from the graphic novel, the comic and the picture book. Indeed, the format of the work clearly goes back to the picture book, but the panels structured by the artist are typical of the comic.

Sophia, the protagonist, is a young girl who lives with her single mother and her little sister in a bleak, high-rise building. The interior of her flat is colourful and apparently safe: the kitchen – the only room depicted – is furnished with a small table, a cupboard with cartoon-like stickers, a fridge decorated with some flowers and a TV where some cartoons are broadcast. Sophia leaves her home to visit her sick grandmother. Her mother warns her that she should be careful.

In Innocenti's version of the fairy tale, the forest is turned into a contemporary city, possibly New York, while the wood is replaced by a shopping mall called 'Il bosco' [The wood]. Thus, Sophia walks through a crowded and dirty city in order to reach her granny's house and bring her some food. Although the little girl is the main character of the story, it is usually difficult to detect her in the wide and hyper-realistic city represented by Innocenti. The girl is often walking in the streets, lost in a huge crowd or hidden in a wall full of graffiti. This particular choice creates an interesting 'Where's Waldo?' effect (Marshall and Gilmore, 2015: 99). As Sophia penetrates in the depths of the city, she becomes smaller and smaller in an urban space that gobbles her up in its filthy and threatening streets. The reader can clearly perceive her vulnerability and disorientation: Sophia is absorbed in a dangerous world and misses the right way, the path she had to follow to stay out of danger.

What is interesting about the new setting depicted by Innocenti is the continual reference to adulthood. The artist provides the reader (and viewer) a 'sexed-up imagery of adult entertainment districts' (Marshall and Gilmore, 2015). As Sophia gets smaller and smaller, sexual overtones – such as hypersexualised girls, fragmented parts of female bodies and risqué advertisements – get more and more prominent. For instance, the walls are covered by images where lips, feet in high heels, female bottoms and underwear are clearly represented. Innocenti captures a (soft) 'pornosphere' or 'striptease culture' (McNair, 2002: 81) that is now extremely common in our streetscapes. Thus, the artist depicts Western society in an apparently old fairy tale: the woods are now chaotic cities and contemporary dangers are hidden in misogynist and hypersexualised posters, usually visible to children and influential in their perception of gender identity. As argued by Leena-Maija Rossi (2007): 'Images do not function as a "mere" reflection of the world. They play an essential part in the societal production of meaning, knowledge and power, thereby shaping the realities we live in. As an example of this, advertising constantly produces knowledge on both sexuality and the gendered idea of beauty, fixed as a presupposition onto women and female femininity.'

In the city, women are portrayed as eroticised bits, and not in their whole as complete beings. In Marshall's opinion, the fragmentation of the female body foreshadows how the wolf will tear Sophia's body into pieces. Moreover, her red cloak indicates that she is available for (sexual) consumption (Marshall, 2015: 167; Leena-Maija Rossi, 2007: 134).

Furthermore, Innocenti chooses a common visual tactic used in contemporary advertisements, where adult women are portrayed as naïve and childish, while

younger girls are shown as self-confident and mature. Marshall notes that the choice of putting sexualised women in a picture book makes it unsuitable for children. However, these are ‘the images that children and adults see every day on the street, on subways, in magazines and newspapers, and on television’ (2015: 167), a context where sexualisation is not thought to be controversial for younger audiences. The contrast between the format – the picture book, usually addressed to young readers – and the issues presented in the work were emphasised by many critics and reviewers. In addition, Sophia gets lost not just because of the chaos of the city, but also because her attention is caught by shop windows. She desires objects of consumption and loses her way: Innocenti also presents a clear critique of consumerism and materialism.



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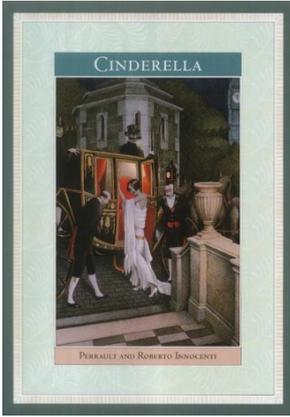
When the girl gets lost, she is suddenly surrounded by a gang of men that follow her in a narrow and deserted street. The girl is rescued by another man, ‘a smiling hunter’, a stranger ‘dark and strong and perfect in his timing’ (Frisch, 2012).

The man’s portrayal focuses on his physical, psychological and symbolic strength, opposed to the vulnerability and innocence that characterise the girl. In Marshall and Gilmore’s opinion (2015), the story turns from the possible gang rape to the participatory experience: Sophia is seduced by the ‘romantic brute’ and immediately trusts him.

The man gives the girl a ride to her grandmother’s house and the atmosphere turns grey, with a storm slowly approaching. The reader sees the man entering Sophie’s grandmother’s house, while Sophia seems completely unaware of her fate.

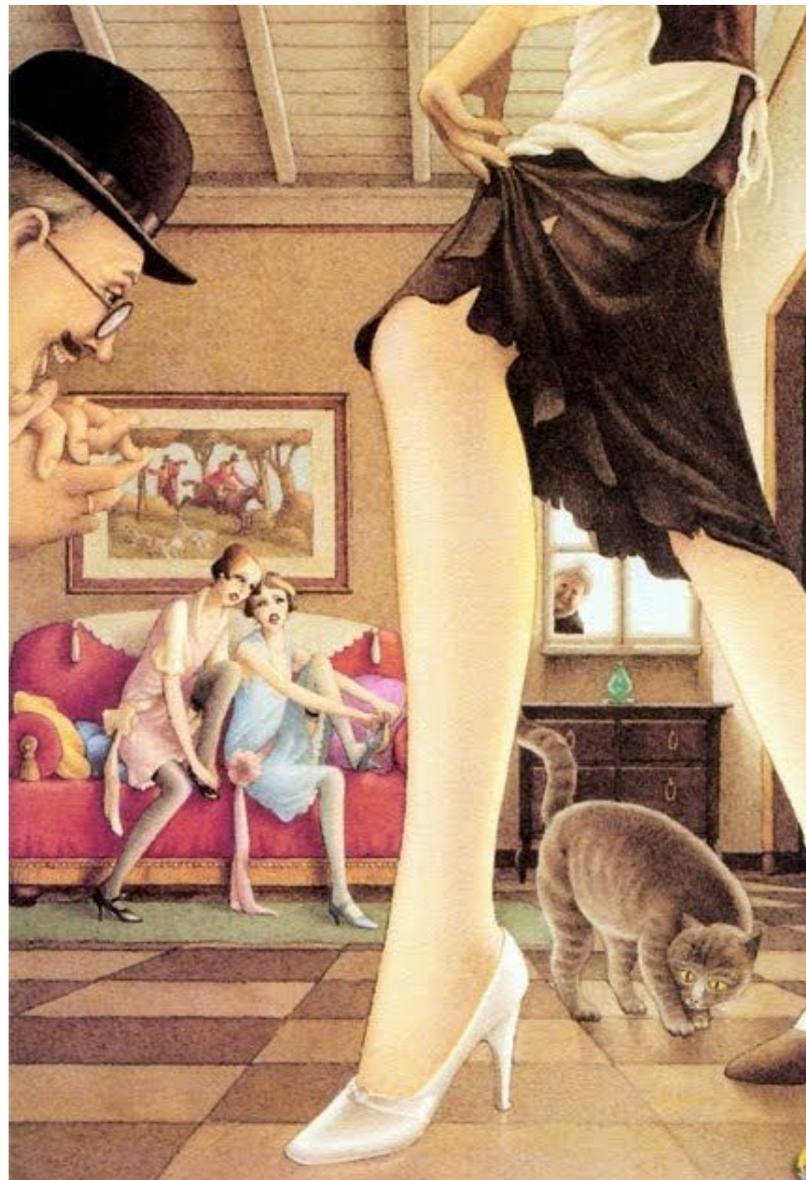
Then the story is interrupted by an ellipsis. Readers perceive, rather than see, the rape, and its omission strengthens this possibility. Trauma is addressed as something unknown, that cannot be represented or spoken. Frisch and Innocenti prefer to depict the moment through silence, in the gutters: it possibly represents the silence of women, both victims and witnesses of such a brutal act, women who do not dare to speak about it. Therefore, the reader, a silent witness, ‘must draw on a larger repertoire of graphic knowledge about girls’ bodies, public spaces, and sexual vulnerability, to imagine it’ (Marshall, 2015: 167).

Finally, the authors offer two different endings: in the first one – inspired by Perrault’s version – the girl is not found and is probably murdered; in the second – like in the Brothers Grimm’s fairy tale – Sophia is rescued. In both cases, rape is not represented but clearly hinted.



The second picture book illustrated by Innocenti considered in this article is *Cinderella* by Charles Perrault (2013). The book was commissioned in 1983 by Swiss publisher Etienne Delessert for the collection *Once upon a Time* and instantly gained international success. Again, the artist promotes the idea that fairy worlds are not so far away from us, both physically and temporarily. He decides to set the fairy tale in a modern setting: London during the Roaring Twenties. Myers (2008) defines the book 'a visual delight', and indeed Innocenti represents in detail the main characteristics of a fascinating era: the art-nouveau interiors and furniture, the flapper-style clothes, elegant haircuts and the general decadent glamour of those years. The pictures are full of detail but also historically accurate: the result is a rich book that is usually appreciated more by adults and young adults than younger readers probably not familiar with this particular context.

In this book, Innocenti demonstrates his ability to find new perspectives when illustrating old stories: some examples could be the close-up of Cinderella's legs during the shoe fitting or the bird's-eye view chosen for the scene where the two stepsisters and the stepmother are leaving in their beautiful car to reach the Prince's castle. Innocenti does not only choose an interesting setting for the fairy tale, but he also interprets it in a personal and unique way.



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The artist also focuses on some details that are usually forgotten by illustrators. For example, he pays attention to the figure of the father, who is often unexplored both in texts and in pictures (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, 2016). Cinderella's father is immediately represented on the first page of the book: he is smiling kindly at a woman and to her two daughters. In the following page, the reader notices a sudden change: the man is now hiding behind a door and his face looks worried and scared. The stepmother and her two daughters are now prevailing on him.

Similarly, Innocenti also focuses on the figure of the stepmother, who is explored in depth and plays a central role in the development of the plot. She is a mysterious character who is often portrayed while drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes, characteristics that would not be likely in Perrault's time. These elements help the reader to label the stepmother as the villain of the story: she is a character with a mean personality and despicable habits. On the other hand, an attentive reader might consider her a problematic woman and might wonder why she was given such an evil personality and bad vices.

What is particularly curious in Innocenti's version of 'Cinderella' is the happy ending. In the last pages, we can admire Cinderella's wedding. The two stepsisters are finally sorry for their behaviour and they are given partners as well. However, the last page of the book contrasts with the happy ending: Innocenti illustrates a concerned stepmother looking out of the window while holding a book, *Cinderella* by Roberto Innocenti. The book is opened on the page depicting Cinderella's wedding, while the stepmother is, again, smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol – there are many empty bottles on the floor. Although the stepmother is presented as the main villain of the story by Innocenti too, this final page creates contrasting emotions: the reader may think she deserved that fate, or may feel pity for the woman, now completely alone in the world. Consequently, readers are not provided with a totally happy ending since the story closes focusing on the stepmother's misfortunes (Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, 2016).

To conclude, in *The Girl in Red*, the illustrator depicts modern cities and their contemporary dangers: media and their sexualisation and objectification of women's body. In *Cinderella*, new spaces give the possibility to underline particular aspects of some of the characters, giving the reader new perspectives on the interpretation of the text. Therefore, the artist does not simply recontextualise the two stories, but clearly shows that fairy tales are possible in different eras and places, they prevail on time and are always contemporary. Innocenti demonstrates that archetypes can easily transcend space and time.

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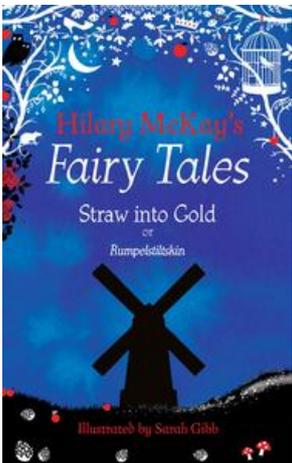
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[Dalila Forni is a PhD student in Education Sciences and Psychology, University of Florence. She graduated in Foreign Languages and Literature, University of Milan, with a thesis on Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and its adaptations for cinema and theatre. Her interests are children's literature, picture books, and gender and queer studies in popular culture.]

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## A Flying Wheelchair and a Deaf Fairy: An Exploration of Disability in Fairy Tales

*Rebecca R. Butler*



In classic children's fiction there are unfortunately instances of disabled characters depicted as evil, deformed or both. Two examples will make the point.

Rumpelstiltskin is an evil dwarf whose attempt to possess a woman's first-born child is frustrated only when she discovers his name. It is significant that the identity of this disabled character is a dark secret, and that his ruthlessness in seeking to acquire the child overshadows the ruthlessness of the king who threatens to execute the girl if she does not make him rich, or of her father who lies about his daughter's ability and comes close to sealing her fate. Research by scholars from Durham and Lisbon has suggested that this fable is 4000 years old. It was popularised in the Grimm brothers' 1812 collection. In 2017 Hilary McKay's *Straw into Gold: A Rumpelstiltskin Retelling* embarked on the first serious attempt in 4000 years to retell the myth and rehabilitate the evil dwarf.

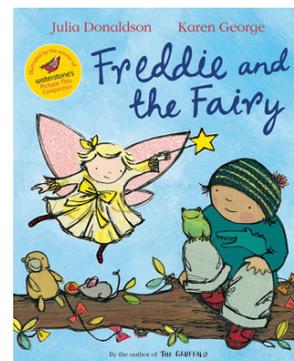
The Pied Piper of Hamelin uses his flute music to draw the rats away from the town. When the people refuse to pay him the agreed fee for his service, he uses his music to draw the children away. According to one version of the story only three children are saved. One is too lame to keep up with the others, one too deaf to hear the music and one is blind and so cannot see the way.



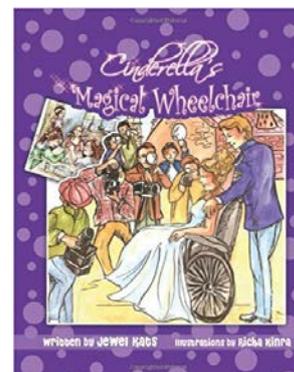
The outcome of the story is a trade-off. The children who have a disability have the good fortune to survive because they are variously disabled. But they also have to deal with the fact of their exclusion on account of their disability. They are 'the others'. Their families and others who lost their children will never look at the disabled survivors without thinking of those they lost. The ironic suggestion is that as punishment for its dishonesty the community has kept three of its least valuable members.

In the classic versions of the Rumpelstiltskin story, before McKay's effort at redemption, the dwarf is a more or less the unmitigated villain whose discomfort is to be enjoyed by the reader. The disabled children who survive abduction by the Piper in contrast are mere ciphers. The reader knows nothing of them as individuals, only as tokens in the fierce exchange between the Piper and the townsfolk. Evil or characterless, the disabled are depicted without humanity.

Taking two modern fairy tales in which disabled characters play a part, I turn first to *Freddie and the Fairy* (2010) written by Julia Donaldson and illustrated by Karen George. Freddy is a small boy desperate for a pet. By chance he encounters a fairy called Bessie Belle who claims to be able to grant wishes. Unfortunately however, she keeps getting Freddy's wishes wrong. It transpires that Bessie Belle is deaf. Freddy has no knowledge of any variant of sign language. He also has a tendency to mumble, fatal in this context. When he makes the effort to speak clearly and turns to look square on at the fairy, he communicates his wishes and gets his pet. The important point of this story is that the difficulty arises not from the fairy's impairment but from Freddy's failure to respond effectively to that impairment. Donaldson here is reading from the so-called social model of disability theory, whereby the real problem of disability is said to arise from society's failure to respond to people's various impairments. The fairy is an agent for good when she is empowered by her non-disabled partner.



*Cinderella's Magical Wheelchair* (2011) is written by Jewel Kats and illustrated by Richa Kinra. In this story Cinderella uses a manual as opposed to a powered wheelchair. Although the text is silent on the nature of her impairment, it seems likely that she has suffered a spinal injury, since she has good upper-body strength and propels her own chair. As might be expected, her stepsisters are not exactly supportive. When they discuss going to the ball, they state that this is a proper ball quite unsuited to charity cases like her. Cinderella incidentally has been cleaning for the family from her wheelchair. My dread at this point of the story is that Kats might opt for a magical cure like Pollyanna or Katy Carr. Or that Cinderella might be transposed to a golden carriage disguising her impairment. But Kats, who herself has a spinal injury, knows better. Cinderella's earthbound manual wheelchair magically takes flight. When the Prince marries Cinderella, some time and effort are devoted to making the palace wheelchair accessible before the happy couple move in. There is in this story a weakness that arises in most texts when a disabled character appears. There is very little context, personal or social. We know little else about Cinderella but her disability and its direct consequences. But the story is unique. If a wheelchair has appeared in a fairy tale before, it is a story I have never seen. Kats has taken some fantasy tropes and turned them upside down. Bravo.



There is a branch of modern literary criticism that holds biographical detail about an author to be irrelevant in relation to a work and to its understanding. In the case of these two modern fairy stories nothing could be further from the truth. Donaldson has an auditory impairment and Kats has a spinal injury. Of course I would not recommend that authors should write only of situations in which they happen to find themselves. Far from it. But as a wheelchair user myself and as a student of children's literature I applaud the efforts of authors with impairments to use their own experience to widen the imaginative boundaries of the genre.

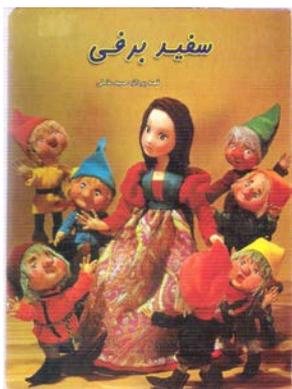
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[Rebecca R. Butler holds a BA in English Literature, a Masters in Children's Literature and a Doctorate in Education, all from the University of Roehampton. She is a volunteer tutor in literacy in two schools. She reviews children's books for three journals. She is the author of numerous articles on children's literature and a regular conference speaker. She is also a member of the committee of IBBY UK.]

## One Story, Many Voices

*Delaram Ghanimifard*



I grew up in Tehran in the 1980s during the Iran–Iraq war. It was a scary time but I always remember the safety I felt when my mother used to read me bedtime stories at night. I loved it when she read my beautiful hardcover copies of *Hansel and Gretel*, *Cinderella* and *Snow White*. They transported me to different worlds where good always prevailed. My father, on the other hand, would make up stories to lighten our moods – you never knew what yarn he might spin or where it might go! But it was my grandma who would tell me stories from the past, stories told by her mother and grandmother.

My favourite story was ‘The Sea Pony’. My grandma would start the story of the little boy and his sea pony, but then she’d stop midway! She only remembered the beginning of the story and I always wondered what happened next. How would the boy and the pony overcome their problem? She used to sigh and say ‘My grandma knew many stories and she told me all of them, but now I have forgotten.’ Now that my grandma has passed away, I don’t remember the name of the boy, or what problem he had to overcome. All I remember is the name of the story, and how much I loved it.

My grandma told me all sorts of stories: rhymes, funny folktales and, of course, fairy tales.

It was only later that I recognised some of these fairy tales as versions of the Western tales I knew so well. At the time, I didn’t realise that the story of the poor man in the woods with his three daughters was another version of ‘Hansel and Gretel’, or that ‘Mah Pishooni’ was the Iranian ‘Cinderella’, and ‘Namaki’ was ‘Beauty and the Beast’. It made me realise that stories are dynamic. They travel like people and food. They change in their new home and adapt to their environment. Reading or hearing different versions of the same story is like finding a common language between cultures.

In the Iranian version of ‘Hansel and Gretel’, a man leaves his daughters in the forest because he’s poor and can’t support them. The children drop stones through the forest and find their way back home but the second time their father leaves them in the forest, they get lost. They dig deep underground and find their way to a magical city.

Mah Pishooni is the Iranian Cinderella. She is made beautiful by a witch because of her kindness. The witch makes her stepsister ugly because she’s so rude. Mah Pishooni attends a royal party in disguise and the prince falls in love with her. She runs back home when she realises it’s late and she has unfinished chores to do, and loses one of her shoes.

Namaki is a young girl who forgets to lock all seven doors of her home. A beast enters through one of the open doors and asks for food and a place to sleep for the night. In the morning, he demands to take Namaki home with him. Her mother says ‘Namaki, you were responsible for locking the doors, now you have to go!’ In the beast’s home, Namaki finds a bottle that holds his life and eventually they fall in love.

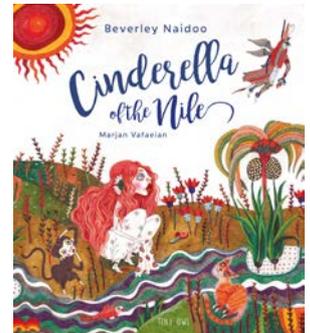
There is something magical in the way stories have travelled across time and cultures. During antiquity, ideas, themes and stories coursed through the Silk Road spread by merchants, travellers and pilgrims. An ancient network of trade routes that were for centuries central to cultural interaction between East and West, the Silk Road connected Asia with Africa, the Middle East and Europe. It is said that the *Ramayana*, an epic Sanskrit poem, owes a debt to *The Iliad* and to *The Odyssey* whilst *The Aeneid* may have been influenced by the Indian texts such as the *Mahabharata*. In the Persian poet Ferdowsi’s epic work *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings), we can find stories that are strikingly similar to ‘Romeo and Juliet’, ‘Rapunzel’ and ‘Snow White’. So I like to think

that our fairy tales also come from this ancient network of people, places and ideas. We have Cinderella stories from China, France, Germany, England, Iran, India and Egypt; Snow White stories from Iran, Ireland, Italy, Gabon and India; Jack and the Beanstalk stories from Scotland, Norway, Greece and Russia – to name but a few!

One of Iran's most prominent poets Hafez says, 'There is only one story of love and many narratives of that same story; still it is new whenever I hear it'. The same themes of good versus evil, love, jealousy and hope permeate across cultures. Stories connect us; they remind us that we are not so different after all. Yet some of our best-known fairy tales have been co-opted by the big screen and cultural variants are little known.

At Tiny Owl we wanted to create a series that paid homage to our shared global heritage and that celebrated the diverse and colourful world that we live in.

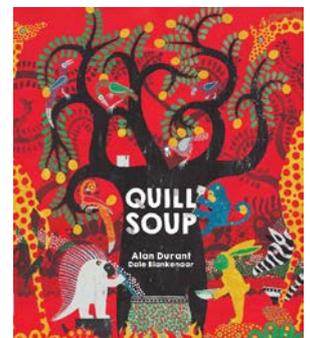
The first book in our One Story, Many Voices series is the epic tale of Cinderella. Beautifully retold by the award-winning author Beverley Naidoo, this earliest known version of Cinderella is set in Greece and Egypt. Rhodopis is a Greek girl who is sold into slavery by bandits and taken to Egypt. Her master gives her a pair of beautiful rose-red slippers, making three other servants jealous. Horus, the falcon, sweeps in to steal her slipper, which leads Rhodopis to the King of Egypt. *Cinderella of the Nile* (June 2018) is beautifully illustrated by Marjan Vafaeian, who brings a unique perspective to the story inspired by ancient paintings from Egypt.



Our second fairy tale is *The Phoenix of Persia* (April 2019) written by storyteller Sally Pomme Clayton. This story is from *Shahnameh* and tells the story of Prince Zal who is born with the fairest skin and white hair. His father banishes him to the forest where he is adopted by a Simorgh, a benevolent and mythical bird which finds its parallels in the phoenix of Greek mythology and the firebird of Slavic folklore. With echoes of 'Snow White', this fairy tale is a story about forgiveness, the power of love and celebrating difference.



Our next fairytale is *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* (September 2020) by Jackie Morris, illustrated by Ehsan Abdollahi. Versions of this tale can be found in Turkey, India, Russia, Hungary and Scotland. Jackie's haunting retelling is a fresh interpretation of the beloved Brothers Grimm fairy tale about 12 princesses who, though locked up every night, wear down their dancing shoes much to the king's dismay. Jackie's dark and poetic text subverts the ending and reminds us that fairy tales change over time and for modern-day audiences. Ehsan Abdollahi's unique illustrative style in rich and delicate detail brings the story to life and perfectly encapsulates the beauty and melancholy of the story.



We are also publishing two folktales as part of the series: *Quill Soup* (May 2019) is a South African version of *Stone Soup* by Alan Durant, illustrated by Dale Blankenaar. In varying traditions, the stone has been replaced with other common inedible objects but our story sees Noko, the porcupine, make soup from his quills and, through his charm and ingenuity, finally convince the rest of the animals to share their food in order to make a meal that everyone enjoys.

*Miss Bandari's Golden Heart* (September 2020) by Sufiya Ahmed is a story she remembers her own grandmother telling her as a child. This traditional Indian tale of 'The Monkey and the Crocodile' also has variants in other countries, including a Swahili version which features a shark instead of a crocodile.

As I remember my grandma's stories, I feel a responsibility to keep them alive by telling them to my own children. As a publisher, I feel even more responsible to publish books so that children can celebrate the many voices in this world – and who will love them as much as I loved my grandma's stories.

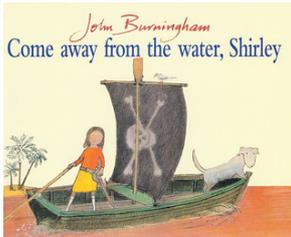
[Tiny Owl was initially set up in response to the lack of children's books that reflected the culture of its co-founder Delaram Ghanimifard. She wanted her sons to experience

stories from home and appreciate the beautiful and diverse artistic heritage of Iran. Since 2015, Tiny Owl has published 17 books that celebrate the rich literary heritage of Persian culture, and its collaboration with contemporary artists from Iran showcases the unique illustrative styles coming from the region. As Tiny Owl spreads its wings, it is now publishing books from around the world to broaden perspectives and introduce artistic and literary traditions from diverse viewpoints.]

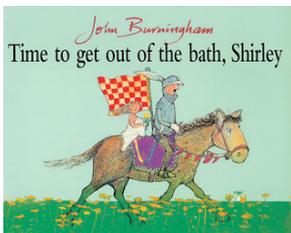
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## A Puss without Boots: John Burningham's *It's a Secret!*

June Hopper Swain

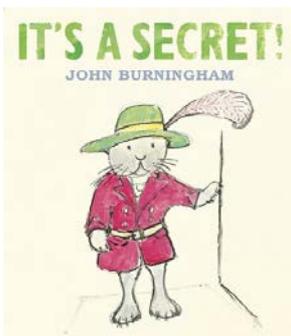


The work of John Burningham has been defined as incorporating 'postmodern strategies ... to challenge expected reader/author relationships' (Thacker and Webb, 2002: 143). Picture books such as *Come Away from the Water, Shirley* (1978) and *Time to Get Out of the Bath, Shirley* (1979), where in each there is more than one narrative at work and the reader needs to decide what the relationship is between them, are brilliant examples of his inventive, postmodern way with pictures and texts that can entertain as well as challenge the young reader/viewer.



While being perhaps more restrained because the words and pictures do, mainly, work together to tell the same story, in *It's a Secret!* (2009), Burningham's take on the fantasy fairy tale, does feature several postmodern narrative strategies: sometimes the pictures tell us more than the text does, at other times we have to rely on our imagination to fill in some of the details; and there are intertextual references, wordplay and a scenario in which there is *no* parental interference.

And while the characters and situations in some traditional fairy tales might seem remote and the stories often lacking in humour, *It's a Secret!* has an immediacy and playfulness that invites involvement. Thus, it is not a once-upon-a-time story for it is set vaguely in the present, and it is too grounded and unsentimental for there to be a completely happily-ever-after ending, yet it has several features that might be found in a conventional fairy tale. There is a talking animal and certainly the hero of the story, who guides the two children once they have mysteriously transformed themselves out of their everyday world into one that is more colourful and vibrant; but before this can happen there is a hazardous journey during which some villains give chase.



On the front cover of *It's a Secret!* is a cat standing on his hind legs and wearing a belted green tunic and plumed broad-brimmed hat. This, perhaps, is a playful allusion to the title character in the traditional fairy tale 'Puss in Boots'. Burningham's cat, however, is without boots. He looks out at the viewer with a deadpan expression on his face and this matches perfectly the narrator's mock serious delivery that keeps the story grounded and matter of fact.

The cat in 'Puss in Boots' has a certain swagger, is wily and ambitious and gains fame and wealth, by whatever methods, for the story's hero. Burningham's puss in contrast seems modest and accommodating. He can talk, on occasions, but he knows his place when he is fulfilling his part-time role of family pet. Like most domestic cats he has another, secret, life but one that is surely more exciting. Children love a secret, and it is the promise of finding out what it is in this narrative that can propel the young reader forward.

The picture on the title page shows a little girl, Marie Elaine, awkwardly clutching a cat. This is Malcolm, in his family-pet persona, passively putting up with his lot as best he can with a resigned expression on his face. This image is in marked contrast to the same cat, looking very impressive in fancy costume as described above, on the picture book's front cover and who enjoys, it would seem, when he is not being the family's pet, a busy social life.

In this narrative, with its understated delivery, there is no overt sense of an adult narrator intruding into a text that is neither moralistic nor didactic, to gain the young reader's attention. Indeed, Burningham maintains a low profile throughout and leaves some gaps in the narrative, and this strategy can gently encourage young readers' participation and allow their imagination to take flight and so contribute to the unfolding story. An instance of this can be found in the double spread discussed below.

Marie Elaine has long been curious to know where cats, especially Malcolm, go at night. When she finds Malcolm downstairs one night, therefore, dressed in his finery (and the cat bowl on the floor on his right can remind us of his double life) and discovers that he is going to a party, she begs him to take her with him. The mood of this exchange is low key, with Marie Elaine showing no surprise at finding the family cat transformed thus and having a conversation with him. Malcolm agrees to let her come to the party but insists that she wears party clothes and 'gets small'.

In response to Malcolm's first request Marie Elaine rushes upstairs to her bedroom and returns wearing a fairy costume. His second request seems to be equally unproblematic, and here the text's deadpan delivery states quite simply that 'Marie Elaine got small' and thus we see her in subsequent pictures. No apparent magic wand or talisman as there might have been in a conventional fairy tale. And here, perhaps, young readers might suggest how they think that it was done. And who could blame the amiable and sometimes put upon Malcolm if he feels, secretly, although this is not commented on in the text, some satisfaction that she has been, albeit temporarily, cut down to size.



Marie Elaine and Malcolm leaving the house through the cat-flap. Copyright © 2009 John Burningham/Walker Books.

The cat-flap through which Malcolm passes every evening when he goes on his nightly prowling must seem, we might infer, to the now much smaller Marie Elaine, a magic portal through which she too can now pass into a darkening and unfamiliar night-time world. That their exit through the cat-flap is swift can be seen in Burningham's sketchy illustration. Malcolm, experienced in exploring his territory nightly, is an expert guide, and the children (for now Marie Elaine's friend Norman, who has also 'got small', has joined them) must now place their trust in him.

Burningham uses a variety of media including collage and photographs in this picture book, and these provide interesting textural backgrounds for the scratchy, energetic pen and ink drawings and for the applied cutouts. These lively, often painterly pictures, uninhibited in execution and sometimes with a naivety that has great charm, drive the narrative forward.

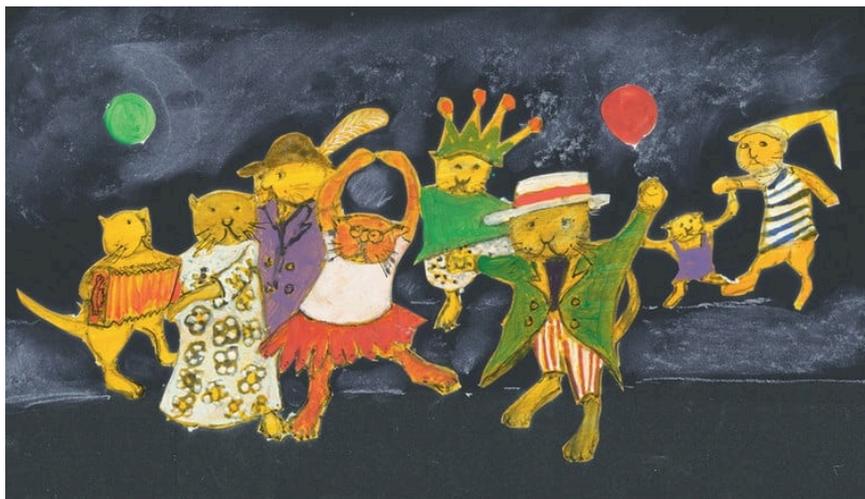
While ogres enliven some versions of the traditional story of 'Puss in Boots', Burningham's 'baddies' in *It's a Secret!* are three particularly ferocious dogs that Malcolm and the children have to pass in order to get to the party. This episode provides a very effective double spread that shows the three dogs, anthropomorphised, loitering by some refuse bins on the corner of an alleyway. Two of the dogs, one of whom is leaning languidly against a wall, are in hooded duffle coats, the third is wearing a 'beanie' hat, and all three have their paws thrust deeply into their coat pockets. There are, surely, some visual puns at play here: in keeping with the hooded theme, the term 'hooded' having associations with street gang culture, two of the dogs have heavily 'hooded' eyelids; and there is, perhaps, a connection between the aimless youths 'wasting' time and the 'waste' bins and cartons around which they are loitering. This double spread is wordless and while it reflects this, as yet, passive, motionless trio, it can also invite the young reader to take up the narrative and so discover something of the interplay possible between picture and spoken word.

There are no shadows in this picture – indeed, there are very few shadows in *any* pictures that Burningham creates – and, against the white of the page, the three figures stand out, a group united in a common cause, that is, waiting for something to happen. The dog on the right is looking over his shoulder as if in anticipation of the page turn that creates a pause in the narrative and adds dramatic power to the next double spread.

This shows the dogs, now appearing much larger, giving chase. Unlike Malcolm, they do not seem to have the capacity for human speech, and no longer being a parody of a gang of idle youths hanging around on a street corner, they have become, despite the clothes that they are wearing, a ferocious pack, the one leading them barking and baring its teeth. The text tells us that in making their escape Malcolm and his companions 'rushed up the stairs', and the jumble of lines depicting them thus conveys this. Poor Norman – oh, how we can empathise with him and thus become more involved with the narrative – is the last to mount the stairs and so closest to the pursuing dogs. It is *his* clearly drawn face with its alarmed expression, therefore, that we might focus on.

Of course, Malcolm and his companions do arrive safely at their destination, but not before they have had to escape the pursuing dogs via the rooftops, a crane's rotating boom and down its lifting gear. No words accompany this very eloquent double spread. Drawn in loose, cursory pen lines that give their forms a lively, nervous energy, the three figures look small, isolated and therefore vulnerable, but not because of the dogs, who are now sitting, glum and ineffective, on a rooftop way below them, but because they are climbing down the crane's lifting gear and hanging in mid-air. It is not difficult to appreciate the dizzying heights to which the trio has climbed, with the vast expanse of sky, which occupies much of the picture area, above them and the drop to the rooftops and, as we might imagine, the ground far below. But at last, with their ordeal over, the trio can anticipate the delights of the rooftop party that is about to

start, and the cats already there welcome the children whole-heartedly and show them great kindness.



**The party.** Copyright © 2009 John Burningham/Walker Books.

There are some colourful, energetic double spreads in this picture book showing the party in full swing with cats dancing to music played by cat musicians and the two children happily joining in. The sharing of food frequently plays a pivotal part in books for children for these are communal occasions that can set the seal on friendship. Thus, the midnight feast, a beautifully balanced double spread, is the centrepiece of *It's a Secret!*. The participants, and that includes Marie Elaine and Norman, fill much of the picture area. The viewer appears to be included in this scene as if seated at one end of the table, outside the picture area and opposite the motherly benevolent presence of the queen of the cats, regal in her golden crown, and an honoured guest who seems to loom over all as befits her position. The cats, surely each one usually inhabiting its own territory, have come together on neutral ground for this social occasion.

On their return journey, the trio, once again, make their way past the three dogs, but luckily they are now fast asleep. And these hooded 'youths' are not merely asleep but apparently totally soporific, having consumed what could be several cans of lager – or is it lemonade? The accompanying text does not comment, so viewers can draw their own conclusions.

The next morning, when Marie Elaine's mother discovers her exhausted daughter, still in her fairy outfit, slumped on the sofa with Malcolm, now minus his costume, curled up fast asleep beside her, she comments in a matter-of-fact tone, 'You look as if you were out all night with the cat'. Marie Elaine's throwaway response is 'I was', adding 'and I know where he goes at night'. But, of course, it was a secret so she couldn't say where. Not, perhaps, the kind of exchange we might expect between a mother and her young daughter under similar circumstances in a conventional picture book. No anxious interrogation. No lecture.

Surely appealing to children and adults alike, John Burningham's contemporary and witty fairy tale-like picture book *It's a Secret!* is imbued with generosity and good will, and has a restrained playfulness and pictures that sometimes speak louder than the words. Satisfyingly, Malcolm's secret is shared with the reader/viewer who may hope that perhaps *now* Marie Elaine will treat Malcolm, as the family pet, with the utmost respect that he deserves – and that Norman will keep Malcolm's secret too.

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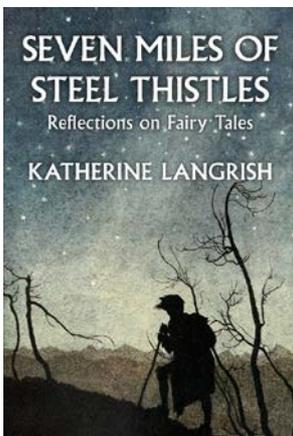
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[June Hopper Swain had been writing articles on children's books for several years when she enrolled on the MA Children's Literature Distance Learning Course at Roehampton University with Pat Pinsent as her tutor. She gained her degree in 2004. She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

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## Seven Miles of Steel Thistles: Reflections on Fairy Tales by Katherine Langrish

*Judith Philo*



This book of essays emerged from Katherine Langrish's many years of posting a blog on fairy tales, folklore, fantasy and children's literature. When I read the title, boldly printed in capital letters an involuntary shiver went through me. This was not the title of any fairy tale that I knew: my first associations were to dragons' teeth and Jason's quest for the golden fleece. Briefly I was in touch with those sensibilities of mine that warn me against further engagement. I was a literal child and found magic, especially bad magic and witches, terrifying. It was some years before I could begin to savour the complexities, tensions and thrills of fairy-tale narratives.

An arresting title, then, with a sense of menace, but modified by the phrase 'Reflections on Fairy Tales', making space for thought. The author's name, in bold print, firmly positioned just below. All this imposed on a wash of grey night sky illuminated by a multitude of stars. In the foreground the silhouette of an elderly traveller resting on his staff looks outwards, as he pauses on a hillside whose sparse vegetation is bare branched trees. The landscape beyond is of mountain ranges stretching far into the distance. This figure, with his backpack, could represent the eternal wanderer who collects and disseminates stories from many different lands as he travels the world. He may be looking at the stars to chart his way or to find his destiny. Another familiar embodiment of the storyteller is the figure of a woman with the household gathered round her as she spins or weaves. Safe at home the listener can be transported in imagination to adventures in other dimensions and worlds.

Langrish has loved fairy tales all her life, she 'can't remember learning to read: it seemed something that I was born doing'. Her favourite books were full of fairy tales, myths and legends from around the world. Gradually she became aware that grownups evaluated these genres differently. Greek myths were most valued, then legends, while fairy tales were considered least worthy. This realisation prompted her to examine her own experience of reading and to notice instances where there was an overlap between myth and fairy tale, such as Andrew Lang's retelling, in *The Blue Fairy Book*, of the Greek myth Perseus and Andromeda as 'The Terrible Head', and to many other instances where myth and fairy-tale retellings were indistinguishable from each other. In a vivid metaphor that gives a sense of the vigour and enduring nature of these narratives she describes the field of fairy stories, legends, folktales and myths as being 'like a great, wild meadow ... flowers and grasses seed everywhere ... poppies spring up in the middle of the oats' (Langrish 2016: 4–5).

In a comprehensive introduction Langrish develops her thoughts on the differentiation between types of story: 'Myth seeks to make emotional sense of the world and our place in it'; 'legend recounts the deeds of heroes' (p.5). Folktale is a local affair: some characters may be recognisable, but the landscape is the main feature of the narrative.

This could be the report of a sighting of a phantom army where a real event occurred, such as the violation of the community by soldiers. Such a traumatic experience may then be recorded by the local population and succeeding generations in their collective memory.

When she focuses on fairy tales Langrish distinguishes between the authors of literary tales such as Hans Christian Andersen, George MacDonald, Oscar Wilde and the anonymous traditional tales which have been passed on through the generations orally and also flourish in printed editions. These are universal stories whose motifs occur throughout humankind; they highlight and illustrate the themes, dilemmas, triumphs and tragedies of our lifecycle. They are set in a timeless dimension, long ago in far off lands. The characters within the stories do not have inner lives and they do not develop emotionally. They follow a predestined course, a firstborn child, a twelfth son, a handsome prince, an ugly old woman, a peasant family; if characters are named it will be a commonly used one such as Jack or Gretel, or it will be descriptive, such as Snow White and Red Riding Hood. Events happen, stories take their course, violently, crudely, unpredictably, inevitably. Many tales do not contain fairy characters. It seems that the term fairy tale has been adopted by literary chance, originating from Madame d'Aulnoy's *Les Contes de Feés* published in 1697, since when it has become in England a generic term for traditional stories. Perhaps it is worth noting that chance frequently plays a part in fairy-tale narrative.

We are halfway through the book before we learn the origin of the title. The circumstances of its discovery also offers us a clue about Langrish's interest in fairy tales. 'The King Who Had Twelve Sons' contains the phrase chosen. It appears in extended form like an epigram on the title page, 'There are seven miles of hill on fire for you to cross, and there are seven miles of steel thistles, and seven miles of sea.' Langrish found the story in an old book in a second-hand bookshop: *West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances* collected and translated by William Larminé, published in 1893, reviewed and praised by William Butler Yeats.

Old books have personalities and so I shall describe it: spine bound in red cloth with gilt lettering, boards covered in green cloth with a gilt medallion on the front cover, pages a little drunken and furry-edged, stitching loose. (p.146)

William Larminé was a minor Irish poet and folklorist who spoke Gaelic. He collected and translated stories from named oral storytellers. Langrish describes reading his account of being told the story which she shares with the reader, 'a simulation of actually being there and listening to the storyteller: it's picaresque, free moving, and full of minor inconsistencies' (p.149). The twelfth son has to roam the world to find his destiny; he encounters and overcomes dangers and fulfils assignments; he wins the hand of a princess, but further complicated quests await him. Suddenly the narration breaks off as the teller falters in his account of further intricacies of the plot and counter-plot. Wait, he remembers the tale's last sentence: 'when the first wife saw the second wife ... she could esteem herself no longer, and she died of a broken heart' (p.155). I suspect that Langrish was captivated by this story before the occurrence of the sudden downbeat anti-climax. Such an experience for the listener is valid she concludes because 'the good of it ... demonstrates the process by which all fairy tales have come down to us' (p.156). Fairy tales on the written page remain static, preserved in time, whereas the fairy tale told aloud is infused with the liveliness of the moment, they 'belong to the person who is telling them, for as long as they are upon his or her tongue' (p.156).

The book's contents are divided into four sections, the first is On Fairy Tales, which includes the introduction and is followed by essays which explore a theme that is common to several stories, like 'Fairy Brides (and Bridegrooms)', and overall focuses on the many facets of the role of women in fairy tales. These essays are interspersed with Langrish's own acutely observed poems 'After the Wedding', 'Naming the King of the

Fairies', 'Consulting the Yellow Dwarf'. The section Reflections on Single Tales follows. These are close readings of six stories, full of insight, two of which are not well known: 'The King Who Had Twelve Sons', from which the book title comes, and 'Bluebeard, Mr Fox and the Bloody Chamber'. This essay compares the story of Bluebeard, which comes from Perrault, and which Langrish dislikes intensely 'a nasty, charmless piece of blood and thunder' whose effect rests on 'how much the reader or listener can enjoy the voyeuristic suspense of wondering if or when Bluebeard's wife will die' (p.198) with the old English fairy tale 'Mr Fox' (quoted in *Much Ado About Nothing* we are told (p.203)). The heroine of this tale, Lady Mary, 'is resourceful, brave and intelligent' (p.209), whose curiosity saves rather than endangers her. Declaring that she would never tell the story of Bluebeard to children, Langrish informs us that she does tell the story of Mr Fox to school children of eight to ten who are always gripped by it.

The initial essay in the section Reflections on Folk Tales is headed 'Do you believe in fairies?' This is not just a question for children. Langrish points out that one of the differences between fairy tales and folktales hinges on the question of belief. While fairy tales do not require the reader to believe in them folktales do in the way that some refer to people and places that will be familiar to hearers of the tale. This added dimension to the account can induce feelings of local pride, also the possibility of belief in fairies, and ghosts. Langrish recounts some gruesome occurrences in communities where a superstitious response to death and loss has distorted a difficult and painful reality. She quotes historical records of such misapprehensions in order to understand them and concludes that, while a story is something that we can understand is 'made up', which gives it sense, a 'happening' may seem pointless.

However I don't think she allows for psychic manifestations that violent and traumatic events may trigger within individuals and communities and haunt them for generations if appropriate recognition of such events has not been formally acknowledged. An event will remain pointless if it remains beyond the reach of symbolic thought.

In an earlier essay, 'Desiring Dragons: The Value of Mythical Thinking', Langrish makes us aware of the relevance of symbolic thinking to the enduring power of myths and fairy tales in the last essay of the first section On Fairy Tales. She asks in response to the scientist Richard Dawkins, who has questioned their value, whether we should be expected to outgrow such tales. (It seems ironic that Dawkins, known for his work on the gene, the replicating entity on our planet, has defined another entity, the meme, which he calls a 'unit of cultural transmission' (Zipes 2006: 4). I think we would recognise this applies to myth and fairy tale). Langrish asks questions about what impression 'art' makes on us, what does it give us, does it change us? At one point she says 'I want to know what lies beyond the boundaries of my five senses' (p.117). We are human and have the capacity to use tools, also to think symbolically. In developmental terms, the care we receive in infancy enables us to develop the capacity to trust and to imagine. These are precursors for our capacity to play, which in turn facilitate our emotional and intellectual development. Fairy tales and myths contribute to our pleasure in playing, which offers us opportunities to experiment, to learn from experience not from only our successes but from our failures also, all of which contribute to the possibility of living creatively.

In her final section Envoi, 'Happily Ever After' Langrish celebrates the art of oral story telling. It is clearly a role that she relishes. She describes the framework necessary to gain and hold the attention of an audience from beginning to end by the playful use of language, facilitating an atmosphere of make believe, creating a space to play imaginatively, and from which listeners can be released at the end. (Those people who came to the November 2017 IBBY UK/NCRCL MA conference 'Happily Ever After: The Evolution of Fairy Tales across Time and Culture' will remember how memorably the conference ended as Sally Pomme Clayton enacted the Russian story of Baba Yaga. It was a thrilling and exhilarating conclusion to the day). Langrish bids her readers

farewell with a lengthy flourish in an ebullient flow of nonsensical phrases and images, leaving one with a strong sense of wanting more, and with an expectation born from a good experience that this can be found again. For by now we know that fairy tales are for everyone: children and grownups too.

The strength of the book lies in Langrish's deep knowledge of and exploration of tales, many of which I was not familiar with. She reminds us of their perennial relevance as a source of personal and cultural enrichment. I recommend it wholeheartedly.

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[Judith Philo is a member of the IBBY UK committee and Book Review Editor of *IBBYLink*. She gained an MA in Children's Literature from Roehampton University, 2003.]

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## **Nursery Rhymes, Fairy Stories and Children's Games: An Appreciation of the Pioneering Work of Iona and Peter Opie**

*June Hopper Swain*

It was while they were preparing for an exhibition on child life and literature that Iona Opie, who died on 23 October 2017 aged 94, and her husband Peter found, in either the original published English texts or in the earliest surviving texts, many of the 24 stories published as *The Classic Fairy Tales* in 1974. These fairy stories come with the Opies' copious notes on the possible origins of the stories and the contributions made to the genre by Charles Perrault, Madame d'Aulnoy, the Grimm Brothers and Hans Christian Andersen. The illustrations show how artists over the centuries have visualised these stories. These include the work of, among others, Thomas Bewick, Gustave Doré and Mervyn Peake.

Fairy tales and nursery rhymes seem to go hand in hand, and the way that the Opies were inspired to begin their researches on the latter had its own fairy-tale quality. It began when one of them took a ladybird on a finger and recited 'Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home, your house is on fire and your children all gone'. The ladybird did fly away but they were left wondering what exactly did the rhyme, and one that they had known since childhood, mean? They consulted *Nursery Rhymes of England* by James Orchard Halliwell (1842) in which they discovered several versions of the rhyme.

In the preface to *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951), the Opies acknowledge their debt to Halliwell's book as being an opening of 'the gate to a fascinating field of research'. The research led to their also including in their studies children's games, the lore and language of the playground, children's songs and narrative verse, that was to occupy much of their lives.

Amassing a substantial collection of nursery rhymes, they published their first book on folklore *I Saw Esau: Traditional Rhymes of Youth* in 1947. These rhymes were those of the playground such as insults: 'Tell her! Smell her! /Kick her down the cellar' or 'I slit a sheet/ A sheet I slit/ A new beslitten sheet was it' that, if recited fast enough, sounded as if a rude word had been said. A new edition of this book, subtitled *The Schoolchild's Pocket Book*, was published in 1992, and Iona was delighted with Maurice Sendak's vigorous illustrations that, she felt, gave these verses 'an extra dimension'.

Nursery rhymes are an integral part of our literary heritage. 'Ring-a-ring-o' Roses', the popular rhyme chanted while small children hold hands in a circle, has been popularly believed to be a description of the symptoms (the rosy rash, the sneezing and the falling down) of the Great Plague that swept through Europe in the fourteenth century. Not so, the Opies tell us in *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. It was 'would-be origin finders' who have given modern English versions that interpretation. The Opies show that there are many variants of this rhyme in which 'curtsy' or 'bow down' appear rather than 'fall'. Moreover, they discovered that there is a sequel rhyme, handed down in oral tradition, which instructs participants to 'all get up again'. No fatalities there. Indeed, this book can prompt us to reassess those nursery rhymes that we thought we knew.

With the Opies considering what rhymes schoolchildren were reciting in the twentieth century, a vast survey was organised and Iona also visited the local school playground to tape record interviews with children from which the Opies produced their pioneering volumes of school lore. Before this, however, Iona edited *Ditties for the Nursery* (1954) and Iona and Peter were joint editors for *The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book* (1955), with the Opies pointing out that in the oral tradition there are no 'correct versions', and *Christmas Party Games* (1957).

When the Opies' scholarly volume on children at play *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (1959), was published the headline of Penelope Mortimer's review in the Evening Standard read: 'Children – They're All Little Savages'. This was in response to the catcalls, jeers and torments recorded in the book. Unfortunately, schoolchildren have a history of being beastly to each other. However, the Opies' collection also includes jokes, beliefs and customs that are of a more amiable nature.

During her regular visits to Liss Junior School playground between 1978 and the end of the summer term 1980 as part of the fieldwork for what would eventually be her book *The People in the Playground* (1993), Iona proved to be a sensitive and tactful interviewer whom the children, who always referred to themselves as 'people' hence the book's title, took into their confidence. They explained to her the latest crazes and, in totally uninhibited language, thoroughly enjoyed telling her their 'rude' variations of rhymes, stories and jokes. Some of the stories and verses might seem rather crude and plain silly but, as Iona pointed out, in the playground punchy, direct verbal assaults have often seemed a necessary defence.

When Peter died Iona wanted to 'astonish his obituarists', who had assumed that on his death in 1982 she would retire. With *The Oxford Book of Narrative Verse* (1983) ready for publication, however, she went on to complete *The Singing Game* (1985), half-finished when Peter died, and what would be the final book by Iona and Peter Opie: *Children's Games with Things* (1997), that traces the history of games like Marbles, Five Stones, and Throwing and Catching.

Iona and Peter were made honorary Masters of Art by Oxford University in 1962 while Iona was made an honorary Doctor of Literature by Southampton University (1987) and Nottingham University (1991). In 1989 *Children and their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie* was published with a foreword by Iona and edited by Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs.

With frequent visits to the British Library and the London Library Iona was always the archivist, meticulously filing and sorting the material, while Peter was the writer, although they did collaborate on what was actually written. An endowment fund at the Bodleian Library in Oxford allows the work of conserving and adding to the Opie Collection of approximately 20,000 items, including chapbooks, toy books and games, to continue. Certainly the Opies' pioneering research, and the bibliography below is by no means complete, has left us an extraordinary body of work for which we can be profoundly grateful.

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

Two people wished to review this book: Rebecca Butler's review below follows that by Susan Bailes in *IBBYLink* 50.

During Pat Pinsent's long career as an author and an educator, the world of children's literature has been transformed. Phenomena such as J.K. Rowling, Philip Pullman and Michael Morpurgo have vastly increased the number of children's books in circulation and expanded the pool of readers, in some cases including adult readers. As Pinsent points out, in the wake of this transformation, the criticism and evaluation of children's literature have become accepted as academic disciplines.

The study of books for young readers, as Pinsent recalls, used to be nothing more than a module in the syllabus for initial teacher education. Today the study of children's literature is established as a serious academic subject, led, for example, by the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature (NCRCL) at Roehampton University, where Pinsent herself has been a key player, and at Newcastle University under the leadership of Professor Kim Reynolds. Today, for example, the periodic appointment of a children's laureate is accepted as the significant public event it has become.

The distinctive elements in Pinsent's book are its scope and its lucidity. It covers, as expected, mainstream areas of interest to scholars, such as feminism, fantasy, narrative, and reader-response theory. But Pinsent also addresses less familiar target areas such as transmedia, religion and ecology, and a deeply significant chapter entitled 'Recognising the Culturally Invisible', which relates to race, multiculturalism, colonialism, Irish children's literature and, finally, disability. In my experience disability in children's literature is sometimes a subject for single-topic specialised books but is largely ignored in books that seek to provide a comprehensive overview.

Pinsent's book will fill a dual role. For each of her chapters she provides a bibliographic profile of sources that will enable scholars in search of more detailed evidence to begin their quest with a useful guide in hand. Pinsent also provides further guidance in the form of two indexes, one by author and one by topic. But it is also undoubtedly true that the book will prove an invaluable aid to less qualified students, to those just launching themselves into an undergraduate or master's course. Pinsent will afford them a full hand of starter elements and detailed guidance on where to seek amplification. Her many admirers will find pleasure as well as instruction in this book.

**Rebecca Butler**

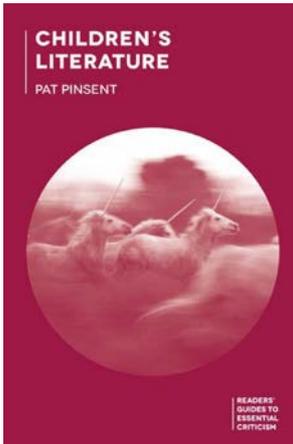
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### Storybooks, Novels and Tales

#### *The Family with Two Front Doors*

Anna Ciddor, London: Allen & Unwin Children's Books, pb. 978 1 7433 6859 6, 2017, £6.99, 208pp. [First published by Allen & Unwin Australia, 2016.] [Novel, 8–15 years. Keywords: Orthodox Jewish family life in Polish city 1920s era; Jewish religion and culture; anti-Semitism.]

The intriguing title of this real-life-based chronicle, set in the 1920s, refers to the fact that the Rabinowitch family is so large that its members occupy two adjacent apartments in the Polish city of Lublin. The eldest of the nine children, Aaron, who is



training to be a rabbi like his father, is already married, while the central theme of the book involves the impending wedding, at 15, of the eldest daughter Adina.

Much of the preparation for this event is seen through the eyes of her ten-year-old sister Nomi, whose character is based on Anna Ciddor's grandmother, one of the only three of these children to survive the Holocaust. This information is provided in the 'Author's Note' at the end; no suggestion of it is given in the main text, which is consistently positive. No hint is given about future events, and the only evidence of anti-Semitism occurs in a brief reference to some local boys throwing stones at the Jewish family when they go on an outing.

Ciddor holds our interest by the fascinating details associated with a way of life very different from that of her readers. There is lavish detail about the unfamiliar food and rituals (a glossary is provided):

Papa began the Kiddush, and Yakov gazed over the spread on the table: cold fried herrings and potatoes, gherkins and sauerkraut, a salad of raw onion and boiled eggs, gefilte fish and horseradish. And this was only the first course! In the kitchen a hot steaming chulent was waiting, and baby carrots in glistening honey glaze, and leftover kugel. (p.81)

There is also suspense as to whether Adina will be approved by the relatives of the proposed bridegroom, 17-year-old Mordecai. More to the point, will she be happy about sharing her future with someone she has never seen?

This is very much a book in the well-established children's literature tradition of the family story, embellished by incidents such as the bread dough falling on the ground and creating suspense as to whether it can be rescued to provide the 'challah' bread for the Sabbath. The book provides a vivid re-creation of a now remote way of life in a community destined all too soon to be destroyed.

**Pat Pinsent**

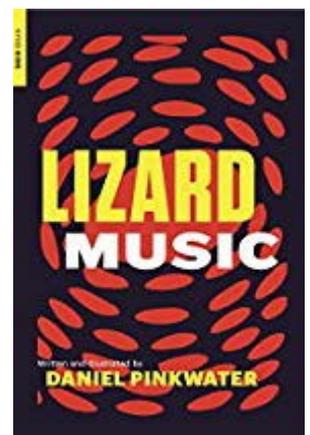
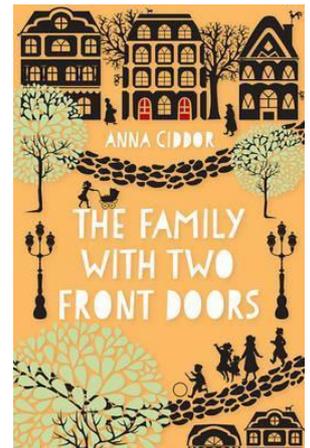
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### ***Lizard Music***

Daniel Pinkwater, New York Review of Books, pb. 978 1 6813 7184 9, 2017, £7.99, 160pp. [First published New York: Dodd, Mead 1976.] [Novel, 9+ years. Keywords: humour, fantasy, surreal, bizarre, absurd, acceptance, American literature.]

Lizard Music is a short, delightfully quirky novel told from the viewpoint of 11-year-old Victor. The book begins with Victor's parents going on vacation leaving him in the care of his older sister, who immediately abandons him to go camping with her hippie friends. Far from being worried about his situation, Victor enjoys the freedom of TV dinners, no enforced bedtime and late night sci-fi movies. The appearance of a band of lizard musicians playing hypnotic music on TV is the first in a series of bizarre happenings that intrigue him. Unshackled by daily supervision and curious to explore, Victor takes a bus to the nearby town of Hogboro. On the way he meets the mysterious Chicken Man who performs tricks for the passengers, with Claudia, a talented hen who lives under his hat.

In the days that follow, Victor has many encounters with Chicken Man who assumes a variety of names and guises and who guides him in his mission to solve the puzzle of the mysterious lizards. The book culminates with Chicken Man taking Victor on an adventure to Invisible Island inhabited by the lizards Victor has been glimpsing. The hospitable lizards are welcoming and give Victor a tour of their city landmarks, including the unusual House of Plants and House of Memory, before returning him safely home the next day. Victor's adventures on Invisible Island are both enjoyable and emotionally engaging and incorporate just enough potential danger to generate a hint of edginess.



Originally published in 1976, this is a book which, through its gentle and humorous celebration of curiosity, wonder and quirkiness has much to offer young readers. Victor is a thoroughly endearing protagonist, someone who is simultaneously happy with his own interests and company and curious to discover, in his own way, more about himself and the world around him. His openness to the apparently impossible, to the non-obvious and to the different, make him an easy travelling companion for a reader accompanying him into realms of the unexpected and bizarre. It is a book that is full of understated adventure, surreal situations, memorably unusual characters, arresting visual images and crazy humour. It is also a novel that has the power to encourage self-acceptance, linger in the imagination and, not least, conjure up a smile, on recall.

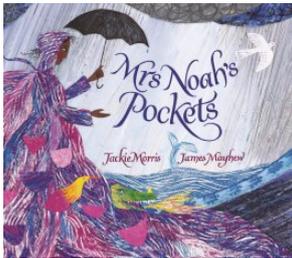
**Anne Walker**

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## **Picture Books, Picture Storybooks, Comic Books and Novelty Books**

### ***Mrs Noah's Pockets***

Jackie Morris, illus. James Mayhew, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, hb. 978 1 9109 5909 1, £12.99, 2017, 36pp. [Picture book, 3–7 years. Keywords: Biblical fable; saint; storm; flood; a creation story.]



Whether Noah included insects in the ark God commanded him to build was much disputed in the early Christian church. St Augustine thought not, but Jackie Morris, in this wonderfully illustrated retelling of the story, suggests that Mr Noah did his best to exclude them. But the wiser, more generous hearted and resourceful Mrs Noah used her sewing machine to make capacious pockets in her coat to accommodate them.

Mrs Noah is a more caring and imaginative person than her narrowly dutiful husband. When the rain beat down on the roof of the ark Mr Noah remained sheltered in the dry while Mrs Noah took delight in watching the dolphins and mermaids racing the waves.



**Copyright @ 2017 James Mayhew.**

When Mr Noah fell asleep after the owls began their evening song, Mrs Noah gathered the children and told them 'tales of dragons and unicorns, griffin and phoenix, centaurs and jackalopes, wolpertingers and all manner of things'. Even at the end of the story when Mrs Noah empties her pockets and gives new life to the creatures that Mr Noah found difficult, he never quite gets it.

Mrs Noah figures more prominently in this retelling than the brief reference she has in the original story. God isn't mentioned. However the book does convey a profound theological insight, that creation is not an event but a continuing process sustained by respect for all creatures.

The book is beautifully and inventively illustrated. Bright orange walls of the ark's interior show the sunshine of Mrs Noah's heart as she sews and tacks and tucks and

stitches. The animals come alive through their eyes. Delicate shifts in the shades of blue make the rain relentless and the water very powerful, but always life sustaining. But where's the rainbow? It's never mentioned. Perhaps Mrs Noah is the rainbow. But there in the sky ... you just have to look for it.

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

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### ***The Chalk Rainbow***

Deborah Kelly, illus. Gwynneth Jones, New York: EK Books, hb. 978 1 9253 3545 3, 2017, £9.99, 28pp. [Picture book, 4–8 years. Keywords: autism; difference; strong emotions; communication; self-agency.]

Zane is a primary aged boy who has autism. His disability is never actually mentioned in the text and Zane himself is simply termed 'different' by his sister, who is also the narrator. His sister describes the way Zane likes to line up his toys in the most orderly manner. He also has a hatred for anything black. He won't eat any black food or walk across zebra crossings because they are black and white. He easily becomes angry and frightened. He is depicted kicking and screaming under a table.

In an effort to cheer him up, his sister (no name given in the narrative) decides that they should draw chalk rainbows on the front steps of their house. When visitors arrive at the house, Zane declines to speak with them. So, for no obvious reason, does his sister. Perhaps she is just showing solidarity with her brother. In an episode which may be interpreted as fantasy, the two draw chalk rainbows all the way down the street to the playground, where there is a black surface that Zane hates.

Kelly's book has a worthy purpose, to render the world of an autistic person more familiar to young readers. It serves its purpose well, up to a point. But it leaves this reviewer asking a familiar question: why are stories about disabled characters so very frequently narrated by a non-disabled protagonist? The suggestion is left in the air that the narrative of the disabled person is too strange, too alien, too other to be accepted by non-disabled readers without the mediation of a person like themselves.

**Rebecca Butler**

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### ***The Glassmaker's Daughter***

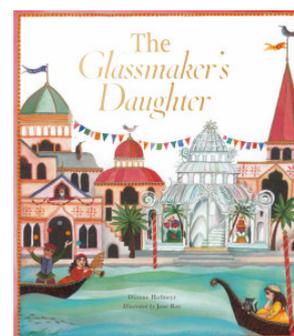
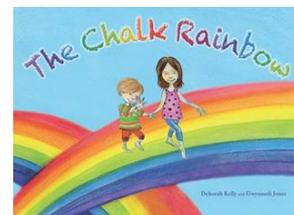
Dianne Hofmeyr, illus. Jane Ray, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 078 1 8478 0676 5, 2017, £12.99, 32pp. [Picture book, Fairy tale; 4–9 years. Keywords: fairy tale; Venice; sixteenth century; glassmaking.]

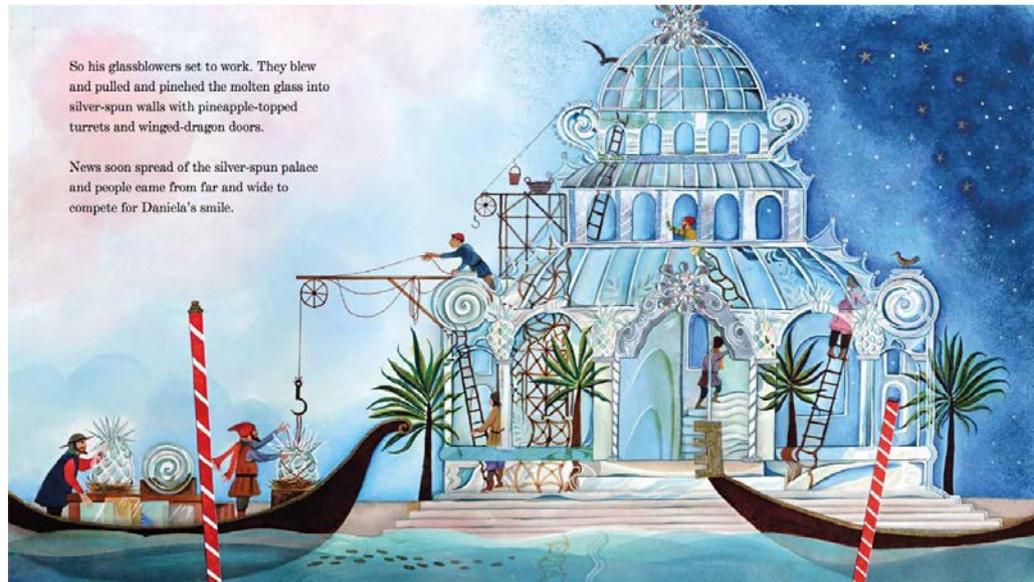
It is always good to find successful collaborations between writers and illustrators, in this case Dianne Hofmeyr and Jane Ray with their wonderful picture book *The Glassmaker's Daughter*. The fairy-tale structure includes a palace and a challenge.

The heroine is the daughter of a prominent sixteenth-century Venetian glassmaker, who is so 'gloomy, glum and bored' that he offers to give a glass palace to the person who can make her smile.

From far and near individuals with exotic-sounding names arrive to try, including Maestro Barbagelata, with an amazing repertoire of tricks, Donna Violetta Rufina Zangara with a cabinet full of masks and Leonardo Leonino Grandi with a huge lion.

Not one succeeds until Angelo, a young Venetian glassmaker, ingeniously creates a looking glass and, on seeing her own reflection, Daniela smiles and laughs and laughs so much that the glass palace shatters into a predominantly blue striking double-page spread of broken, silver, shining glass.





So his glassblowers set to work. They blew and pulled and pinched the molten glass into silver-spun walls with pineapple-topped turrets and winged-dragon doors.

News soon spread of the silver-spun palace and people came from far and wide to compete for Daniela's smile.

Copyright © 2017 Jane Ray (illus.), Dianne Hofmeyr (text), Frances Lincoln Children's Books.

She learns a lesson that 'Happiness is inside all of us' and all Venice laughs with her. An authorial note provides the history of Venetian glassmaking. The richly colourful illustrations in watercolour, gouache and ink convey the beautiful city miraculously built on water with its stunning architecture, canals and gondolas. Instead of a fairy-tale marriage and a handsome prince the final pages show a modern child looking into her mirror and smiling, and its message empowers every reader.

Susan Bailes

## Translations

### *Once Upon a Time*

Raul Guridi, trans. Alay Pullen, London: Tate Publishing, hb. 978 1 8497 6513 8, 2017, £12.95, 32pp. [Picture book, 5+ years. Keywords: translation; kaleidoscope; synonyms; adjectives; transformation; silence.]

Translated from the Spanish, the gently paced *Once Upon a Time* tells the story of Bard, a distinctive figure in bowler hat, dark suit and bow tie. He created the most wonderful stories. The villagers would bring him new words like 'kaleidoscope' as well as synonyms and adjectives from which they hoped he would create more 'unforgettable' stories that would take their imaginations to faraway magical places. And he always did. Then one morning, Bard stopped speaking. The villagers were perplexed and tried all sorts of things in the hope that he would speak again but nothing worked. One day, however, Ballad, the musician, began softly playing his cello, and the sweet sounds reached Bard's ears ... .

Using dark blue ink, pencil and crayon throughout, Guridi's drawing style is sure and direct, and while his human figures could seem rather static, his calligraphic line gives them their own particular energy. This is a picture book that acknowledges the magical and transformative power of language, and of music too, and asserts that there must be an end before there can be a new beginning, and there must be silence out of which something really creative can grow.

A thought-provoking narrative aimed at five-year-olds and above. Older children and adults might particularly appreciate Guridi's philosophical message and his distinctively linear graphic style.

June Hopper Swain



## ***One House for All***

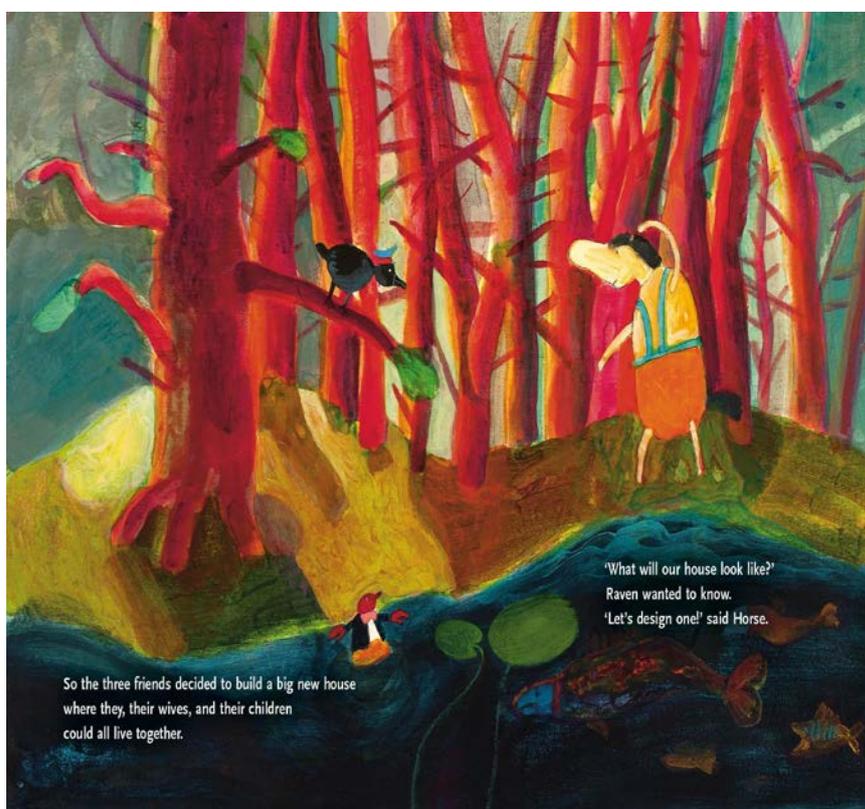
Inese Zandere, illus. Juris Petraškevičs, trans. Sabīne Ozola, adapted Lawrence Schimel, Bristol: Book Island, hb. 978 1 9114 9606 9, 2017, £11.99, 24pp. [Picture book; 4–7 years. Keywords: translation; friendship; river; animals; habits; humour; cultural diversity; sharing; compromising.]

*One House for All* is a heart-warming, witty, delightful tale about three friends – Crayfish, Horse and Raven – deciding to share a house after each gets married. However they inhabit different landscapes: Crayfish lives in water, Horse in the meadows and Raven favours trees.

How do they build a house that will accommodate the needs of all three and their families? Luckily, Crayfish has an idea: they will build a house with three stories, each family occupying separate floors. Which they did.

After reading the story, I am impressed by how the author chooses to discuss the grand themes of diversity, understanding, compromise, sharing and friendship within such a short, simple narrative.

Like many classic fairy tales, the message is conveyed in an effortless, elucidating way that easily elicits an empathetic response, thus inviting the child reader to consider the values of simple but important truths.



Copyright © 2017 Juris Petraškevičs (illus.), Inese Zandere (text), Book Island.

The original story, 'Three Friends on a River Bank', is Latvian. The adapted and translated version by Book Island successfully reproduces the sensuous humour and rich detail of the original. The illustrations are particularly noteworthy.

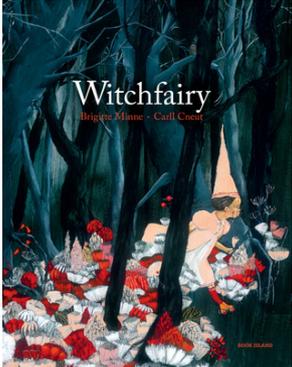
All the illustrations are laid out in full spreads, inhabiting the narrative space of the picture book in its entirety and allowing the child to interact with the larger landscape of the meadows and rivers without gaps or interruptions. The illustrator's use of colour and space is creative and carefree, verging on disorderly, which partly corresponds to a child's way of experiencing art.

My only reservation concerns the standard font in this adapted version. In the Latvian version, the font is presented playfully and deviates from standard written style. The

lettering is wiggly, echoing the topsy-turvy illustrations (as on the cover shown above). Finding a way of matching the font with the illustrations could help readers make connections between the aesthetic spaces of the pictorial and the textual.

**Yan Du is an MPhil student at the University of Cambridge.**

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### ***Witchfairy***

Brigitte Minne, illus. Carll Cneut, trans. Laura Watkinson, Bristol: Book Island, hb. 978 1 9114 9607 6, 2017, £12.99, 40pp. [Picture book, Fairy tale; 4+ years. Keywords: translation; stereotypes; opposites; compromising; individuality; determination; happiness.]

Fairies are sweet and neat, with magic wands. They live in golden turreted castles in the air. Their life is perfect and orderly, but surprisingly, not everyone likes it.

Although Rosemary is a little fairy, she is different from her peers. She wants to be a witch and nobody can change her mind. When her mother rejects her decision, Rosemary sets off to the dangerous witches' wood. Except it proves to be very safe.

The witches welcome Rosemary who feels that she can finally be herself, sliding on her roller skates and flying on her new broomstick. After her mother visits the wood and experiences herself the witches' kindness she embraces Rosemary's choice to become a ... Witchfairy. After all, she wants her daughter to be happy.

This illustrated book can be enjoyed by readers of all ages. It inspires children to follow their dreams, fight for their independence and be brave enough to take the responsibility for their actions. It encourages parents to listen and be more receptive for the sake of their children's good. The author also puts an interesting twist by challenging common stereotypes in the characterisation of fairies and witches.

Carll Cneut uses red and black tones in a very playful way, associating them with the two worlds in conflict: red for the angelic fairies, black for the dark witches. His dreamlike illustrations powerfully render the narrative and engage the reader. The floral spreads that depict Rosemary's first visit to the wood are a visual delight. It doesn't come as a surprise that Cneut has been published in more than 30 countries and was shortlisted for the 2014 Hans Christian Andersen illustration award.



**Rosemary is picking berries in witches' wood (double-spread 8). Copyright © 2017 Carll Cneut. Book Island.**

This story by Belgian author Brigitte Minne is reprinted many years after its first release, re-illustrated by Carll Cneut and published in English by Book Island.

**Lina Iordanaki**

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## Information Books and Non-Fiction

### *Into the White. Scott's Antarctic Odyssey*

Joanna Grochowicz, Illus. Sarah Lippett, London: Allen & Unwin Children's Books, pb. 978 1 7602 9365 9, 2017, £7.99, 288pp. [Non-fiction, 10+ years. Keywords: Antarctic expedition; exploration; scientific investigation and evaluation of outcome.]

This is a remarkable, if challenging, book in many ways. Not only do the words capture the spirit of this well-known story, but the accompanying illustrations help us to visualise and come to know the characters and landscape of this tragic tale. The publicity attached to the book says 'If you are into happy endings, best look somewhere else. This story does not end well.'

This is an entirely justified warning and I think only sophisticated readers will really find this a good read. Although very well written, and illustrated with great ingenuity, it is quite challenging in many ways. It is inevitably emotionally draining, but it is worth persevering if only to find out the gory details!

This true story is based on Robert Falcon Scott's diaries which are cleverly turned into a thriller by the author. The tale of this expedition is helped along by a poignant collection of original photographs and amazing illustrations that really bring this story to life. We get to know Scott and his men as well as the ponies and dogs that accompanied the team. We face the blizzards, the hunger, snow blindness and much more that the characters overcome before they finally face cruel disaster.

Although the main characters perish, the book is upbeat about the scientific advances made on this polar expedition and how future explorers have learnt from the mistakes made by Scott and his chosen team.

It is a perfect book for KS2/KS3 teachers who are looking at polar regions or studying explorers to share with their students. A great resource for any school and for a mature teenager.

This sad story is rehabilitated into an amazing, if ultimately disastrous, adventure. It is well worth a read, especially as it challenges many preconceptions of what really happened on that fateful journey which ended so tragically in March 1912.

**Shirley Hobson**

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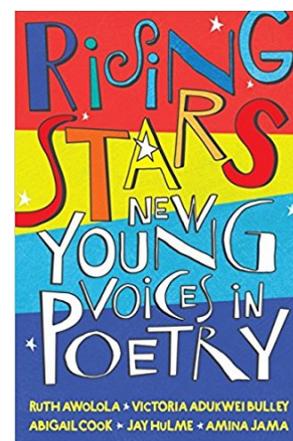
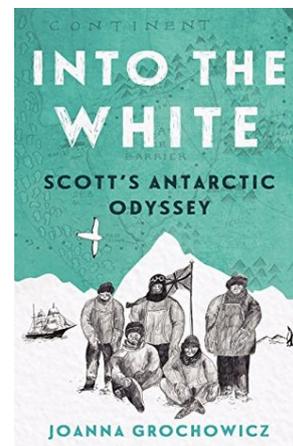
## Poetry

### *Rising Stars: New Young Voices in Poetry*

Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Ruth Awolola, Abigail Cook, Jay Hulme and Amina Jama, illus. final-year students on the Illustration course at Birmingham City University, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, pb. 978 1 9109 5937 4, 2017, £6.99, 96pp. [Poetry, 10–14 years. Keywords: everyday life; daydreams; environment; wildlife; humour.]

This book is a collaboration between Otter-Barry Books and the Pop Up Project, and is sponsored by Arts Council England's Grant for the Arts Programme. It is a poetry anthology showcasing the work of five debut poets and three young illustrators from diverse backgrounds, all age 25 and under.

Each poet presents eight poems for 10–14 year olds, with a wide range of themes and moods. All the poets will take part in workshop projects with Pop Up's partner schools, culminating in a reading and writing festival.



The illustrations are black and white, and the book is in the usual format for the Otter-Barry series of stuff-in-the-rucksack books to encourage young teenagers to read and write poetry. Joelle Taylor, founder and Artistic Director of SLAMBassadors UK, is acting as a consultant to the Rising Stars project.

Below are examples of the illustrators' styles: Joe Manners 'Mainly About Aliens', Riya Chowdhury 'This Poem Is Not About Parakeets', Elanor Chuah 'Spring'



Ruth Awolowa's and Jay Hulme's poems are illustrated by Joe Manners. He fills faces and objects with black so they appear as silhouettes with white areas to indicate features. His illustration to Ruth Awolowa's 'Wolves' is particularly effective. Here is the start of the poem which carries us in its imagining.

We are staring at the moon  
and I think for a second we become  
wolves again.  
Screaming at the stars  
growing at the idea  
that this night might end

Victoria Adukwei Bulley's and Abigail Cook's poems are illustrated by Riya Chowdhury in lighter tints and more stylised, often using perspective.

The poem by Victoria Adukwei Bulley 'Africa Hair Hiiku' has three-line descriptive verses.

Sometimes I wear braids  
Other times I wear cornrows  
Any style looks good.

I used to harm it,  
force it down, flat and lifeless –  
a ghost of itself.

Abigail Cook's poem 'Rise' ends with the line 'You are worthy.' Here is the beginning.

And when they try  
to clip your wings,  
tell you  
tell you  
to sit down, shut up:  
rise.

Jay Hulme's poem 'How Brave We Are' is illustrated by a bus driving along a rainbow above the clouds, very evocative.

I was on the bus,  
The clouds parted,  
The sun became  
A rainbow,  
And I thought:

How brave we are,  
To chase the dreams  
That lie  
At the end of such light.

Amina Jama's poems are illustrated by Elanor Chuah. For the poem 'City', the artist has drawn a series of boxes with each box containing an illustration of happenings, for example the first box shows 'a group of school children flying home' and the third shows 'a preacher shuffling bibles// like a magic trick'. 'The House at the End of the Street' make us feel the horror as we read of a family losing their home in a fire.

There were old worn mattresses outside  
and broken beds and TVs left to die.

There were officers and firemen going in and out  
as the whole street heard cries, screams and shouts. ...

There was a smoke cloud of anger and pain  
and Leila just stared at the light.

This book is an enjoyable collection of varied ideas and I hope it encourages other beginning poets. Poetry is not easy to illustrate, yet these young artist are to be commended in their work with these young poets. Of course the project sponsors and organisers have taken a risk but I think they will be rewarded so that this is the first of such collections of poetry. Blogs by the poets and films of their performances are at <http://pop-up.org.uk/category/young-writer/>.

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### Jennifer Harding

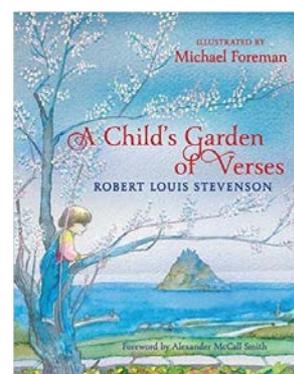
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#### *A Child's Garden of Verses*

Robert Louis Stevenson, illus. Michael Foreman with a foreword by Alexander McCall Smith, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, hb. 978 1 9109 5910 7, 2017, £14.99, 128pp. [First published 1889 with the title *Penny Whistles*, this version a reprint of the Gollancz 1985 edition.] [Poetry, 5–10 years. Keywords; classic; gift book; Victorian childhood.]

Alexander McCall Smith informs the reader that Stevenson's classic poetry anthology of 64 short poems has remained in print since its first publication in 1885, indicating its lasting popularity. Otter-Barry Books have chosen to reissue this 1985 illustrated version with a new hardback gift format and red ribbon page marker. Both poet and contemporary illustrator skilfully interpret childhood with its preoccupations, using their imaginative skills. Michael Foreman has a special affection for this volume, 'the Stevenson book closest to my heart' and dedicated it to his three-year-old son Ben, seen throughout. Stevenson experienced a Victorian childhood. Perhaps today's child will not recognise 'Auntie's Skirts' as 'they trail behind her up the floor/ And trundle after through the door', nor feel comfortable with

Little Indian, Sioux or Crow,  
Little frosty Eskimo,  
Little Turk or Japanee,  
O! don't you wish that you were me?



Nevertheless we can relate to the majority of the poems, the vivid evocation of winter causing 'tingling thumbs' and the frustration of having to go to bed in daylight 'When all the sky is clear and blue.' A favourite of mine is 'Picture Books in Winter', as Foreman explains: 'The picture shows Ben with his favourite knitted dinosaur in the window of our old home, enjoying the magic of books. Books that tell us the wonders of the world, waiting to be experienced.' Stevenson transports us out of illness, boredom, loneliness, for each day for a child is a new adventure, an exploration of sights and sounds. The cover chosen accompanies 'Foreign Lands' and shows Ben up a tree gazing out towards St Michael's Mount in Cornwall with the limitless horizon beyond. The tenderness shown by Foreman to his subject strengthens the message for all parents to share the garden and play and give their children the chance to experience Stevenson's recapturing of a transient sense of wonder and enchanting pleasure:

So you may see, if you will look  
Through the dim windows of this book,  
Another child, far, far away,  
in another garden, play.

**Susan Bailes**

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The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 52, Summer 2018 (copydate 31 March 2018) will be on the theme of magical reality.

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

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

#### **Titles for Review**

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

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