

Magical Reality



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EDITORIAL

'Magic realism' – this is a description that is frequently tossed into a review to indicate to readers that the author has somehow moved away from reality but has not embraced fantasy. But what does it mean – and is 'magic realism' actually what is involved? It was consideration of this question that led me to suggest this theme. However, it quickly became apparent that what is sometimes called 'magic realism' when it appears in children's literature here is very different to the magic realism of Latin America. In fact it is much more a sense of 'magical reality' – and it is this that Piers Torday, Penny Thomas and June Hopper Swain examine in their articles, highlighting a common core through their individual lenses. How reality in itself can be magical and the imagination of the child reader moves easily between a solid world to the fantastical – or rather does not move from the world; instead surroundings and situations acquire a new perspective with characters that are as real as they themselves. It is a question of imagination – imagination that is rooted in the world in which the young reader lives.

Reading Roger Mello's personal take it is immediately obvious that there is a clear distinction between the magical reality with which we are increasingly familiar and 'magic realism'. This, 'magic realism', is not the imagination working with the story so that, though extraordinary, there is strong sense of the real and we are rooted in a particular landscape or situation. This is a very different case that for Mello is something 'sobrenatural'. The literal translation is, of course, 'supernatural' – but this is a definition that does

not work in English. It is too loaded with ideas of magic, fantasy, the ghostly. For Mello as an illustrator as well as an author it is a way of expanding the text, a way that is beyond the immediate perception of meaning; of creating images that are not mirrors but are truly 'above or beyond the natural'. His article will fascinate because here is a practitioner offering us his response to his work.

Returning to the UK, Ian Dodds examines the art of Anthony Browne. There is little that is obviously 'magical' in these illustrations. We recognise this world it is so ordinary – or as Ian says 'mundane'. Yet there are surprises, magic moments to capture the imagination adding depth, emotion and tension to the situation that is depicted on the page through illustration and text. Indeed it could seem that magical reality is particularly suited to the work of the illustrator. However, Liz Byrne demonstrates that storytelling in the hands of a master can be imbued in the same way. The author whose work illustrates this to perfection, is of course, David Almond and her article explores some of the aspects of his writing that demonstrate this.

Running through all the articles is a sense of personal response from their authors. Perhaps, this more than anything links and defines 'magic realism' and 'magical reality' enabling them to work – the personal response of both the creator and the audience.

Ferelith Hordon



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The Magic of Reality

Piers Torday was born in Northumberland and educated at Eton and Oxford. He worked as a theatre and TV producer, before deciding to tell some stories of his own. His books include *The Last Wild* trilogy (2013, 2014, 2015) (Guardian Children's Fiction Prize 2014 for *The Last Wild*) and *There May Be a Castle* (2016). He has adapted John Masefield's *The Box of Delights* for the stage and his latest book is *The Lost Magician* (2018).

In Philip Pullman's recent collection of essays on storytelling, *Daemon Voices* (2017), discussing the challenge of 'Writing Fantasy Realistically', and the differences between the literary realism of a writer like George Eliot and the pure high fantasy of Tolkien, he concludes that

The more profound and powerful the imagination, the closer to reality are the forms it dreams up. Not the most unlike real things, but the most like.

He's comparing the psychological realism, the 'moral truthfulness', and believability of the characters in *Middlemarch* (1871–1872), as opposed to some of the more archetypal figures drawn from the traditions of sagas and myths which Tolkien deployed. It explains in part why Pullman laboured for seven years creating the characters and world of His Dark Materials trilogy so that a story of witches, talking bears and tiny spies on dragonflies could exploit the same psychological realism as a big Victorian novel.

In Pullman's eyes, the creation of epic, magical fantasy only 'matters' or 'has value' when it is a vehicle for truthful, meaningful revelation about our own, real world. Our demands of great fiction are not just entertainment or escapism, on however grand a scale those are provided, but also satisfactory insight and revelation into our daily life, which, for most readers, generally features fewer witches or talking bears than we might like.

There's a different revelation that high fantasy can offer, of course, and that's the timeless and profound sense of being part of a shared human story that stretches over many epochs and cultures, but with so many central hopes, desires, fears and rituals in common. Legends and epics tend to more everyman characters and, in doing so, deliver the literary consolation of essaying universal dilemmas – quests for meaning, rituals of sacrifice and redemption – rather than nuanced, psychological examinations of contemporary mores.

I agree with Pullman that the most important quality in fiction, whatever the genre, is a sense of truthfulness. The reader must suspend disbelief, otherwise they are simply comprehending a written text, and not meaningfully experiencing it in their imagination – with the subsequent emotional revelation or catharsis. Whether the character is a dragon from an alien planet beginning their conquest of Earth or a child on their first day at a new school, unless they think, act and speak with a degree of consistency, in comprehensible ways and in accordance with the established rules of their imagined world, not to mention the laws of physics – the reader will start to have doubts, and that is the kind of thread pulling which can unravel the most tightly knitted of tales.

But I would go further. For, after all, as Pullman admits, Dorothea is no more 'real' than Frodo Baggins, we can no more actually travel to Middlemarch than we can Mount Doom. All fiction is fantasy; it's just that some choose to exercise their imaginations more liberally and extravagantly than others. Yet more than that, we are overlooking one fundamental point. That for young children – certainly those younger than perhaps the readers who might get the most out of either Tolkien or Pullman (not to mention George Eliot), for those readers' imaginations, there is already limitless magic in reality itself. In her still authoritative guide to early twentieth-century children's literature, *Intent Upon Reading* (1961), Margery Fisher wrote:

The very simple dramatizing of a child's experience, through an animal or toy that comes to life, though it is technically fantastic, can be very near to fact, because the child takes it literally. A four-year-old has only to tie a bonnet onto a kitten and force it into a pram, to make it, instantly, a baby. To this child, there is nothing out of the way in Mrs Tiggy Winkle wearing an apron and wielding a flat iron. ... Fantasy for young children is best if it is a matter of one simple incident which, for a time, enlarges and irradiates the everyday world.

Setting aside Fisher's notions of what four year olds should or shouldn't be doing with their kittens, there is a vital enduring truth here about reading, imagination and the value of stories. It's one that can get lost in all the heat and noise over the many different, often intersecting, genres and age groups that now make up our richly complex and diverse canon of children's literature.

As children grow and develop, and apprehend the real world by degrees, let us not diminish the sense of wonder with which they first encounter what will later become commonplace, whether it is holding an insect for the first time in the palm of their hand, opening their eyes underwater, or travelling at speed. For what is magic after all, as Fisher says, but 'fear and wonder'? The wonder that the humble, domestic wardrobe, standing in the corner of your bedroom might be the portal to a whole new dimension. The fear of what might, or might not, be living under your bed.

Fairy tales still exert their power today, especially for young children, because they are not stories about either a completely imagined (and therefore potentially taxing to read and reimagine in a growing mind) world or a remote land of mature emotions and grown-up problems. There are so many tales which cast the most mundane domestic objects in a sinister or marvellous new light – turnips which bring misfortune down upon a family, a cursed iron stove, a magic self-cooking porridge, and, of course, every possible kind of farmyard animal blessed with every kind of enchantment.

To sit down at home and read the complete *Grimm's Fairy Tales* (1948), after an hour or two, is to invoke a hallucinatory perception of one's own living space. If I don't listen to that bird tapping at the window, will I lose my money? What if those shoes on the floor began to dance? And if I open that small bottle, what supernatural force might I unleash?

As Anil Seth, Professor of Cognitive and Computational Neuroscience at Sussex University, explains in his TED talk 'How you Hallucinate your Conscious Reality' (24/9/2017), this isn't so far from the truth.

Our brains, trapped inside our skulls, are to all intents and purposes as blind as moles under the ground. They rely on signals from our eyes, hands, internal organs to create a picture of the outside 'real' world. Seth argues this picture is created by billions of neurons 'hallucinating' and that it is 'only when we agree about our hallucinations that we call it reality.'

So, it turns out that reality is already pretty magic.

Adults are all too good at forgetting this. Children less so. A kitten becomes a baby, a torch shone under a duvet makes a spaceship, and the great wars between Lego figures and soft toys acted out on the kitchen floor are as deadly serious as any real-world military campaign to the child mind directing them.

And when we read, adult or child, those same billions of neurons are hard at work creating a different kind of hallucination in our head, hallucinations on which we rarely agree, such is the uniquely private and individual experience of reading. We all read about Lucy going into the wardrobe, but every one of us sees a different Lucy and a different wardrobe. Yet at the same time, we feel we've experienced the same thing, and that shared experience, along with thousands of others, is part of the cultural glue which binds us together, and makes acts of real-life magic possible.

As a child, I wanted to know if there were carpet bags *in real life* as infinitely capacious or magical as Mary Poppins', because whilst I had to accept the laws of physics which made this an unlikely prospect, my brain drew less of a distinction between the experienced real world so unfamiliar, and the magical ones I so often fell asleep to every night. I strongly felt – and in a way, still do – that if you could write a story about it, then somehow, somewhere, it might be true. That is the compulsive power of the imagination, the restless curiosity it ignites.

Then when the search for a magic carpet bag that never gets full is overtaken by a search for a plastic bottle that doesn't pollute the ocean, or when knocking on wardrobe back walls in search of Narnia leads to knocking on doorsteps to solicit support for a better real world, or that realising the kindness extended to an abandoned talking bear at Paddington Station might also apply to others equally abandoned visitors from other countries - it turns out that Gandalf does not always need to wield the white light of Glamdring to drive away the forces of darkness.

The magic of reality is that, unlike fictional characters, trapped by their manipulative authors, we do – with effort and collaboration – have the means to shape elements of it for the better. The magic of reading is that it, through fables of fear and wonder rooted in everyday experience, piques on the imagination to deeper levels of profundity and power. And the greater they are, to paraphrase Philip Pullman, the closer to magic are the forms of reality they dream up.

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Piers Torday

Visual Magic Realism

Roger Mello was born in Brasilia in 1965. Winner of the 2014 Hans Christian Andersen Award, given by the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY), and considered for the Nobel Prize for Children's and Youth Literature, he is an author-illustrator of international renown. He has illustrated over 100 books, 25 of which he has authored himself and has received innumerable awards world wide, including the Most Beautiful Book of the Year award from China for *The Feather* written by Cao WenXuan, also a Hans Christian Andersen winner.

Magic realism does have a strong equivalent in illustration. If magic realism is the possibility of inter-penetration between reality and fiction, or the interaction between a so-called fiction approximated to reality, and another, let's say, 'sobrenatural', then images and words are equally inter-penetrable. This ambivalent terrain is a natural construct in Latin America, since the experimental narrators of the continent do exploit edges without 'warning' the reader-listener when they will cross the boundaries between the one and the other. In Brazil, Dias Gomes and Murilo Rubião are the representatives in what would be related respectively to the fantastic realism of a more rural or natural atmosphere on the one hand, and the urban, on the other; a parallel like Garcia Marquez in Colombia and Cortazar or Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina. In his own words, Gabriel Garcia Marquez would write as if listening to his grandmother's stories, forging those myriad sceneries of his. Another Borges, the Brazilian engraver, publishes his own books using xylography, an example of a traditional and borderless dialogue between fiction and 'sobrenatural' in his dense limitless black and white imagery.



Jardins pp.26–27. Copyright © Roger Mello.

Imagery, image, let's take a closer look at the verb to imagine. In Portuguese, Spanish or English, it doesn't matter, the word 'imagine' comes from 'image'. Writers of such magical realism have used and abused this imagery reference to create their own landscapes. Not all literary art will use the visual composition of scenarios and characters so strongly. They seem to build it from the outside to reach the inside, but this approach to developing the shape of their composition in this way does not suppress the content. The inside reveals itself to be bigger than this, because, contrary to what is said here and there, it is possible and desirable to choose a book by the cover. Cover and design are constitutive elements of the book, and the chance for a well-crafted book with paper specifically and whimsically chosen, increases the chances of the book's content being as unique as its shape. The book is an object and artists like Carybé, Santa Rosa, Luís Jardim, Poty, Calazans Neto were experimenters of this resource. Sometimes when this emerges in an almost 'anthropological' drawing, or as an extension of neo-neo realism, depicting the day-to-day life of the corners of Brazil, they are very close to the 'visualities' captured by the lenses of those experimenters, the photographers. This is the case of Carybé (Argentinean from Bahia) and the French

anthropologist and photographer Pierre Vergé, rebaptised in Bahia State as Pierre Fatumbi Vergé, with whom he created visually or literally. This very specific dialogue is also seen with the music of Dorival Caymmi, who was himself an illustrator.

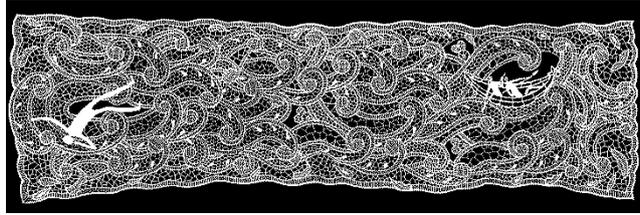
[Dorival Caymmi, the well-known composer of *É doce morrer no mar*, and many anthologised songs of Carmen Miranda wanted to be a professional illustrator, but one publisher in Rio de Janeiro told him: just forget it, in this country only soccer players or musicians have a future.]



Carvoeirinhos pp.4–5. Copyright © Roger Mello.

Take the case of *The Gato Malhado and Andorinha Sinhá*, by Jorge Amado and Carybé; Gato Malhado, the tabby cat and Andorinha Sinhá, the swallow, an impossible love? In one of the last watercolour images in the book, the cat decides to deliver his own body to a snake that will swallow him because his love for the swallow is impossible. It is a unique moment taking one beyond the written text of Jorge Amado. Again, in the illustration depicting Mauricio Babilônia, Carybé's version for *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, the character is not merely surrounded by butterflies as the words of Garcia Marquez genially suggest, he is at the same time the bunch of butterflies in their flock form, but pulverised like a human made out of these separate parts. The sexual act encompasses him and the woman in an encounter even more intense than the embrace, than the sexual act itself. There are at least five more layers of reading through the visual approach of such illustrators, all of them lovers of philosophy and, let's name it this way, lovers of a limitless interaction of all arts. When Burle Marx drew his gardens or paintings he was also experimenting with this space, an 'in between' that leads us to another peripatetic quest; through the unsafe, experimental, open, inconclusive gardens of his mind.

I was born in the middle of such a diverse ambience, and those experimental artists are still making it possible for me to be surprised. Growing up in a Brasilia planned by some of these artist's companions, I got to read more through their wordless visual poetry, more from these artists' images in books or in the outside world, than through the words themselves. Throughout the extended shadow of the dictatorial military regime from the 1970s on, this was also the only possible voice for me as a narrative author. It made me slowly chart my own ways, plot my own shapes and my own palette, incorporating ferocious neon colours to expand the dialogue with such references. This added contemporaneity and danger to their background and also, let's say, to a kind of forgotten visual past, an ancestral past, from long before the time of the arrival of Europeans in this continent. On the other hand, depicting an extreme, wild, naturally based and boldly saturated coloured Brazil, with lower-class day-to-day people's life would seem to some snobbish artists or critics, too naïf or 'folkloric'. Meaning what? Meaning nothing, I might say; it would be like a body without organs, pretending to privilege the content instead of the shape.



Joao Por Um Fio. Copyright © Roger Mello

Magical reality is not, of course what it was at the very beginning, in its Caribbean origins. It's not anymore a question of digging for an identity, since the 5,000 year old archaeological city of Caral in the Supe valley shows us that Peruvian culture is even older. It's not the 'aleph' vortex from Jorge Luiz Borges or the 'designed plot' of Cortazar, Ernesto Sabato, Byores Casais, Rubião. But that experimentalism still persists in the work of both visual and verbal narrators in South America. From Chilean Brazilian Andres Sandoval to Isa Watanabe, Dipacho, Isol, Roger Ycasa, Manu Mercado, Colombia, Argentina, Ecuador, to make a list is always to make it incomplete, realistically, magically.

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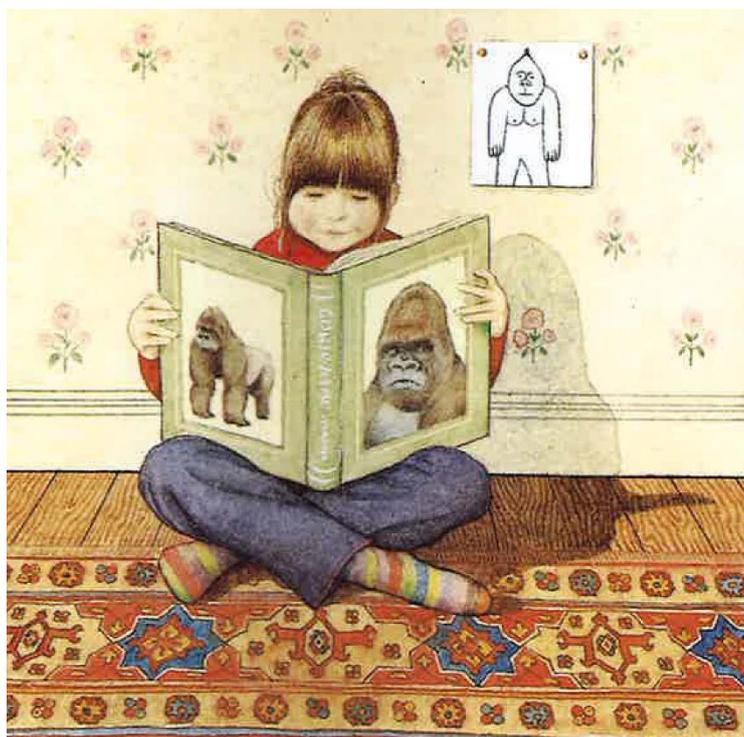
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Roger Mello

Magic in the Mundane: A Glimpse at the Picture-Book Art of Anthony Browne

Ian Dodds is Chief Executive of Achieving for Children, a community interest company that provides children's services on behalf of local authorities in London and south-east England. He started his career as a children's librarian and has also worked with children and young people in arts, theatre and heritage education. He has a long-held interest in visual literacy and picture books; he is writing here in a personal capacity.

Take a look at almost any of Anthony Browne's picture books and they begin with a single image of a child – human or ape. They are seemingly alone although the images hint at the potential for escape and friendship through the power of imagination. In *Gorilla* (1983) Hannah sits cross-legged on the floor reading a book about her beloved animal – an ape-like shadow on the wall snuggled beside her (illus. 1). In *Willy the Wimp* (1984) a downcast Willy walks along the street accompanied by an annoying housefly. In *The Tunnel* (1989) the sister sits reading on a window ledge surrounded by subtle clues to the fairy story she is about to enter: a black cat in the window opposite; the creeping vines of the wallpaper; and pointed witches hats formed from chimney pots and visible in the gaps between curtains.



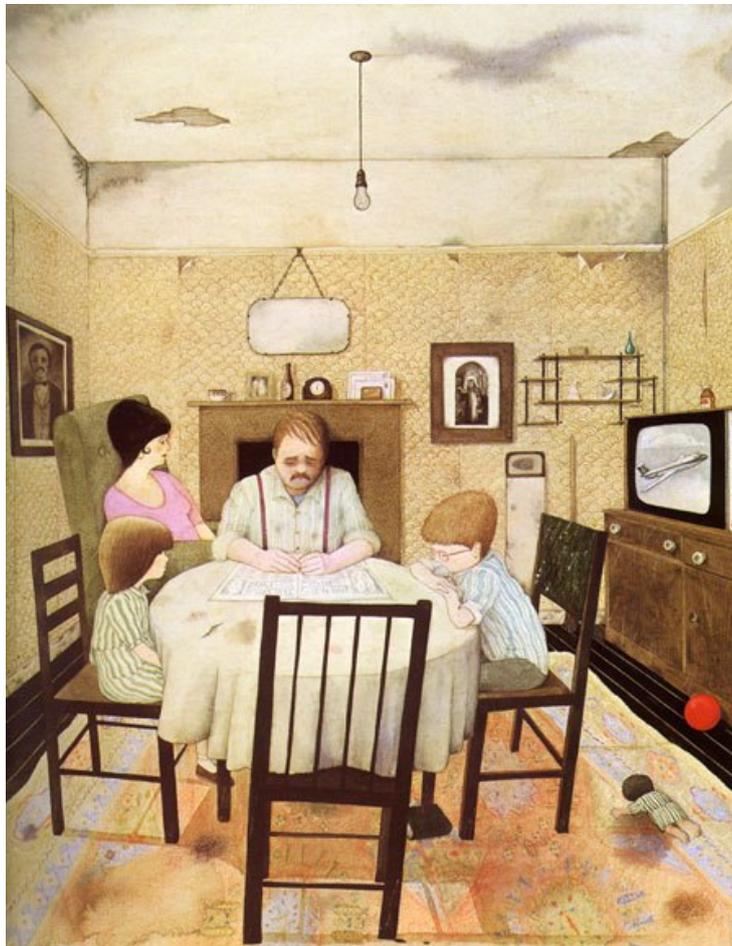
1. Copyright © 1983 Anthony Browne, *GORILLA* by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, London SE11 5HJ, www.walker.co.uk.

Escape from loneliness is a continual theme in Browne's picture books; as are absent fathers, disconnected families and longed-for friendships. These themes are reinforced by the domesticity of his picture-book settings. His kitchens and bedrooms, streets and parks, are familiar to us; however, it is not always the cosy domesticity we expect, and neither are they the cosy family relationships we have come to know in picture-book fiction. In fact, they are often uncomfortable spaces, tinged with unhappiness and the threat of menace to come. This undercurrent of darkness and Browne's deftness to deal with complex and difficult themes permeates his art and arguably gives his picture books their enduring appeal.

Children are more than capable of coping with all kinds of stories; it's adults who

are threatened by the darkness in children's books. But it has a place: an essential place. If we insist on telling children that everything in the garden is lovely, we are doing them a disservice. (Browne, 2009a).

In *Hansel and Gretel* (1981) the dining room is a scene of family despair (illus. 2). The father and children sit slumped at the table with no contact or affection between them. Their stepmother sits away from them staring into the distance. The room is shabby. The naked lightbulb, stained carpet, damp ceiling, peeling wallpaper and discarded doll highlight, not only the family's straightened circumstances, but also their dysfunctional relationships. This is reinforced in the perspective Browne has taken. The room is boxed in and claustrophobic. The walls appear to be closing in, stifling the space, and there are prison-like bars on the chairs and wall that emphasise the oppression we are led to experience. But there are also visual hints at hope through escape: the airplane soaring away on the television set; the bird-like stain in flight on the ceiling; the rolling red ball; even a copy of William Holman Hunt's allegorical painting *The Light of the World* (1854) discreetly hanging on the wall. The subtlety of these visual clues sewn into the fabric of our first impression is what entices our creative mind to explore the illustration.

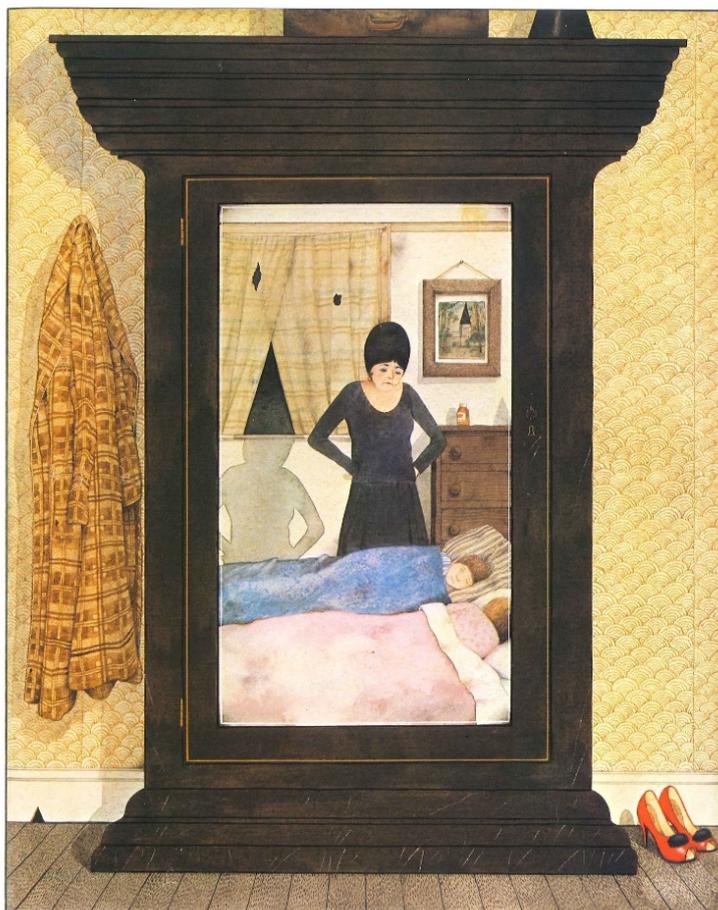


2. Copyright © Anthony Browne 1981, HANSEL AND GRETEL by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, www.walker.co.uk.

Meaning-laden visual clues are a signature in Browne's picture books.

I see *Hansel and Gretel* as a breakthrough book for me, and one of the reasons is because I started to apply meaning in the hidden details. Whereas in previous books I had treated them as little more than doodles in the background, in *Hansel and Gretel* I employed them as subtle aids in telling the story. Not only do they reinforce the main narrative; they also offer an insight into extra narrative information that isn't expressed in the text. (Browne, 2009a)

We best see this as the stepmother in *Hansel and Gretel* prepares to wake the children (illus 3). The shadow on the wall behind her is extended by the gap in the curtains so that it appears as if she is wearing a pointed hat. This hat image links her to the witch that the children later encounter in the story. It is repeated several times: the shadow above the chest-of-drawers; the steeple of the church in the picture on the wall; the mouse hole in the skirting board; and the unexplained object on top of the wardrobe.



3. Copyright © Anthony Browne 1981, HANSEL AND GRETEL by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, www.walker.co.uk.

These visual clues rely on us having cultural knowledge and competence in other texts and discourses: fairy tales, fine art, cinema and comic books. Browne's illustrations are accessible on a number of levels, but place some reliance on the audience's inter-textual competence to understand the visual clues that he carefully and deliberately places there. Fairy-tale motifs are particularly important in his work. They are amongst the cultural currencies that are more likely to be grasped by children and deliver the elements of darkness that he so enjoys. Such references are spread throughout *Into the Forest* (2004), which tells the story of a boy anxious to be reunited with his father (illus. 4). Black and white illustrations are used for the forest scenes where he meets a cast of fairy-tale characters. The characters are all notable for their absent fathers: Jack, Goldilocks, Hansel and Gretel. Other fairy-tale images are woven into the black-and-white images that heighten the fear and anxiety we share with the boy as he makes his quest to his grandmother's cottage. In one image the twining branches of a tree incorporate a pumpkin, a spinning wheel and Rapunzel's tower alongside other fairy-tale objects placed there to prompt us to look more carefully and search for inter-textual meaning.



4. Copyright © 2004 Anthony Browne, *INTO THE FOREST* by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, www.walker.co.uk.

It is the juxtaposition of familiar domestic experiences with magical images that is intriguing. This is not magic in the sense of spells and dragons; rather, it is a magical realism where magic simply exists, occurring quite naturally without reason or explanation on the page, and in the midst of mundane and everyday events. The magical visual references work to expand Browne's linear narratives. They blur the lines between what is real and unreal and what is explicable and inexplicable so that we are helped to see new, creative and exciting opportunities for his characters. Browne encourages us to accept the magic, to look for it in our everyday experiences, and believe in it without question.

This type of magical realism has its roots in folklore and fairy tale. It has its genesis in South America where it was a device used by writers and artists struggling against oppressive and despotic regimes. The magic opposed a reality that the writer or artist found unsatisfactory, restrictive or uncomfortable and which needed to be disrupted. This desire is clearly replicated in Browne's work: we see it in the struggle to escape an oppressive family in *Hansel and Gretel* or to reignite a loving family relationship in *Gorilla*. It is a central theme in *Voices in the Park* (1998) which is itself a reworking of an earlier Browne book, *A Walk in the Park* (1977). In the book Charles and his mother take a walk in the park with their pedigree Labrador, Victoria. There they share a bench with a young girl called Smudge, her father and their mongrel dog, Albert. The two families are from different backgrounds. We are shown this not only in the names they are given, their dress and body language, but also in the colour palettes, tones and fonts that Browne uses to voice each character. Charles is lonely, living a sheltered and restricted existence under the control of his mother. He wears a buttoned-up duffle coat and is most often seen standing in his mother's shadow. Her hat is ever-present in the grey clouds, the shape of a leafless tree, and on the tops of the lampposts that line the path that Charles seems unable to leave.

The oppressive regime that Charles wishes to escape is his overbearing mother. The hope of such an escape for Charles (even for a short while) comes in the form of Smudge. She has the freedom and *joie de vivre* that Charles wants, and Browne shows us this in the magical images with which he surrounds her. They appear without reason and explanation to signal the new and exciting possibilities to come. A streetlight becomes a snowdrop breaking through the harsh concrete pavement; juicy oranges, apples and pears replace the leafless trees; and the tops of the lampposts shift from sinister hats to cherry-topped fairy cakes.

Central to these magical illustrations is the desire for and achievement of change. This is only hinted at for Charles.

I'm good at climbing trees, so I showed her how to do it. She told me her name was Smudge – a funny name, I know, but she's quite nice. Then Mummy caught us talking together and I had to go home. Maybe Smudge will be there next time?

All that is left of their joyful encounter is a red flower that Charles gives to Smudge. We know that the flower will eventually fade, but the magical touches in the final illustration gives us hope that this will not be their last time together in the park.

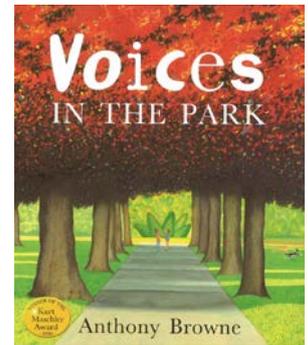
The potential for change and the whole transformative process is a significant element in Browne's illustrations and magic realist approach. His illustrations guide us to better understand his characters' changing views, wishes and feelings, and prompt an emotional response from us. We see this first in *Piggybook* (1986) where the roses on the wallpaper gradually morph into pig faces as Mr. Piggot and his two sons become greedier and more chauvinistic towards their mother; but it is perhaps best seen in *Changes* (1990) where Joseph must come to terms with the addition of a new baby sister to the family.

That morning his father had gone to fetch Joseph's mother. Before leaving, he's said that things were going to change.

The primary marker for change is the introduction of unusual or surreal images in place of Joseph's familiar domestic surroundings. The change is gradual. The kettle grows the ears and tail of a cat; the bathroom sink spouts a nose and a mouth; the sofa transforms into a crocodile (illus. 5); and the armchair morphs into a gorilla. The effect is to unsettle us and to encourage an empathy with the anxiety Joseph is surely feeling about the anticipated change about to happen to his family life. Once his parents arrive home again and introduce him to the baby, the magical elements disappear and the illustrations return to domestic realism, reassuring us that Joseph's anxiety was only a temporary response and normality has resumed.

What *Changes* also includes is Browne's trademark references to fine art and in particular his nods to the Surrealist art of Salvador Dalí and René Magritte. Surrealist interest in the marvellous appearing in everyday life, and the transformation that comes from seeing things in different ways, are commonplace in his books.

I believe children see through surrealist eyes: they are seeing the world for the first time. When they see an everyday object for the first time, it can be exciting and mysterious and new. (Browne, 2009a)





5. Copyright © 1990 Anthony Browne, *CHANGES* by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, www.walker.co.uk.

Socks hanging on a washing line are transformed into a Dalí-esque animal skull; a hosepipe becomes an elephant's trunk; a scrubbing brush becomes a hedgehog; and a plant pot develops a bird-like beak. Similarly, Magritte's bowler-hatted men are found throughout Browne's picture books from early works, such as *Through the Magic Mirror* (1976) on to the award-winning *Zoo* (1992) and beyond — at least until the Magritte estate intervened following the publication of *Willy the Dreamer* (1997) and told him to stop. In earlier works, the images tend to appear in the foreground or the background without meaning; but in later books their inclusion points to the sub-textual narrative of the story.

I want my books to have a point and so I try to use the transformations or strange happenings to try to tell us something that the words don't. (Browne, 2010).

Sometimes the inclusion of these fine art references are upfront, like the bowler-hatted men; in other cases they are more oblique. *Through the Magic Mirror* is based on Magritte's portrait *Not to be Reproduced* (1937), which depicts a man looking into a mirror and seeing the back of his head. A similar Magritte reference drives the narrative of *The Tunnel*, in which Rose travels with her brother through a tunnel to reach a fantasy world (illus. 6). Reassuringly, the images depict Browne's trademark fairy-tale references: Rose wears a red-hooded coat; there is a woodcutter's axe; and a wolf is distinguishable in the gnarled wood of a tree. Rose uses her fairy-tale knowledge to survive the forest and rescue her brother who has been turned into stone. What is much less obvious is that the image of the petrified brother is a reference to Magritte's painting *The Song of the Violet* (1951) and his vision of a silent world in which all humans have been turned to stone. This is unexplained and unnecessary to our understanding and enjoyment of the story — but is silently and magically there.



6. Copyright © 1989 Anthony Browne, *THE TUNNEL* by Anthony Browne. Reproduced by permission of Walker Books Ltd, www.walker.co.uk.

That we may not understand the hidden meaning of these fine art or cultural motifs does not mean that they do not communicate something to us; nor does it diminish the power and enjoyment of the story. For those of us who derive additional meaning from his images, Browne's magical touches allow for a fuller and more challenging reading of the book. For us all, the magical realism of his artwork encourages us to embrace a new way of looking and seeing. He creates a careful path in his illustrations that steers us through the narrative but which also teases us, like Charles in *Voices in the Park*, to venture from the path, to free our imaginations and look creatively, so that we become more curious as readers, become more skilful at questioning, and more adept at walking a little way in somebody else's shoes.

The best picture books are ones that leave a gap between the pictures and the words – a gap that is filled by the reader's imagination. (Browne, 2009b)

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Ian Dodds

Wandering in the Landscape of Magical Reality – Exploring David Almond’s Archive

Elizabeth Byrne is a Northern Bridge AHRC PhD Creative Writing candidate at Queens University, Belfast, and a former producer for BBC Current Affairs. Her short stories have appeared in the Seamus Heaney Centre Blackbird collection, the *(RE)Sisters* (2016) anthology published by For Book’s Sake, and *Something About Home* (2017), a collection of new Irish and Northern Irish writing edited by Professor Liam Harte and published by Geography Publications in Ireland. Originally from Dublin, she’s delighted to call Belfast home.

David Almond is the renowned author of fiction for children and young adults, including *Skellig* (1998), *Kit’s Wilderness* (1999), *The Fire-Eaters* (2003), *The Savage* (2008), *My Name is Mina* (2010), *A Song for Ella Grey* (2014) and most recently *The Colour of the Sun* (2018). His work features on National Curriculum reading lists, and is the subject of many academic studies of children’s literature. His work is now being celebrated as part of the Great Exhibition of the North 2018, in an exhibition at Seven Stories entitled ‘Where Your Wings Were, Journeys with David Almond’, and an art trail along the Ouseburn valley, ‘Winged Tales of the North’. In May this year I filmed an interview of David Almond for the exhibition; quotes which follow are taken from that interview.

In his writing for children Almond explores the extraordinary that exists within the seemingly ordinary, the wondrous and strange possibilities in the everyday. His strange, lyrical and fantastical stories are earthed in the North East, in the landscape, nature and language of his childhood – both real and reimagined – especially his home town of Felling in Gateshead. But his explorations of this landscape take place in a hinterland somewhere between its physical geography, remembered by an adult recalling hours of childhood wandering, and the dreams and imaginings of childhood.

The north-east that I write about is a real north-east, I could take you to the places, but it was also like a fictional north-east that has been kind of reimagined so that it works inside stories. It seems to me now what I’m doing is kind of taking that wandering that I did as a child, and it’s almost like the page becomes a place in which I can wander again and wander through these landscapes and again to see them anew, to recreate them. I use the language and the pencil and pen to move through a landscape and to discover stories in it.

This knife edge between what is real and what is magical is the country of all childhood imagination, dreams, fears and creativity – for children there is only ever a porous border between the two. A shimmer of possibility illuminates his stories; turn the lump of clay in your hand this way and it is a crude figure of a man, turn it another and it appears to move and breathe with a life of its own. Steel yourself to walk down a dark tunnel that could be simply be part of a building site, or could lead to a journey to the Underworld itself.

Without needing to hear from Homer’s ghost, it is evident that in writing about the North East, Almond taps into something deeply resonant to a wide range of readers – not only have his books been widely translated and earned international success, including the rare feat of both the Whitbread Children’s Award and the Carnegie Medal for *Skellig* (1998), a second Whitbread in 2003 for *The Fire Eaters*, the hugely prestigious Hans Christian Andersen Medal for writing in 2010 and the Guardian Children’s Fiction Prize for *A Song for Ella Grey* in 2014; they have also frequently been ‘made into something new’ in the form of plays, movies and even opera.

But when I met him in June of this year, I learned that at the very beginning of his writing career, he feared that only by rejecting his Northernness could he hope to find broader success.

When I first tried to get published some people were resistant to the fact that I was Northern, they said 'hmm, you write in a kind of Northern working class voice and we've got some of those, so we don't need you'. I thought 'Am I going to have to kind of imagine I'm from somewhere else? Maybe there's some kind of literary language out there somewhere, that I'll be able to find and kind of attach to myself.' But of course that's nonsense, you know, your own language that is in your bones and your blood and in your history and in your memory is where your language comes from. I hope one of the things that I've done is to discover the kind of true poetry in what we think of as ordinary language, and to transform it into something that can be read around the world, which it is.

Almond uses language linked to earth, to blood, to clay, bones, grass, trees, birds in flight, darkness, food, water and fire; elementals rooted in the somatic, yet also made ethereal and even spiritual in his writing.

Last year Almond donated his personal archive to Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books, in Newcastle. As part of a Northern Bridge AHRC placement at Seven Stories I've had the opportunity to explore his archives, including manuscripts, artwork, letters from editors and the very first notebook which contains the ideas which eventually became the extraordinary *Skellig*.

The most profound help this has given to me in writing my first novel as part of my PhD in Creative Writing, is in coming to understand more about *how* Almond creates stories in which the reader is immersed in an illusionary, fantastical, yet sensate and substantial world. My own science fiction novel is about a young woman trying to find a place in which to belong and survive in a landscape catastrophically transformed by climate change, where boundaries and structures of every kind have been blurred and erased, including language itself.

I've learned that one of the underpinnings of Almond's work is the way in which he sets about the *physical act of writing*. He embraces mess, scrappy notes, teases out half-formed and nascent ideas across the pages of his notebooks with ideas using colour, drawings, diagrams and scribbles. These are not limited to early thoughts or draft notes – they are the building blocks of his novels right through the writing process. And he believes it is this process which allows him to tap into and rediscover the magic that lies within reality.

For me, more and more, I use colour and pictures, creating images is central to me as a writer. I use colour to help me to imagine. I think it's a way of releasing what might be in my mind and helping me to discover what the story might be. And a lot of times when I'm doing this I'm staring into space, I'll be chewing me pencils, I'll be wondering, I'll be dreaming. Central to it is this vast scribbling and it's almost like the movement of the hand is really important; writing is a physical thing.

It seems to me now what I'm doing is kind of taking that wandering that I did as a child, and it's almost like the page becomes a place in which I can wander again and wander through these landscapes and again to see them anew, to recreate them. I use the language and the pencil and pen to move through a landscape and to discover stories in it.

In my own ongoing clumsy attempts to decode David Almond (how does the magician even *know* there's a rabbit in the hat, let alone produce it for an audience?), I consider a key text, and one of his most vivid realisations of the magic within reality, to be his 2010 book, *My Name is Mina*. More than simply a prequel to *Skellig*, the story of the

wonderfully curious (in every sense) Mina McKee is intertwined with its predecessor in a way that throws new light on the original novel. The story is in the form of a diary or journal written by Mina herself, a lonely, unusual but extremely imaginative, brave and articulate child. She loves clay, reading, trees, birds, the poems of William Blake ... she sees infinite possibilities in the world, and the world beneath the world, for love and knowledge, as well as for grief and cruelty. She mostly delights in existing in a space in the world that is different, in the hinterland between the reality of other children – school, structure, normality/obedience, two parents – and her own more fantastical realm of thought and the possibility of something magical, because it allows her a different perspective.

I'll tell the story of that day when the time seems right,
when the words seem right. And I suppose I'll tell the
other tales that matter, like the tale of my day at
Corinthian Avenue and my vision, or the story of my
journey to the Underworld in Heston Park, or the story
of my grandfather's house and the owls. And I'll put
in poems and scribblings and nonsense. Sometimes writing
nonsense can make a lot of sense! That sounds
nonsensical itself, of course, but it isn't. **NON-SENS-I-CAL!**

WHAT A GREAT WORD! WOW!

NONSENSICAL!

An extract from Mina's diary in *My Name is Mina*. Copyright © 2010 David Almond; Hodder Children's Books.

This is echoed and amplified in the physical format of the book itself, which uses many different fonts and formats to convey Mina's ideas, and her emotional state. It plays with white space on the pages and experiments with a variety of styles. It is, in fact, the finished book which most explicitly resembles one of Almond's own notebooks. And Mina is perhaps the character who most closely resembles Almond, or at least the part of Almond who always inhabits those borderlands between.

Writing will be like a journey, every word a footstep that takes me further into an undiscovered land. (*My Name is Mina*, p.16, Hodder Children's Books 2010)

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Elizabeth Byrne

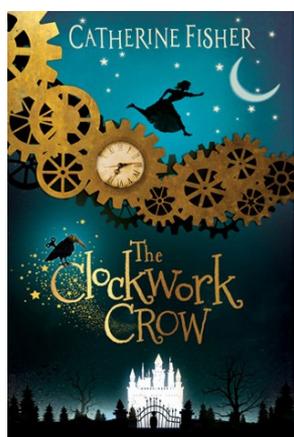
Magical Reality in Children's Fiction

Penny Thomas is the publisher and co-founder of Firefly Press, based in Wales. She had a misspent youth in Harpenden library, where there was a whole shelf of fairy stories from around the world, before taking a BA in English Language and Literature at Keble College, Oxford, and then training as a journalist. After 15 years in regional journalism she became fiction editor with Seren literary publishers in Bridgend and freelance edited for many others, including Chicken House, the University of Wales Press, Parthian and Honno Welsh Women's Press. In 2013 she and cofounder Janet Thomas (no relation) set up Firefly Press to publish quality fiction for five to nineteen year olds and have had several prize-nominated or winning titles to date including the Branford Boase award for a first children's novel author and editor for *Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot* (2015) by Horatio Clare.

As Maria Merryweather arrives at her estranged uncle's west-country mansion of Moonacre Manor she thinks for a fleeting moment that she sees a little white horse at the far end of a glade in the moonlit woods. But her startled guardian assures her that no such creature exists on the estate.

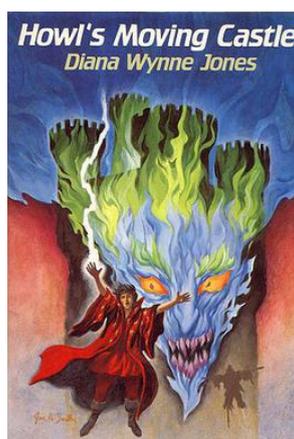
We don't need Sir Benjamin's reaction, or even the title, *A Little White Horse*, to tell us that this 'fleeting moment' is to be the heart of the book. The story proceeds in a more or less rational manner for many pages, with not a spell or a wand in sight – but this 1946 classic is assuredly a magical book, hiding its magic at first glance, in a cloak of reality.

I recently chaired a seminar at the London Book Fair on 'The new Welsh *magical realism* in children's publishing'. Thanks to some kind fairy godmother the event went well, but I admit I'm still struggling with comprehending magical realism in relation to children's books.



A quick Google gives many, often defensive, definitions of magical realism. It is most usually described as the appearance of an impossible or magical event in an otherwise entirely serious and realistic adult novel, most notably in the novels of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, such as the shattering moment when the blood of a murdered son flows around corners and up steps to end at the feet of his mother. A truth expressed in fictional terms where fiction allows the impossible to happen, maybe. We are admonished that this is quite different from that fantasy stuff, which is mere escapism, whereas it is the duty of adult fiction to engage with the real world and try to order or reorder the experiences it retells.

But in this article I'd like to step away from the tautological world of 'entirely serious and realistic adult fiction' and give the slip, at least for a while, to the question of escapism (who is against escapism anyway apart from a jailer, it has been said). Instead I'm setting sail for the more enticing islands of magical reality in children's fiction, where there are mercifully fewer attempts to kill the magic stone dead before it can be officially allowed to exist.



Where, in children's fiction, does the real world end and magic begin? And should we even try to disentangle them, let alone back one over the other? Does it matter if 'reality' and 'magic' blend organically in and out of the stories when they are written for an audience which may not yet have seen the need to divide them into two separate entities anyway. When, during a bedtime story, granny emerges smiling from the wolf's belly or Peter Pan flies straight on till morning, you might think that 'why' would be the obviously right question at the right time. Instead I wouldn't be surprised to find the story has grabbed the attention of the listener, who will absorb the increasingly unlikely action with much more delight than confusion. They may well have been more concerned about *why* they should go to bed in the first place, than how a magic carpet can be flying to faraway lands, or a superhero landing nearby. We don't need to explain magic to readers, just let them wonder at it, and enjoy it. And the

resulting boost to the imagination, taking the reader or listener out of themselves and engaging them with the thrilling characters and action, can in my opinion only have opened up possibilities and grown the imagination and empathy by the time the carpet lands safely home again.

Perhaps the widespread early exposure to the flickering lights of fairy stories is part of the reason why young readers may not be unduly troubled by trips back and fore into magical worlds, or magic turning up unexpectedly in their own. Indeed magic must be one of the most popular ingredients of children's fiction.

I mean, if a pumpkin can turn into a golden carriage, and back again at midnight, what can't happen? By and large, though, fairy stories fit their own internal reality, and the grooves of the much-told tales. For other stories of magical reality, there needs to be a way in: a door to knock.

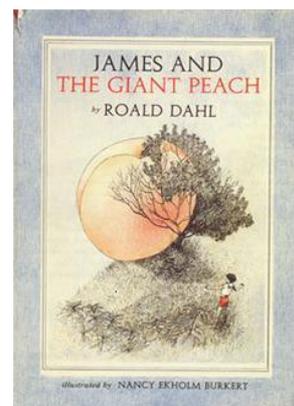
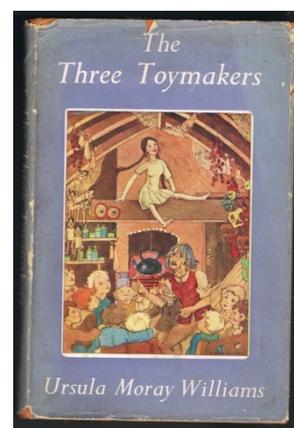
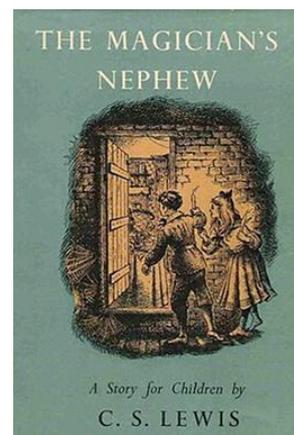
Delving back into twentieth-century British fiction to explore this further, I find myself immediately in that little-used room in the old house with the wardrobe. Open the door, peep through it, push between the mothballed fur coats (I've never smelt mothballs but mention them and I'm in that wardrobe) and you might just see a lamppost, and a glitter of snow on branches. It's that longed-for doorway into another world: scary, possibly dangerous, but compelling.

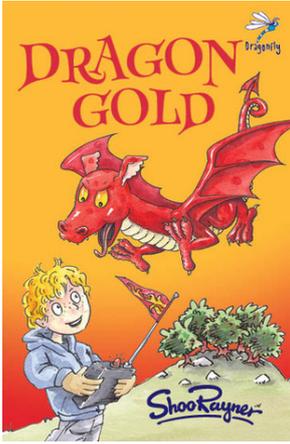
A few decades further on and we are lining up with our parents and trolley to hurtle onto platform nine and three quarters at King's Cross. When you're on the other side of this magical door, anything can happen and generally does. We've already had letters dropped by owls down the chimney and so on, but all is explained by that other world that overlaps with ours whether we can see it or not. And in Harry Potter the boundaries and unlikely crossover points between the 'real' and 'magical' worlds (Port keys, Diagon Alley, Mrs Arabella Figg, ...) can become rich areas of plotting.

But of course it didn't start with the wardrobe door. The fairy door has been around a very long time; the magical entrance to Annwn, the otherworld as the Welsh have it, has opened or closed at will (generally the faery will) to trap the unwary and release them again after fruitless enchantment, typically lasting a year and a day – and that's if they are one of the lucky ones. Time of course is different in faery lands, and it's wise not to eat or drink a drop if you ever want to escape.

In forthcoming middle-grade adventure *The Clockwork Crow* (2018) by Catherine Fisher the doorway to the deceptive world of the Tylwyth Teg (faeryland) is in the cellar of the great house where unwitting protagonist Seren Rees has come to live. At certain times, the high ring of a bell in the depths of the night alerts the hearer – and a wide set of shimmering golden steps appears, leading down from the lowest cellar to who knows where. The door is open. But the next day the cellar is just bare stone and damp earth again. Other wonderful variations on the theme appear in *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986) by Diana Wynne Jones, where the castle, itself about as magic as can be, has several different doors leading to different, more or less ordinary or magical landscapes.

To go back to C.S. Lewis, the device becomes ever more involved. In *The Magician's Nephew* (1955), prequel to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), he creates the 'wood between the worlds', where wearers of certain magical bracelets can choose which world they enter by jumping in different pools with the wood, a sort of quiet place with a hum





Examples of stepping across the threshold into the world of magic abound in children's fiction and the more inventive, credible or incredible the magical line, the more enjoyable the story, I would contend, and the greater the effect on the imagination. But you have to get it right! Where the internal logic of the world or worlds is not clear and persuasive, readers will not follow. Personal favourite overlaps of magic and non-magic worlds for me also include Malkin's wicked magic doll, Marta, in *The Three Toymakers* (1945) (Ursula Moray Williams), the magic seeds in Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), or, to come closer to home, Harri's drawing of a dragon which was placed inside a magical egg to hatch a real fire-breathing baby dragon named Tan in Shoo Rayner's *Dragon Gold* (2014).

Just as important of course, is sustaining the magical reality so carefully created. To step back through the wardrobe door one last time, through time, into a small Oxford pub, Tolkien was reportedly outraged when his fellow Inkling C.S. Lewis allowed Father Christmas to blunder his way into the magic of Narnia, and even more bizarrely, furnish the children with weapons as Christmas presents.

'It simply will not do,' he warned. And he had a point.

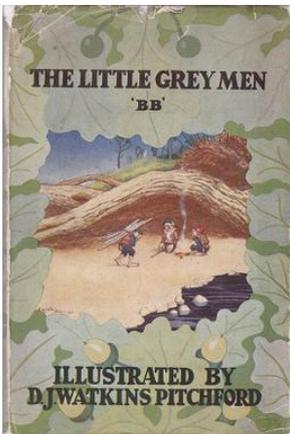
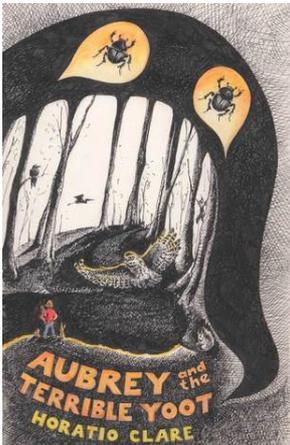
Tolkien's magical reality was quite different. Although drawn in part from his study of language, such as medieval English or Norse, and their myths, he needed no door into another, magical reality; his entire story is set in a world with which he replaced our own, or which is our own as it might have been with a sprinkling of stardust. Much the same goes for Pullman, which explains for me why these two writers are often classed as fantasy rather than magical realists. At the other end of the 'magical scale' I would argue, the natural world becomes so intense that it brings with it its own magic, or the boundaries are stretched so thin as to be almost porous. Books such as Horatio Claire's *Aubrey and the Terrible Yoot* (2016) explicitly pinpoint the moment when realism gives way to the magical – in this case when an owl speaks to the child protagonist Aubrey (by thought transference) – and the author draws attention to it with the line:

At this point our whole story hangs in the balance. Aubrey even takes hold of the curtains; he is about to shut them on this unlikely but demanding bird.

But, as Claire explains in rather brilliant footnotes, the talking owls are to him an extension of the natural world, rather than a move away from it:

Oh-ho, you may be thinking, a story with talking animals in it. How anthropomorphic. ... However as you will see, the philosophy of this story is closer to animism. ... Animism says humans are not the centre of the universe because everything in nature has a soul or a spirit, and that plants and rivers and owls have their own existences in the same way you do. (This is why you sometimes overhear people like Suzanne [Aubrey's mother] say, 'Hello, woodpigeon'.)

To backtrack a little, the talking owl arrives just after the young hero, Aubrey, has drawn inspiration from the tale of Perseus and the Medusa in his book of *Greek Gods, Myths and Monsters*. He takes Perseus for a role model to help him fight the invisible enemy of depression (the terrible Yoot of the title) which he believes is attacking his dad. We are told right away that this is a battle he can't win, but the story, the use of myth and magical understanding of the natural world, gives the young Aubrey, and by implication the young reader, a way in to understanding what may be affecting their parents' lives or those of the grown-ups around them. A difficult, and rarely tackled subject for any age, is made accessible and understandable by consciously moving it into a mythical, magical but still natural world through which it can be contained, interrogated and understood.



Clare, a nature writer at heart, also references his debt to B.B., author of the 1942 Carnegie medal-winning *The Little Grey Men* (1942). Set in the English countryside, this ‘story for the young at heart’ features the adventures of four gnomes who may be the last of their race as they set out up the bright stream in a toy boat lost by its owner, to search for their missing brother Cloudberry. Magic turns to folklore turns to reality with scarcely a port key in sight in this gentle, wonderful tale.

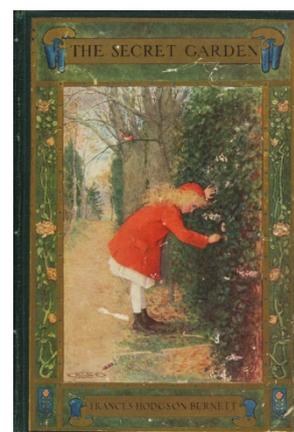
There are of course so many more examples and exceptions that prove the wavering rules. Frances Hodgson Burnett’s characters speak repeatedly of ‘the magic’ in *A Little Princess* (1905) or *The Secret Garden* (1911) but are perhaps almost always referencing actual (if Edwardian) human kindness when they do so, with maybe a touch of divine intervention behind it. My own particular favourite was referenced at the start. *A Little White Horse* (1946) by Elizabeth Goudge is, I believe, credited by no lesser person than J.K. Rowling as the book which revealed to her how magic and reality could exist harmoniously in a single story.

What searching out these many and varied magical doorways and pathways through our children’s stories confirms is that magic is embedded and entwined with storytelling and mythmaking from our earliest encounters with language. As such it can help children to recognise, name and comprehend the everyday world around them as well as at times escape it; perhaps in a way that didacticism or facts alone cannot transmit. Magical reality is a way of thinking that goes to the core of our imagination and the stories we tell about ourselves. Yes, we can write, or children can read, entirely ‘realistic’ fiction, the events that happen to the protagonists could really happen (though you might hope not all at once). But if magic-less reality is all that we have to offer our children we would be losing whole dimensions in which they can have fun, wonder and delight at the mysteries and possibilities of the world, and perhaps by making such imaginative leaps, uncover a few more for themselves.

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Penny Thomas

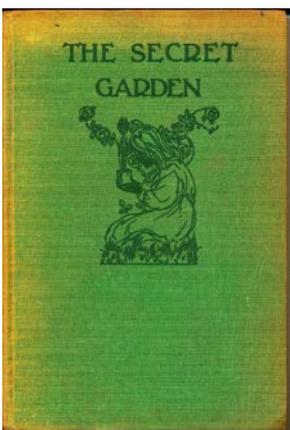


From a Child's Perspective: Magical Reality in Narratives by Virginia Woolf, Frances Hodgson Burnett and Philippa Pearce

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.

The very first paragraph of Modernist author Virginia Woolf's novel *To the Lighthouse* (1927) describes how six-year-old James Ramsey, holidaying with his family in Skye, in the Hebrides, is engaged in cutting out pictures from an Army and Navy Stores catalogue. 'Yes, tomorrow, if it's fine,' his mother replies when he asks her if they can visit the lighthouse soon, and his sudden happiness spills over and his heightened senses endow those things that he is cutting out, as well as the sound of the rooks and the rustling of the silk dresses, with a seemingly magical halo. Though the novel was not written for children, Woolf's narrative method stream of consciousness captures perfectly a child's unspoken feelings. Magical while being rooted in the everyday, Woolf (1882–1941) surely tapped in to those feelings that she recalled from her own childhood.

While James's experience is fleeting and dependent on circumstances, the seemingly magical effect of the 'redemptive power of nature' (Cogan Thacker and Webb, 2002: 83) can be lasting and transform the individual. This is the abiding theme of the fin de siècle narrative *The Secret Garden* (1911) by American author Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849–1924). During the British Raj in India, when her parents and Ayah, or nurse, die from cholera, nine-year-old Mary Lennox, unwanted, sickly and disagreeable, is sent to England to stay at Misselthwaite Manor, the home of her dour uncle, Archibald Craven, on the bleak Yorkshire moors.



Although determined to remain disagreeable, the unexpected gift of a skipping rope, plain-speaking Yorkshire folk like Martha, the servant girl, and the 'rough fresh air' blowing from across the moors begin to work their magic on Mary. With the help of the gardener Ben Weatherstaff's robin, she discovers in the grounds of the manor a secret walled garden, closed and untended for many years. The idea of having a 'secret garden' appealed greatly to the lonely child; it was, she felt, 'almost like being shut out of the world in some fairy place' (1960: 78–79).

Mary befriends 12-year-old Dickon, Martha's brother, who is the nineteenth-century's idealised image of the Romantic child so at one is he with the natural world around him. Pan-like, and reflecting the 'pseudo-pagan spirituality in much of the fiction of the period' (Cogan Thacker and Webb, 2002: 79) he charms the animals when he plays on his rough wooden pipe, and it seems to the enchanted Mary that 'he might be a sort of wood fairy' (1960: 97).

Dickon and Mary begin to tend the secret garden, clearing the weeds to allow spring bulbs and flowers to flourish. The sensual passages, as when Mary and Dickon 'put their eager young noses close to the earth and sniffed its warmed spring-time breathing' (1960: 136) give the garden an earthy reality as well as a magical quality. Hodgson Burnett uses the word 'Magic' – with a capital M – at intervals throughout the narrative, often to express Mary's growing wonder at the burgeoning world around

her. The garden was certainly having a magically beneficial influence on her health – as well as her temper.

One night, Mary, to her astonishment, discovers that she has a cousin, Colin Craven, hidden away in a bedroom in a remote corner of the house. He is a sickly-looking and peevish child. Recognising something of herself as she once was, bad-tempered and sullen, she stands up to Colin's tantrums and gradually coaxes him out of the confines of his, seemingly, permanent sick bed and eventually out into the sun and air and, of course, the secret garden. Eventually, the time comes when Colin, growing stronger every day, has to admit, rather warily at first, that 'Even if it isn't real Magic ... we can pretend it is. *Something* is there – *something!*' (1960: 200).

Colin's mother had died when he was born, since when Archibald Craven had had little time for his son and left the care of him to others. But the Magic was beginning to work on him too, away many months in the beautiful Austrian Alps. It was here that he found an almost mystical sense of peace, and it was this, as well as a vivid dream and a letter from Dickon's mother, the archetypal earth mother, that brings him home at last. He had expected to see a 'sickly, weak-backed boy whose father was afraid to look at him' (1960: 209). Instead, he finds that his son has grown strong and well, and is moved beyond words when his son tells him 'It was the garden that did it – and Mary and Dickon and the creatures – and the Magic' (1960: 251).

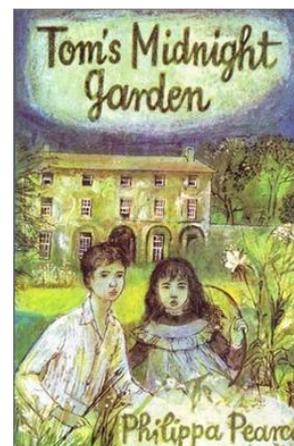
But for another child, and under different circumstances, reality might seem sadly lacking in any magical qualities, and be even alienating, so when something mysterious and utterly magical *does* happen it can provide an escape and begin to take over. This is sensitively described in Philippa Pearce's Modernist novel *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) for which she was awarded the Carnegie Medal. Magical yet rooted in the everyday, this is one of the most haunting of stories written for children.

Years before writing *Tom's Midnight Garden* Pearce (1920–2006) had read J.W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time* (1927), a study in precognitive dreams and a theory of time that Dunne was later to call Serialism. While his study has subsequently had its detractors, it did sow the seed in Pearce's mind for her time shift novel.

While his brother recovers from measles, 12-year-old Tom Long is sent to stay with relatives in a stuffy flat in an old converted house. He is lonely, restless and bored, until one midnight the clock in the hall strikes thirteen. During this magical out-of-time hour Tom finds that the house becomes as it was in Victorian times with a beautiful rambling walled garden. Based on the mill house and garden where Pearce spent her childhood in Cambridgeshire, the descriptions have an actuality about them. Particularly vivid and sensual are her descriptions of the garden and one can almost feel the dew-damp, lush grass under Tom's feet as he ventures out onto it and smell the scent of the hyacinths and wallflowers in the flower borders.

Yet throughout the narrative there is a dreamlike quality: although Tom does not notice it, we are told that, unlike the gardener's, his own footsteps leave no trace on that dew-damp grass (2015: 42); and the times of day and the seasons in the garden seem to change on each of Tom's visits while the seemingly long periods of time he spends in the garden appear to be contained within but a few minutes in the real world (2015: 43).

It is in the garden that Tom meets Hatty, a lonely late-Victorian orphan child and they become close friends. She is the only person living at the house who can see Tom, save the gardener who believes that he must be a ghost. Because time in the garden is fluid, Hatty sometimes seems much younger, as when Tom finds her weeping for her dead parents (2015: 95–96), and at other times much older, as when she skates on the frozen river with Tom to Ely (2015: 188–190). It is at the end of this particular adventure that Tom suddenly realises that Hatty has grown up. She had gradually



become less interested in the 12-year-old Tom, and when she meets and falls in love with Barty, Tom is left alone and distraught.

On the night before he is due to go home, Tom tries to re-enter the garden, but it is not there. In its place are the dusty yard and some dustbins. The magical out-of-time hour has ceased to be; he is firmly back in the twentieth-century and his dream of mastering Time and living in the garden with Hatty for eternity must be abandoned.

The mystery of Hatty and the garden and their links to old Mrs Bartholomew, the landlady who has a flat at the top of the house where Tom's aunt and uncle live, are movingly revealed at the end of the novel. Tom had, magically, become caught up in Mrs Bartholomew's dreams of long ago. 'When you're my age, Tom, you live in the Past a great deal' (2015: 222) she tells him, and it was through her dreams that she had connected with the young Hatty she once was. She had been 'longing for someone to play with and for somewhere to play' (2015: 223) just as Tom had, and so, through her dreams, their need had drawn them together.

When Tom's parents come to take him home, and he is about to leave, he suddenly turns back and puts his arms around Mrs Bartholomew, 'a shrunken little old woman' (2015: 227), and hugs her as if she were a little girl. He understands, surely prompted by his own sadness at losing the young Hatty and the 'midnight garden', and perhaps showing a maturity beyond his years, her sense of loss and longing for what has gone forever. There is poignancy here in that the child has as strong a desire to relive what has passed as has an elderly woman for they pledge to continue to share their memories of the magical 'midnight garden' on Tom's promised future visits (2015: 225).

The experience of each of the three children, six-year-old James, nine-year-old Mary and twelve-year-old Tom, is touched by a kind of magic while being grounded in reality. The older the child, the more complex the magic seems to be. For James, the magic was fleeting, there one minute and gone the next when that which he has most wanted, and his father has seemed intent on preventing, may not be possible after all; for Mary, her awakened sense of wonder at the magic inherent in nature, and her understanding of its transforming potential, will surely remain with her always as it will for Colin; for Tom, it was a tenuous magic, woven out of someone else's dreams of events long past, but so beguiling and real seeming that he had begun to lose sight of his everyday world; yet for Tom, the 'midnight garden' will always be both magical and 'real' for as long as he and Mrs Bartholomew have their shared memories of it.

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June Hopper Swain

REVIEWS

We are in the process of redesigning *IBBYLink* in order to improve the experience of reading it online. We plan to concentrate on articles around selected themes and include one or two book reviews of special interest. In future the majority of book reviews will be transferred to the website which is being developed. Here they will be available to everyone who visits the site and not restricted to members only as is currently the case.

Storybooks, Novels, Fables and Tales

Life with Grandpa

Pat Pinsent, AuthorHouse UK, pb. 978 1 5462 8580 9, 2018, £8.95, 76pp. (Available from Amazon.) [Fiction; 6–11 years. Keywords: dementia, memory lapses/confusion, complexities of old age, different/varying conditions of ageing, care and needs, different/unusual behaviours, adjustments to family relationships and life.]

Pat Pinsent is a celebrated figure in the world of children's literature. She has been for many years one of the best-known academics at the National Centre for Research in Children's Literature at Roehampton University and the author of influential books such as *Children's Literature* (2016) and *Children's Literature and the Politics of Equality* (1997).

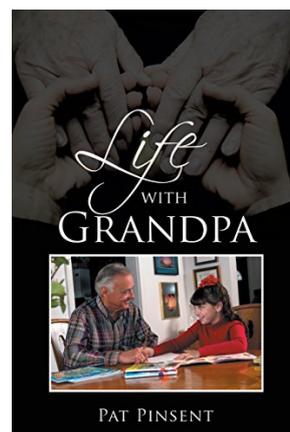
This is Pinsent's first venture into fiction as opposed to criticism. Debbie is a young child. Her grandfather Harold Grant is a retired mathematician. As the book opens Harold has early onset dementia. The situation posed by this book is unusual as a theme for children's fiction. But it is a theme much in demand for our times. As the population lives longer, so dementia becomes more common. More and more children will be exposed to dementia as an influence on their family life. A book that prepares them for this experience is much needed.

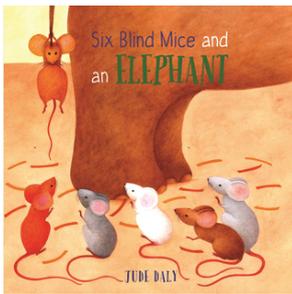
The book is narrated by young Debbie. She grows puzzled by her grandfather's inclination to hide food. She is especially intrigued by his habit of cooling tomato soup by pouring orange juice into the bowl. To allow Debbie's parents to look after her paternal grandfather, the grandparents move into an annex of the parents' home. At first Debbie resents this move. Previously the grandparents lived in London and provided a valued pied à terre in the big city.

Debbie narrates the trials and tribulations of cohabiting with Grandpa, such as embarrassment in church when like a young child he needs a toilet break in the middle of the service. Every time he gets in the car, at five minute intervals he asks whether they have enough petrol. At one point he insists the whole family must stay at home because his own parents are coming to visit: they have been dead for 30 years.

Debbie also depicts the role played by singing groups in Harold's life and more generally the importance of music. The book must strike a tricky balance. It must explain to young readers the reality of dementia as they may witness it in ageing relatives. But it must also take care not to frighten young readers out of their wits. The book, crafted with Pinsent's customary skill and tact, strikes this balance well and will no doubt play a significant part in the lives of many young readers. It remains to be seen which of the powerful national mental health charities will take up this slim volume and help put it to its very necessary work.

Rebecca Butler





Six Blind Mice and an Elephant

Jude Daly, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, hb. 2017, £11.99, 32pp. [Picture book, Fable; 4+ years. Keywords: blindness; smell; senses; wonder; wisdom.]

This is an inspirational story written and beautifully illustrated by Jude Daly. The tale has its roots in a classic Indian fable and to me is also reminiscent of the style of Aesop's Fables.

Daly has set this multi-layered story where she lives, in South Africa. The glowing colours of the illustrations show us a landscape, people and animals that the mice never see. However, their lives are enhanced by a chance encounter with a tired old elephant who finds respite from the hot sun in the farmer's barn where they live.

The six blind mice are dozing in their nest when they are awoken by a scent they have never smelled before! Each mouse tries, through touching parts of the sleeping creature, to work out what it is when the elephant suddenly flaps his ears and trumpets, sending the mice scurrying for cover!

The ensuing exploration will encourage children to share and question preconceptions and perspectives as well as having fun with a discussion about the sense of touch. For instance, the youngest mouse is convinced that the elephant's tail is a rope! Knowing the mice are blind not only gives insight into how misconceptions arise, but also shows how the whole is always more than the sum of its parts. This is a valuable experience for any child and it is especially exciting for them to explore the delightfully informative illustrations.

The last page shows the mice 'squeaking and squealing with satisfaction at having seen for themselves **the wonder of an elephant.**'

This is philosophy for young children to have fun with so would be a good book for a school library. It's also a great book to share with grown-ups anywhere. There is much to learn from the wise old elephant too!

Shirley Hobson

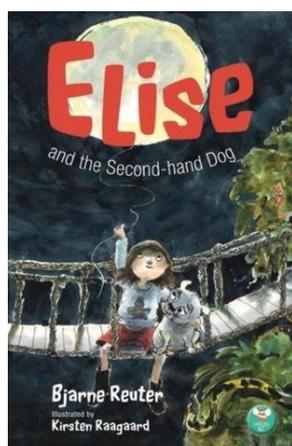
Translations

Elise and the Second-Hand Dog

Bjarne Reuter, illus. Kirsten Raagaard, trans. Siân Mackie, London: Wacky Bee Books, pb. 978 0 9956 9728 7, 2018, £6.99, 180pp. First published in Danish by Gyldendal, 2016. [Translation; 7–12 years. Keywords: Absence, longing, imaginary friend, make believe, reality, trust, courage.]

This is an idiosyncratic book, which is likely to appeal strongly to some readers and to be rejected by others. Elise's longing for a dog is easy enough for the reader to empathise with, and the purchase of a strange looking 'animal ... with a rotund body and four spindly legs ... [with] its mouth ... smiling at Elise' (pp.18–19) might seem to lead in to a traditional type of 'child loves dog' story. But this dog is an individual with his own voice: when Elise sets up an elaborate ceremony in order to 'christen' him Prince Valiant the Great, the dog objects, "But my real name's McAduddi," he said' (p.33).

Elise's adventures with McAduddi involve other members of her family. Her 'youngest aunt', Fie, is reluctant to believe that a dog can speak but is partially convinced when Elise has information about Scotland that it appears she could only have derived from McAduddi. Her elderly great-grandfather dresses up as an Egyptian mummy for Halloween (and is described by McAduddi as 'a kitchen roll with legs' (p.104). At Christmas, Elise and McAduddi somehow manage to



visit the Amazonian rain forest, where Elise's mother, an engineer, has been supervising the building of a bridge (though they do not encounter her). Before they fly home, McAduddi, now named 'Dancing Dog', kicks out of their path a tarantula, and they escape from a nine-metre-long anaconda which Elise had mistaken for a fallen tree.

In due course McAduddi vanishes, or 'goes to Aberdeen', his euphemism for dying. The end heralds mother's return from South America and reunion with her daughter. Elise tells her the story of the 'second-hand dog', but rejects the idea of getting a more ordinary dog as a replacement.

The extent to which readers will believe in the 'reality' of these and the other fantastic incidents involving Elise and her dog may well differentiate those who read the book as an adventure story from those who see these events as resulting from the young girl's need for her absent mother. I suspect that the style of the black and white illustrations is more likely to appeal to the latter, more sophisticated, reader than the former.

The translation generally reads well, but I would have welcomed a little more information (in an appendix?) about the places mentioned (whose names provide something of a challenge for the non-Danish reader). It would be interesting too to know how far the depiction of the celebration of Halloween, Christmas and Candlemas is based on real Danish practice.

Pat Pinsent

Dragons, Father and Son

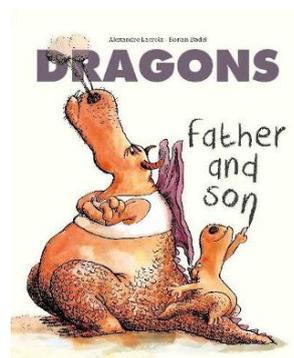
Alexandre Lacroix, illus. Roman Badel, trans. Vanessa Miéville, London: Words & Pictures, hb. 978 1 7849 3828 4, 2017, £9.99, 32pp. First published in French as *Dragons Père et Fils*, Père Castor-Flammarion, 2014. [Translation, 5+ years. Keywords: picture book; French literature; father's role; son's role; tradition; questioning; decision making; obedience; challenging; philosophy.]

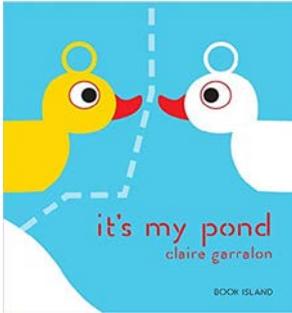
Drake is a little dragon with a problem. Dad has decided it's time Drake behaved like a dragon. He sets Drake a task; he must burn down the local village. 'But why?' asks Drake. 'It's tradition' says dad. So Drake sets off. But will he succeed? That is the question.

Both author and artist are French and together they bring a subtly different tone to this enjoyable picture book. Lacroix is the editor of *Philosophie Magazine*. In this story he introduces a number of questions for the young reader to consider. Why should actions be dictated by tradition? Should one conform to how one is supposed to act? Does a dragon have to burn a village down? This is not a picture book for the youngest and this is reflected both in the style of storytelling, excellently conveyed by Miéville's translation, and by the illustrations of Roman Badel. Taking a very limited pastel palette, the artist fills the pages with life and energy – and humour. There is a strong element of the comic strip and the cartoonist's art in the presentation of both dragons and villagers. This is a visual language that will be familiar to the young. It has an immediacy that engages the attention, the vigorous lines fill the pages with movement and there are details together with little vignettes adding depth and delight. Both Drake and his father are presented as very real characters both in the text and even more through the images. Their relationship is just as real.

A fun picture book to be enjoyed by young and old – and especially dads and lads. One for Fathers' Day perhaps.

Ferelith Hordon





It's My Pond

Claire Garralon, trans. Sara Ardizzone, Bristol: Book Island, hb. 9 781 9114 9602 1, 2017, £8.99, 32pp. First published in French as *C'est ma mare* by Éditions MeMo, 2016. [Translation, 3–8 years. Keywords: picture book; French literature; sharing; possessing/ownership; self; others; pleasure.]

'Wow, nice pond – it's my pond' quacks the yellow duck. But what happens when more ducks arrive and they are all different colours? There isn't room for each to stake a space for themselves. What about sharing? What a great idea. But what will happen when someone much bigger turns up?

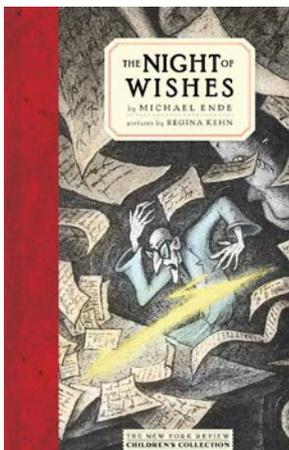


'Along comes a black duck.' Copyright © 2016 Claire Garralon (text and illus.), Sara Ardizzone (trans.); Book Island.

A bright, colour palette brings the clever minimalist illustrations alive as the ducks, all the colours of the rainbow and more, happily swim in the bright blue pond itself set against a white background. The text – brilliantly translated by Sarah Ardizzone – is seamless. There is no unnecessary moralising; the situation is clear as each new duck arrives and asks for a space. Dialogue ensures that the narrative is as crisp as the illustrations. Then the hippo arrives, but is that the end? Of course not – but do not make any cosy assumptions.

This very simple picture book is an outstanding example that shows simplicity does not preclude a multi-layered message. The theme of sharing is not new – David McKee has explored it on several occasions – and here Garralon poses plenty of questions for the reader to think about. Is sharing always good? Whom do we share with? Why share? This is a book for adults to explore with young readers – but it is also an enjoyable and humorous picture book that is fun to read.

Ferelith Hordon



The Night of Wishes: Or the SatanarchaeolidealcHELLish Notion Potion

Michael Ende, illus. Regina Kehn, trans. Heike Schwarzbauer and Rick Takvorian. New York Review of Books, hb. 978 1 6813 7188 7, 2017, £11.99, 224pp. First published in German as *Der satanarchäolügenialkohöllische Wunschpunsch* by Thienemann Verlag, 1989. [Novel, 9+ years. Keywords: humour; fantasy; magic; German literature.]

The Night of Wishes is a topsy-turvy fantasy story with a strong magic element, told partly in rhyme. On New Year's Eve, malevolent wizard Beelzebub Preposteror gloomily contemplates his impending magical demise. Being stripped of his magical powers is the penalty he faces for his failure to meet his annual quota of dastardly deeds.

With only a few hours of the old year remaining, Beelzebub and his devious relative, Tyrannia Vampirella, set about brewing a mightily powerful Notion Potion, with the aim of bringing last minute disaster to the world and salvaging their magical powers. The only creatures that stand in their way are an overweight, dozy feline and a dishevelled, rheumatic raven.

The Night of Wishes contains plenty of darkness, but Ende incorporates ample quantities of comedy and wit to mitigate this. Regina Kehn's fine monochrome illustrations also contribute greatly to the book's comedy. Evil self-interest and malice are sharply drawn in the characters and actions of Beelzebub and Tyrannia Vampirella, but are well balanced throughout by the book's underlying humour, its powerful cinematic quality and an abundance of witty ideas and wordplay. The main wizard characters are deliciously evil and revolting, whilst Mauricio and Jacob, the animal characters who set out to thwart them, are warm hearted, entertaining, endearing and funny.

This story is rich in humour and wild fantasy, and can be enjoyed purely on this level. However, *The Night of Wishes* is more than simply a dark, comic romp where things come good in the end. Concerns about human impact on a fragile world (pollution and harm to nature in particular), underlie the comic narrative. Profound themes of good against evil and the weak prevailing against the strong, mesh together in its pages, along with the importance of friendship, trust, bravery and kindness. And readers are reminded throughout about the potential dangers of not standing up to what is wrong. It's a telling theme from a German author who, in his youth, joined the anti-Nazi resistance.

Anne Walker



Picture Books, Picture Storybooks, Comics Books, Graphic Novels and Novelty Books

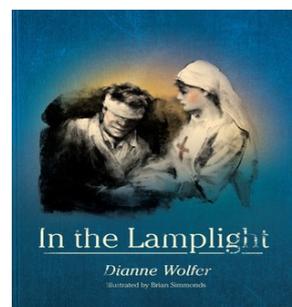
In the Lamplight

Dianne Wolfer, illus. Brian Simmonds, Western Australia: Freemantle Press, hb. 978 1 9255 9122 4, 2018, \$26.99 AU, 120pp. [Picture book; 12+ years.

Keywords: nursing history of First World War Australian troops in England; wounds; gangrene; gas poisoning; shell shock; social history; suffragettes; women's roles; attitudes to those who did not enlist; Red Cross.]

The author, Dianne Wolfer, visited England in May and June to promote her book written in memory of Australian First World War troops who were treated at Harefield Hospital. The event was held at Harefield Library in association with Harefield History Society. Subsequently Dianne Wolfer visited Schools in Hillingdon and Greater Manchester meeting teachers and children through specially arranged workshops. The book can be purchased online through many retailers including https://www.freemantlepress.com.au/products/in-the-lamplight?taxon_id=10 . There will be a postage charge and it is calculated based on your location in the UK at the time of ordering. The publisher has an overseas distributor, Independent Publishers Group, based in the US so local UK bookstores should be able to order from them. The book is also available from the Book Depository at £14.78.

Published to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War, this book was inspired by the story of Harefield House, Uxbridge (now the site of Harefield Hospital), used as a No 1 Auxiliary Hospital for Australian troops from December 1914 to early 1919. The proprietors were Mr and Mrs Charles Billyard-Leake, Australians then living in England. The title reminds us



of Florence Nightingale's fame in Victorian Britain as 'the lady of the lamp'. This is an appealing work. Short narratives are interweaved with imaginary diary entries by the protagonist, Rose, who becomes a nurse at the hospital. Wolfer does not shy away from the grim nature of her work; dealing with men suffering from gangrene, gas poisoning, trench foot or shell shock. Along with the harsh realities of the victims of war, there are plenty of human, cheerful touches: the white cockatoo calling out 'G'day, Mate', the Joey which is a regimental mascot, chickens called 'chooks' and the 'bonza job' done by our heroine. There are a few factual slips and anachronisms but these are unlikely to bother a child reader. The USSR was not created on 3 January 1918 but was founded on 30 December, 1922. (The Soviet Russian Republic came into existence on 8 January, 1918). An Uxbridge girl in April 1919 would not have 'farewelled' her friend nor referred to their Majesties King George and Queen Mary as 'the royals' in August 1915, nor would Rose have called her mother 'Mam' (p.2). A singer would not have been called an 'artist' in 1915 and could not have sounded like a BBC Radio performer as the British Broadcasting Company was not set up until later in 1922. Also people listened to the 'wireless' not the 'radio'.

Wolfer provides us with a compelling narrative drive with evocative charcoal drawings, and archival materials including photographs. Along the way the young reader will discover references to the suffragettes, as Rose's sister Edna is a great supporter of Mrs Pankhurst. British readers will also learn that women in New Zealand and Australia already had the vote at that time. Rose's friend Charlotte not only hands out white feathers to young men but she also harms Henrietta, the little hen. Younger readers might read for the first time of trouble in the Balkans, of Mr Lloyd George, of a Red Cross Peace quilt or of the Armistice. Rose has a true vocation and deserves the happy ending: having nursed one of her patients, she finds new love in a new land.

Susan Bailes

Small Things

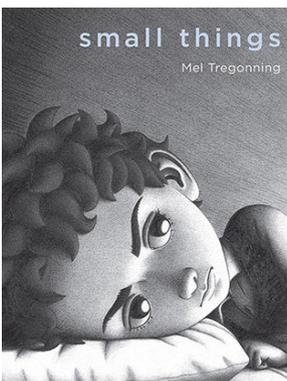
Mel Tregonning, London: Murdoch Books, hb. 978 1 7433 6872 5, 2017, £16.99, 40pp. [Graphic novel; 10–16 years. Keywords: depression; anxiety; insecurity; isolation; fears; fantasies; empathy; companionship; relief.]

This black and white, wordless graphic novel tackles the sensitive subjects of depression and anxiety with incredible depth and integrity.

A small boy navigates his daily journey through school, taking the reader through a range of social situations with varying degrees of failure. His personal world is not a positive place and his insecurities continue to grow with every turn of the page.

As the book title suggests, it is the small things which drag the boy down over time. His constant rejection by his peers, being picked last for PE, having no-one he feels he can talk to and his increasing isolation in a world where he sees no allies make every day a battle, evidenced in his slowly deteriorating academic grades and the force and magnitude of the shadowy monsters that accompany him everywhere.

Eventually the cracks literally start to show, illustrated as cracks in his skin, as he is eaten up by his demons, both during the day and at night, when the darkness descends on him and increases the intensity of his anxieties, save for the glow of his bedroom night light.



It is not until his sister shows him her cracked skin too and encourages him to speak to their parents about his problems that the boy is able to appreciate that he is not alone in having worries. This moment of shared experience and clarification gives him the strength to look again at the world, recognising that his own experiences might enable him to support others. The final page in the book has him with his hand on the shoulder of a girl in his class who clearly has her own anxiety daemons eating away at her. The boy's monsters have not disappeared, but this image presents the more uplifting suggestion that he is beginning to overcome them.

An incredibly powerful book that demands both reflection and discussion by its readers. Whether or not children have suffered similar feelings to the boy, they will gain much from looking at how we treat others in a highly intense and stressful world.

Sarah Stokes

Balthazar the Great

Kirsten Sims, London: Frances Lincoln Children's Books, hb. 978 1 8478 0949 0, 2017, £11.99, 36pp. First published by Orfeu Negro, Portugal, 2016. [Picture book; 4+ years. Keywords: polar bear; anthropomorphism; circus; loneliness; violin.]

Balthazar is a polar bear, and his greatness is defined by his ability to play the violin in the circus. But he is the last of such bears and, set free, he heads for home, although he is not quite sure where it is.

In a sparse text and bold pictures, which rely on the contrast between Balthazar's white fur and the darker hues of the changing environment he passes through, Kirsten Sims traces a journey that has happy moments but often finds Balthazar 'more LOST and lonely than ever'. Balthazar is an appealing bear wearing small square-rimmed glasses, whose plight will touch the hearts of young readers. I think there are points being made here, too, about the use of animals in circuses, since Balthazar is shown confined in a cage that seems to droop with him in sympathy; and also about the plight of refugees and migrants, as Balthazar travels through unfamiliar places and camps on the outside of cities with 'others who were looking for home, too'. But this is softly framed by the fantasy of an anthropomorphic bear, who has been taught the violin by his grandfather, and who is greeted on his homecoming by bears dressed variously in a bikini top, a flat cap, tea shirts and an anorak.

For some inside illustrations, see

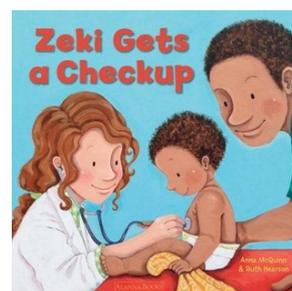
<https://kirstensims.myportfolio.com/balthazar-the-great>.

Clive Barnes

Zeki Gets a Checkup

Anna McQuinn, illus. Ruth Hearson, Slough: Alanna Books, pb. 978 1 9076 2520 0, 2018, £7.99, 20pp. [Picture book; 1–4 years. Keywords: doctor; friendship; kindness; safety; body examination; health; wellbeing.]

This is a warm picture book featuring Zeki, who is younger brother to Lulu, star of McQuinn's earlier series. This book explains to pre-schoolers in non-threatening terms what a medical checkup is and why we need them to 'keep us safe'.



Refreshingly it is Zeki's father who accompanies and reassures him, showing readers from the youngest age that childcare can and should be shared. Adding to the inclusive nature of the text, the family is non-white and the doctor is female. Given that some children have fears of medical intervention, these books are necessary to allay such fears before they take root.

Rebecca Butler

Poetry

Chicken on the Roof

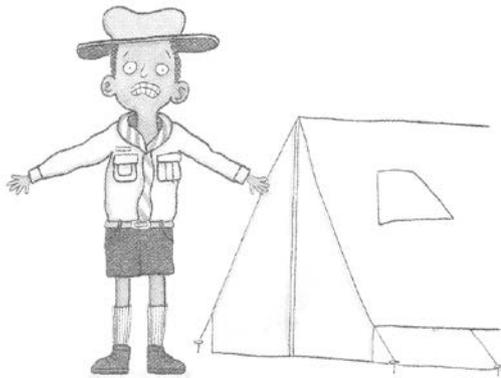
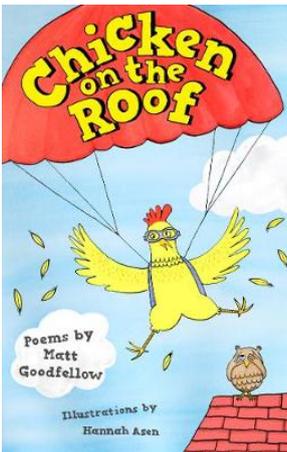
Matt Goodfellow, illus. Hannah Asen, Hereford: Otter-Barry Books, pb. 978 1 9109 5990 9, 2018, £6.99, 96pp. [Poetry, 7+ years. Keywords: poems; fun; humour; school life; ups and downs of life.]

I am not familiar with the work of either the author or illustrator of this book but am very impressed with the poems, which are enhanced by the illustrations. Otter-Barry poetry series in this format have so far been excellent and this book follows that trend.

Matt Goodfellow is a performance poet so it is not surprising that I found myself jiggling as I read some of the poems and was chanting some out loud where there is a refrain. Read this from 'Fit':

every pan has a lid
every bus needs a stop
every bike needs a wheel
every drip needs a drop

Not all the poems have such rhythm nor are they so frivolous. 'Why I Dislike Camping' says it all in two lines and includes a pun: 'Sleeping bags make me anxious/ And I hate feeling tents.'



Illustrations for 'Heading Home' (margin); 'Why I Dislike Camping' (left); 'Little Boat' (right). Copyright © 2018 Hannah Asen.

'Gone' describes a child's sadness at a friend moving away to another school, while 'Little Boat' is a lovely description of watching a small dingy bob up and down.

Puzzle' is a thoughtful poem about ourselves: 'We are/ all/ jigsaw pieces/ ...', whereas 'The Rain Snake' snakes down the page. For those who dislike getting up early there is 'Can't I Just Stay in Bed?.'

Those who like to be out of doors will find 'King of Birds', 'Rock Pool', 'From the Land to the Sea' and 'Walk' satisfying.

If you find your family too much then read 'Cousins' and for more pensive poems try 'The Green Man's Child' and 'Slip Away'. Fifty poems to keep you alert.

The poems cover every aspect of life and so will be enjoyed by anyone over seven, not just children and young people but adults too. It will help you through any situation of sadness, joy, pain, feeling lost.

Jennifer Harding

Overheard in a Tower Block

Joseph Coelho, illus. Kate Milner, Burley Gate, Herefordshire: Otter Barry books, pb. 978 1 9109 5958 9, 2017, £6.99, 112pp. [Poetry; 11+ years.

Keywords: urban landscape and environment; conflict; growing up; family life; divorced parents; tension; myth.]

Joseph Coelho's debut poetry collection, *Werewolf Club Rules*, was the winner of the CLiPPA award in 2015. His second collection lives up to the promise of the first and it appears to have autobiographical elements. There is certainly a story to trace: of a boy growing up in the inner-city with warring, and eventually separated, parents; a boy fascinated by stories and books and who uses them to understand the pain and joy life brings him; and a boy who, before the end of the book, becomes a man and a father. There are poems that honour the city and its children 'who are its eyes and ears, its tongue and nostrils, closer to the ground, breathing the city, playing on its front line.'

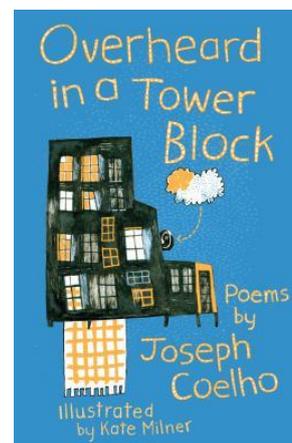
There are poems that explore his environment: the tower block that consumes and defines the lives within it, and the woods and ponds of Richmond Park where danger and adventure wait. There are poems that describe his family life: the sights and sounds of his parents arguing; the aching absence of his father, and the memorable day that his grandfather creates a rainbow candle from all the fragments of wax he finds about the house.

Coelho has an eye for the telling incident and the ability to draw out its meaning. He can ring the style changes from rap to free verse; from performance poetry to stuff that needs a lot more work. He also knows about pacing. 'Welly', in which a child remembers spinning a dog by its tail, is spun out just long enough for the reader to find it unbearable.

He's also an ambitious poet. The poems about family life and growing up are framed and interrupted by three that trace the fate of Prometheus and that explore the limits and possibilities of a world in which men have supplanted the gods.

Kate Milner's black and white illustrations complement the poems, sometimes mining their imagery, and sometimes offering a sidelong or obscured view of the real world the poet inhabits, leaving the poems to do the rest. Altogether, it's a collection that will excite, intrigue and stretch teenagers and that offers a lot of scope for classroom discussion.

Clive Barnes



The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 53, Autumn 2018 (copydate 7 September 2018), and will be on Classics.

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 Lina Iordanaki: linaiodanaki@gmail.com. New reviewers are always welcome.

Titles for Review

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* should send them to Lina Iordanaki at Campus London, (Code First Girls), 4–5 Bonhill Street, Shoreditch EC2A 4BX, London; linaiodanaki@gmail.com.

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