

David McKee

Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2022

UK Illustrator Nomination



David McKee Biography

In a career spanning over fifty years, David McKee has delighted countless young readers and inspired a generation of illustrators – and continues to do so.

He was born in 1935 and grew up in Devon. Even as a child he drew “Everybody used to send me out on long walks with a pencil and a pad. They used to tell me to fill it. So I did”¹. Later, following the advice of his art teacher, he went to study at Plymouth Art College. Here he discovered cartoons as a means to support himself, selling his efforts to national papers. He continued to do this after leaving college, his work appearing in *Punch* and others. Inspired by artists such as Saul Steinberg, and André François, he realised he could match stories to his art. The result was his first picture book *Toucan Toucan* in 1964.

In 1967 the first Mr Benn story appeared – the latest, *Mr Benn: Gladiator* in 2001. Then in 1968, *Elmer, The Story of a Patchwork Elephant* was published by Dobson Press. When Andersen Press reissued the book in 1989 in glorious technicolour, *Elmer* became the iconic elephant recognised across the world, the stories generating numerous editions and merchandise – even statues decorating city parks. McKee’s work is distinctive for its bright colours, interesting perspectives and surreal details where the influence of artists like Paul Klee and the Fauves has become increasingly apparent.

Other series developed. The BBC took up *Mr Benn*, and the neat little gentleman in a bowler hat appeared on screen in 1971 achieving great popularity – he is celebrated outside the house in Putney where he was created. Nor is he the only character to translate to film. In 1978, McKee became involved in the creation of King Rollo Films, launching with a series based on the King Rollo books.

With the publication of *Tusk Tusk* in 1978 – a text now used on philosophy courses, it became apparent he was an artist prepared to challenge his readers. Then in 1980 came *Not Now, Bernard* which immediately sparked controversy as the child, ignored by the adults in his world, is eaten by the monster. It has remained in print for 40 years.

Throughout the 80’s, McKee’s reputation as a picture book creator increased rapidly. In 1987 he was awarded the Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis. Since then he has continued to create picture books that delight but also challenge as they reflect contemporary issues; *The Conquerors* (2011) is his response to the Iraq War – “There have to be other ways to deal with things than war”² he says. In 2020 he was awarded the BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award.

His stories have a moral heart but never preach. Children warm to them and to his art which has a deceptive simplicity. McKee describes how he observed his children happily “reading” a picture book from a variety of angles. It has informed his work ever since. For him the child comes first “Without the children’s books, the adult books wouldn’t have any public”³

¹ Books for Keeps No. 8 May 1981 : <http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/8/childrens-books/articles/authograph/authograph-no8-david-mckee>

² BookTrust Interview with Emily Drabble September 2020 <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2020/september/the-shock-is-hard-to-get-over-elmer-creator-david-mckee-on-winning-booktrusts-life-time-achievement-award-and-his-incredible-career/>

³ Idem

David McKee A Critical Statement

Since his first publication, *Two Can Toucan*, came out in 1964 (when he was a student), David McKee has created some fifty picturebooks which have enduringly appealed, with their warmth, humour and sense of fun, to the necessary double audience for books for pre-schoolers: to adults and children alike. The simplicity of his books makes them accessible to the very young, but they also manage to address big themes. They add up to a boundary-breaking, inventive, influential body of work that is among the most notable in modern children’s literature.

McKee has said himself that ‘Children’s books can contribute to changing attitudes and are instrumental in helping them shape their view of the world’¹ and it is a responsibility he takes to heart. His books are often about reconciliation and acceptance, as in, for instance, his clever and poignant allegory, *The Conquerors*. This story is about a militaristic nation that attacks other countries “for their own good... So they can be like us” and always wins, whatever the resistance. Until one day it invades a small country that does not fight back. The invaded people welcome the soldiers with open houses, and share their jokes, stories and food, enriching the lives of the invaders. Similarly, *Tusk Tusk* is a brilliant fable about the resolution of conflict between black elephants and white elephants, and like *Two Monsters*, is a tale of opponents who come to find they have more in common. All these works are timely for our currently riven society, and our divided world. Children who grow up taking to heart the compassionate spirit of these books are more likely to bring us a sane and hopeful future.

McKee’s oeuvre is prolific and various, but one of his strengths is his capacity always to understand the point of view of a child. He creates adult characters who are really children: Mr Benn, for instance (a perennial favourite not only because the books that featured him were televised) looks like a boring adult in a bowler hat, and lives in an ordinary street, Festive Road, but travels into stories, or history, when he puts on fancy dress from a magic costume shop in a back lane. (The series was in fact set in McKee’s own street, Festing Road in Putney, South London, and perhaps expressed his own desire to escape, which grounds the fantasy in observation and real feeling.) At the same time the Mr Benn books are about the joy of make-believe and the imagination, or the magic of reading. Going through the door in the

costume shop is a metaphor for opening a book. Every time we do so we become a different character entering another world. It is apt that Mr Benn always brings a tiny bit of magic home with him, as readers always carry something of the enchantment of a book with them after a story is ended.

Furthermore, these stories are on the side of gentleness – in *The Red Knight*, for example, when Mr Benn dons armour, he befriends the dragon he is meant to kill. When he goes on safari (in *Mr Benn and The Big Game Hunter*) he turns a hunter into an animal photographer. McKee’s resolutions are always compassionate.

Another supposedly adult character, King Rollo, is a child in a crown, as McKee has fun with the fact that most children are as important as royalty to their own families. Rollo engages with everyday children’s experiences (like learning to tie his shoelaces) while maintaining his regal status. He honours the importance to children of the minutiae of their own lives.

And one of his most popular books, *Not Now, Bernard*, is an enduring and unconventional classic about the importance of paying attention to children, which breaks the boundaries, as his work often does, of what is acceptable in picture books. It entertains children with its daring humour, and resonates for adults as they recognise their own distractions and inattentions and are, importantly, reminded of the need to listen to what children say.

David’s most famous creation is Elmer the Patchwork Elephant, and the score of books about him since 1989 add up to a celebration of difference. They show, as author SF Said has said, that “difference is not something to mock or to fear, but a source of richness”². Elmer, who is more exotic than grey elephants, feels he should be like them to fit in, but discovers this makes him lose his individuality and specialness. The Elmer stories often pose problems that are resolved by kindness and cooperation. They are about friendship, tolerance, outsiders, community and looking after nature and each other – again ideas that we need to espouse now.

All of these thoughts fail to acknowledge David’s visual artistry – that he makes scenes out of squat figures and bright colours with stylised foliage reminiscent of the paintings of Le Douanier Rousseau so that the images

sing out of the pages of his books and small and big people alike are seduced by their vibrancy. His colours are influenced by Fauvism – Derain and Matisse, Elmer’s patchwork by Paul Klee, and we can see inspirations from Surrealism (green skies) to cartoons. David began his career as a cartoonist and is particularly an admirer of the French caricaturist André François, and the American artist Saul Steinberg. As he has said himself: ‘Picture books are a child’s first glimpse into the art world and in some of my books, the illustrations are actually more important than the story.’³

Among many other illustrators who confess to having been influenced by him are former Children’s Laureate Lauren Child and cartoonist Sarah McIntyre. Praise from his fellow artists has mentioned, among other qualities, his ‘exquisite design’, his ‘playing with perspective’, ‘his use of pattern and flat colour’ and his ‘skill that takes years to get right’. He is a picturebook-maker who combines wide and lasting allure with daring, depth, originality, craft, wit and important things to say. And McKee has, as Children’s Laureate Cressida Cowell has said, ‘a pitch-perfect understanding of why the best picture-books work’⁴.

McKee has inspired a generation of picturebook makers, and made a generation of children laugh, love art, love stories and love each other better.

Nicolette Jones

¹ David McKee quoted in Bookseller article September 24, 2020 by Mark Chandler

² S F Said speaking in video tribute to David McKee, winner of the Booktrust Lifetime Achievement Award <https://www.facebook.com/booktrust/videos/350066579527748>

³ David McKee quoted here <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/news/news-2020/elmer-and-mr-benn-creator-david-mckee-wins-booktrusts-lifetime-achievement-award/>

⁴ All quotes in this paragraph from the video tribute to David McKee, winner of the Booktrust Lifetime Achievement Award <https://www.facebook.com/booktrust/videos/350066579527748>: from Lauren Child, Sarah McIntyre, Chris Riddell and Ken Wilson-Max. And the final sentence from Cressida Cowell.

David McKee Interview 1

‘The shock is hard to get over!’ *Elmer* creator David McKee on winning BookTrust’s Lifetime Achievement Award and his incredible career

Here, he tells Emily Drabble how he created his classic books – from *Elmer* to *Not Now, Bernard* and *Mr Benn* – and explores the roots and inspirations of an incredible career spanning over 60 years.

Did you want to be an illustrator when you were growing up?

I was born in 1935 in Devon, and honestly didn’t even know jobs like being an illustrator existed! I mean, I drew a lot, and I was encouraged to draw – I think probably to keep me quiet. My mother would give me paper and that was probably to stop me drawing on the walls! I was usually top in art at school, but that was not what one did. It wasn’t a proper job. I think I was expected to go and work with my father. After the war, he repaired farm machines and later he started selling them.

So tell us about your road to becoming the illustrator we know and love?

One day at grammar school, one of my masters asked us all what we’d do the following year. I said I was going to work with my father. And it was at that point that I thought about it for the first time – I’d just accepted it before. I realised my father had two weeks of holiday a year and he was working 48-hour weeks. And I realised the only thing I liked about school was the holidays and that I was on three months of holiday a year!

The only way I could keep that three months, I thought, was to stay at school, and the only way to stay at school was to be a teacher, and the only thing I could possibly think of teaching was art, because I was alright at that. And luckily the teacher advised me to go to art college first, not straight to teacher training college. So I went to Plymouth College of Art. Then I thought, ‘What’s all this business of three months off? I want the whole year for me, thank you very much!’

I did go to an arts specialist teacher training college after my degree in London, but I realised I didn’t want to teach. However, a teacher sounded quite respectable for my mother to say I was going to be. She died at 95, and I think she was still waiting for me to get a proper job! In England, I think if you said you were going to be an artist,

that wasn’t acceptable to most families – and that’s probably still the case now

What were your favourite books as a boy?

Winnie the Pooh and *Treasure Island*; these were books that were read to me, and lots of people told us stories.

How did you actually get your first book published?

I realised while I was at college that to sell paintings and earn a living – enough to eat – was going to be difficult. I was going to have to find things to bring in money. There was a student ahead of me at Plymouth Art College called Roland Fiddy and I’d admired his ordinary drawings at college and later I noticed he was doing cartoons. I thought maybe I could do that too.

So I set about drawing what I thought were humorous drawings. I’d draw ten cartoons and send them with a stamped addressed envelope. Usually they’d send them all back in the other envelope but sometimes they would keep one, and later you’d get a cheque – they paid in guineas, it was a professional kind of fee. This would be in the 1950s when I was still at college and by the time I left college I could just about keep myself by drawing cartoons.

I became interested in certain cartoonists who were more than ‘joke men’ but artists. There were two in particular: one was Saul Steinberg in America and the other was André François in France. Interestingly, they were both Romanian by background. And they affected all my generation – the influence was very strong. I discovered a book by André François called *Crocodile Tears* – it was in French and English and a very good book. I used to tell stories to friends at college and I thought, ‘I can do this’.

So I made my first book *Two Can Toucan* in exactly the same way as I would do with the cartoons. I drew it up and sent it off. When the book came back from publishers it might have a comment saying something like, ‘All that colour is too expensive’, so I’d do it in a different way. The first books were redrawn several times and sent off several times – I did it all by post. Then I had *Two Can Toucan* accepted by Abelard-Schuman – this was a branch of an American publishing company that Klaus Flugge headed up in London.

The first version of the book, because there are now

two, was with hand-separated colours, so that meant making multiple drawings painted in black with a brush, a separate drawing for each colour. But that's the basis of lithography, and was fine, I'd learnt that at college. I had an offer of either a flat fee or a royalty, and because I believed the book was going to be there more permanently than a newspaper I decided on the royalty and that I would make money in the end. So it was a £75 fee with royalties or an outright sell for £150. I made the right choice, I think! After *Two Can Toucan*, I was off!

What happened next?

While I was working on that first book *Two Can Toucan*, I also made one called *Bronto's Wings*, so that was my second book. All through the 60's I wrote a lot of children's books, but did a lot of humorous illustrations too. I drew for the TES every week and regularly for *Punch* and all that was quite important to me.

Once the books had started, I continued with them. I liked that they had a kind of permanence – one of Klaus Flugge's big things is keeping certain titles in print, and that has been fantastic. A lot of publishers don't do that because it's quite expensive. But I think when teachers are using your books, the books need to be kept in print for them. The world would be a much poorer place without Klaus Flugge, that's for sure.

Then in 1969, the BBC asked if I would be interested in making a *Watch With Mother* series, and that's how I started to make *Mr Benn*, so then for a while films were the most important thing for me.

What was it like to make children's books at that time in the 1960s?

There were quite a few small publishers and one of the things which was important was they all loved books. I was asked once in a conference in Mexico what I demanded of my publisher. The thing that I wanted is that he or she would love books. Of course, with Klaus Flugge as my publisher that was very much realised – not many people love books like he did and does. He's a great guy as well!

It was an exciting time to be making picture books. First of all, there was the sudden change in printing techniques – suddenly you could do full colour, it was separated and there were these really colourful books. I think I was lucky to be there at the time. I don't think I could make it now if I was starting out!

Parents hadn't seen the kind of books that were coming from John Burningham, Brian Wildsmith and Michael Foreman. Parents were buying children's books for

themselves – because they hadn't seen picture books, they were open to them. It was that visual period with Biba and all the rest of it. Now the bookshelves are full – if you're doing something, it better merit its place on the bookshelf! Now parents have seen the books, are used to them and a bit blasé.

In the swinging 60s, I was a young parent and I had three young children so I wasn't out and about that much! But thinking about it afterwards, I suppose I was involved – I was doing lots of advertising and actually was contributing images which were part of the 60s, and the books of course.

Did you write your books for your own children?

No. It's always been for me really, I'm a very selfish chap! But they were involved, in that I would tell them the stories, and we always had lots of children's books in the house. And they influenced me probably by their drawings, and especially by their attitude to reading a book.

I'd have a book flat on the floor and I'd be reading it from the normal position and I'd have one child looking from one side, one from the other and the other one sitting in front of me reading it upside down. I realised they read images upside down perfectly well, and that was one of the influences for me. And there were many others – for example, Medieval war scenes which have inspired my perspective 'mistakes' (as people tell me).

How important are the adult readers of your books, who read the book to the child?

The picture book is the one book that is shared by an adult and a child, so you've got a double audience. Why not work for both audiences? I like it when a book works for an adult as well as for a child. Adults have to read them every night so you don't want them getting bored.

When I made the films for the BBC, the series was titled *Watch With Mother*. The title was later dropped as I suppose it was too sexist, but it was a nice title in a way because you were conscious of the 'with' – the double audience.

It was also nice because they repeated the series, and that repetition is what a child likes – there's the need to read the same book over and over. I think part of that is security, they know the story and can go through dangerous waters but they're going to get out the other end because they've heard the book before. Certainly I've always been very aware of my adult audience and the books are partly made for them.

Do the ideas come to you as the story or as the look and illustration?

It's one or the other. With *Elmer*, it was the image of Elmer first, then the name, then the story. But other books, like *Not Now, Bernard*, come as the story and the image you work out later.

Tell us how you make your books!

I may make a very vague storyboard, with small pictures to look at how it would work out. I'm working on an *Elmer* book now and I've drawn all the book and now I'm going through and painting it. I'll have to go through again to correct it, and there's always a chance at the end that I'll reject all of it and say no. That's happened to me – it's a living kind of thing. In that way, it's a bit like a painting – work a bit here and a bit there.

Where do you work?

Oh, anywhere. Absolutely anywhere. I have an area which is allocated at the moment where I am in France. It happens and you just work. If you're on a plane, that's where you work.

Do you keep a sketchbook or notebook where you jot down your ideas and do sketches?

No. I used to carry a sketchbook all the time but I don't do that so much now. Just lifestyle changes – and I'm not so selfish with what I'm doing.

Are there germs of books in your notebooks that you haven't created yet?

Yes! I've got written stories, good stories I think, that I'll never make into books. That used to worry me at one time, that I'd have a book that I'd be working on and I'd die before it could be finished. And then one day I suddenly realised that no matter what I did, as soon as a story was done, there was another one anyway so it didn't really matter

Do your characters come alive to you? Do you talk to them? Does Elmer whisper in your ear at night and tell you to write more books about him?

He doesn't come at night, but yes! It is the case of knowing the characters and revisiting them and wondering what they're up to at the moment. I suppose I've never analysed the process really, and the nice thing about stories is that you've got that start and then you're carried with it. You want to know what happens.

At the beginning it's like singing blues. You start singing. You don't know where the end is, but at a certain point you know where it's all going. It's like jazz. And then you're fine – you can do what you like because you know where the end is.

What does it feel like to finish a book?

It feels like, 'Oh, thank God for that!' Usually there's another one waiting, or somebody saying, 'What's the next one?'

So you're 85 but you're still very much working on new books all the time?

That's what you do – you can't stop. Nowadays I work more slowly I suppose. If I get five hours of work done that's fantastic, but there are obligations to go for walks, or some bread, which you don't think about when you're younger. And also there are things like arthritis which we older illustrators seem to get that slow you down. I sleep more – older people are supposed to sleep less, but I sleep more. When I was doing the Mr Benn films – the books, the magazines, the cartoons – I was sleeping four hours a night! And all the rest was work. Now I quite like eight hours in bed. I'm happy to take a bit extra and a siesta, which I like!

You don't have the internet at home – is that a specific way of life?

I've stayed in the past, really, doing everything by post. I saw all the trouble that everybody else was getting with it and I thought, 'I don't really need this, I don't even wear a watch'.

Which of your characters do you think most resembles you?

Well, they all do. I think it's all self-portraiture in a way. When I look at things, and when I realise what names I use for certain images, I realise how much comes out of the past.

Who are your biggest inspirations?

Well, I think I've been influenced by everyone actually – mostly painters, or Steinberg and François, who I talked about earlier in the graphics side. From the painters just everybody, including Medieval war painting which affected the perspective in my books, and Prussian miniatures, where perspective works differently and I've used a bit in different illustrations.

I was very influenced by Paul Klee; the drawing as well, the fine line that bites, and influenced by his thinking a bit, his attitude to drawing: he said drawing is taking a line for a walk. Even the art teacher at my primary school who taught us how to lay a wash, and to paint the big areas first because they are the most boring! I think they all influenced me. Other students influenced me, and it's probably pretty visible the people who influenced me. I admire the work of other illustrators that I know so much.

Your books have been used to deliver philosophical concepts to children and to help teach them about inclusion, prejudice and violence and peace – especially *Tusk Tusk* and *Elmer*. Is this your intention when writing them?

It's a mix. For the obvious one *Tusk Tusk* – that's what it's about. The world is full of differences and we have to accept all differences. How boring it would be if we were all the same!

My book *The Conquerors* came about because of the Iraq war, but it was a story I wrote when I was in college in the 1950s! When people ask, 'How long does a book take?' I think of that one. It took over 50 years! When I was in college it was not long after the Second World War, so the older students and the younger members of staff had been released recently from the forces. And one of them, a young assistant at the college, had gone through Italy with the army – I suppose you could say they were releasing Italy. All he could think about was getting back to Italy, and how much he loved it. That was the basis of *The Conquerors*, because it's the culture that in the end wins. And so there have to be other ways to deal with things than war.

Some people might say you should keep deep themes and dark subtexts such as the pointlessness of war out of children's books. How do you answer?

Well, there's plenty of space for both, I should have thought. It's up to parents to select the books for their child.

How important are children's books to guide the world to be a better place?

I don't think there's much chance of that! Books can change people's attitudes, but you can see what's going on at the moment – it feels like the end of mankind!

I do think children's books can contribute and are very important. It's the children's books which create the fans for adults' books. Without the children's books, the adults' books wouldn't have any public. Also, children's books are a way to access the art world, and in some of my books the illustrations are more important than the story.

How does it feel when people tell you they have been inspired in their career choices by your work?

Well, that's the bit that's quite frightening because you are influencing them! Some young guy was telling me how much the Mr Benn films influenced him one time, and I thought to myself, 'How can people possibly say the films with excess violence and sex don't influence

children if an innocent film like *Mr Benn* can!' You do have to be wary about what you're giving children.

***Not Now, Bernard* is iconic – but is the monster Bernard, or did the monster eat Bernard? More people think the former, but what do you say?**

I don't definitely say either way. Lots of children have written to me to say, 'The monster is Bernard, isn't he?' They understand that we all have a monster inside us that can eat us up. You see it with road rage when quite normal people shout, hit the horn and so on – the monster is eating them. And that has to have a control!

If you just ignore your children the risk is that the monster will eat them up. Now it's the opposite with computers and video games, of course – you might see a parent saying, 'Come and have dinner, it's time for bed', and the child might easily say, 'Not now, Mother!'

Published on: 24 September 2020

Author: Emily Drabble

BookTrust

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/news-and-features/features/2020/september/the-shock-is-hard-to-get-over-elmer-creator-david-mckee-on-winning-booktrusts-life-time-achievement-award-and-his-incredible-career/>

David McKee Interview 2

'What I like doing is provoking discussion, especially for schools. There are subjects that can and should be talked about in stories.'

Clive Barnes talks to David McKee for Books for Keeps

Andersen Press is celebrating Elmer's 25th anniversary this year, but Elmer himself is much older. The first version was published by Dennis Dobson as long ago as 1968, and was one of my daughter Jenny's favourite books when she was a toddler in the early 1980s. Still, if Andersen is overlooking the book's longer history, it is perhaps justified. It was the redoubtable Klaus Flugge, Andersen's founder, who, when Dobson stopped publishing, insisted that Elmer should not die, and sent the resurrected patchwork elephant out into the world in brilliant new colours to become one of picturebooks' most readily recognisable characters. It's not a decision that Klaus can ever have regretted, for, at a quick count, there are over thirty Elmer titles in the Andersen catalogue, including joke, pop up and colouring books. His stories are translated into over twenty languages, and there's a new story, *Elmer and the Monster*, out this year. David McKee says that, having lived with Elmer for so long, he now feels that all he is doing is setting down the stories that Elmer continues to share with him. For some illustrators David's Elmer oeuvre might be enough in itself. But since he began in children's books he has had over a hundred books published where he is credited as writer and illustrator, and has been the illustrator for as many books written by other authors. Along the way, he has also written the Mr Benn TV scripts and founded King Rollo Films, which made many TV films for younger children, including another iconic character, Spot the Dog. He says, 'I did a lot of stuff. I keep saying to young people, do as much as you can when you're young. Because as you get older you get so many obligations. Life generally fills up and it's harder to work 24 hours a day.' It was his skill at drawing that first took him into children's illustration. Like Quentin Blake, he began young by sending cartoons to newspapers and, by the time he left art college, found that he could support himself simply by doing that. He made an impact in the children's book world with his third and fourth books, *Mr Benn*, *Red Knight* (1967) and *Elmer, The Story of a Patchwork Elephant* (1968). His work usually combines humorous and characterful drawing with a bold use of colour. The way that David

describes the appearance of Elmer, in which a painting in the style of Paul Klee became somehow superimposed on the drawing of an elephant, suggests exactly the confluence of his two interests in paint and drawing. And, if you turn to the original Mr Benn, pages of pen and ink drawing alternate with richly coloured double spreads. If you look at the recent Elmer books, the sky will change from yellow to green to pink to blue. If it's just green trees and blue skies, it looks so damn boring. Between the two incarnations of Elmer, there was one more Elmer and four more Mr Benn books for Dobson; the appearance of two more book characters, Melric the Magician and King Rollo; the writing and drawing of thirteen Mr. Benn TV episodes; the making of a series of films for the Save the Children Fund; the launch of King Rollo Films (still in production today); and the appearance of a number of notable individual picture books. It was no surprise then, that when Elmer reappeared he looked different. His story was pared down, demonstrating how picture book storytelling had evolved in twenty years, and his jungle surroundings were changed utterly, influenced by the intense colours and strange plants that had begun to appear in David's other picture books.

The colours, David says, are influenced by his admiration for the Fauves, a group of early twentieth century French artists, including Derain and Matisse, who used strong contrasting non naturalist pure colours in their paintings. Here, although David admits he possibly favours certain colours and contrasts – 'I notice there's often a citrus green and a pink, which are strangely discordant' – there is no need for consistency. 'If you look at the recent Elmer books, the sky will change from yellow to green to pink to blue. If it's just green trees and blue skies, it looks so damn boring. It's not a real world. It's a picture book world. And I've got the right to have blue trees or any other trees that I want.' To a child of the sixties, the strange shapes of McKee trees, like his intense colour contrasts, bring back memories of psychedelic art posters, but, for David, the influences are both nearer to home and further away: the light and flora of the South of France, and Henri Rousseau's jungle. The McKee trees became such a feature of his books that David remembers he was invited to take part in a project with a London school in recreating them on the pillars under the Westway flyover.

David is interested in other non-naturalistic ways of seeing and telling: 'Picture making is not like photography.' The Mr Benn books introduced a playing with perspective, in which it was possible, for instance, to see both sides of Festive Street, where Mr Benn lives. This has now become characteristic of his work. Like the device of being able to see inside a house and outside simultaneously, this storytelling manipulation is influenced by medieval painting and Persian miniatures but it also derives from David reading picture books with his three children, with the book on the floor, and a child on each of its other three edges but everyone still being able to follow what was going on.

What could be more surreal than a patchwork elephant?

The Surrealists seem to be hovering somewhere about his individual picture books, particularly in the 1980s, when his stories are sometimes mysterious and their endings occasionally sardonic. His only work to explicitly acknowledge them is *I Hate My Teddy Bear* (1982), where two children and their teddies play in a world of largely unexplained events and characters. Yet Mr Benn himself surely owes something to Magritte; and, even if we have got rather used to Elmer, what could be more surreal than a patchwork elephant? If many twentieth century artists were seeking to move away from representational art to look at the world anew through the eyes of the primitive, the naïve or the child, and acknowledge, through thinkers like Freud, the role of the unconscious and fantasy, then perhaps David brings something of that artistic sensibility back to children themselves.

David's pictorial talent is in the service of a gift for character and narrative. Of Elmer, Mr Benn, King Rollo and Melric, all of which have their own series of books, David says, 'They say all art is self-portraiture and I think it's me probably just speaking through them. They all have something that is constant about them, in the way that they are.' And I can see what he means, although neither of us can put our finger on it. I suggest they are all 'quietly adventurous'. Not quite right but perhaps it says something of their appeal to children. His characters are vulnerable, curious, and, if not actually seeking adventure, happy to take it on when it appears.

David says he is aware of his child audience when he is writing, 'But not very... It's still basically for me.' Many of his stories, even in the character driven books, take the shape of a fable, offer a message to the reader, and imply a wide audience that could be adults or children: 'When I was young it was wartime and books were not so much around, but my favourite stories were the fables and the

parables in the Bible, because they meant something. My parents were very moral people and I'm probably the same. I'm also conscious that a picturebook is the one book that is shared by adult and child and I have to work with that.'

The responses of some adults to David's books have occasionally been fiercely critical. Of these controversial books, *Not Now, Bernard* (1980), recently reborn as a play at the Unicorn Theatre, is perhaps the most celebrated. Here Bernard figures so little in his parents' concerns that, when he is eaten by a monster in the garden, they scarcely notice. It was one of three major picture books of the time that commented on possible shortcomings in parent and child relationships, preceded by John Burningham's *Come Away from the Water, Shirley* (1977), and followed by Anthony Browne's *Gorilla* (1983), and some adults took rather too much to heart the suggestion of a child-eating monster lurking in the garden. David says that in letters to him, children seem to realise that 'the monster is Bernard really, isn't he?' and that some children take it as their favourite book. Monsters figure quite frequently in David's books: 'We've all got monsters in us and a lot of our time is spent in subduing that.'

David is concerned about adult reactions to some of his books, particularly when he feels that what he has intended has been misunderstood. A situation that he felt had happened recently when *Denver* (2010), a book about a small town's envy of a rich man stirred up by a mysterious stranger, was described by Polly Toynbee in *The Guardian* as 'Ayn Rand for baby beginners, trickle-down economics for trustafarian toddlers, a nursery Hayek for every little Conservative.' For David it was actually about how other aspects of life other than money make life worth living and a concern with merely material things brings only discontent and unhappiness.

It could be said that fables have always been open to contrary interpretations, and the feeling that he might be misunderstood has never stopped David from trying to make a point. Throughout his career, he has returned to the subject of conflict and the futility of war, a preoccupation that he puts down to the losses of the Second World War he witnessed as a child in Plymouth. In 1972 there was *Six Men*, a brilliant parable, recently reissued, entirely in black and white line drawing, incidentally demonstrating perfectly what David can achieve with the minimum of resources. In 1978 there was *Tusk Tusk* in which the trunks of warring black elephants and white elephants mutate into guns and fists. In 1985 there was *Two Monsters* in which monsters living on opposite

sides of a mountain reduce it to rubble in their rage; and in 2005, written in a swift response to the Iraq War, *The Conquerors*, a tale of how the victims overcome military might through cultural resilience rather than violence. As David points out, even the Elmer books contain messages about, for instance, individuality and tolerance. 'What I like doing is provoking discussion, especially for schools. There are subjects that can and should be talked about in stories.'

David's body of work offers contradictions. The creator of two of Britain's best loved characters for children, Mr Benn and Elmer, he has also created books that have sharply divided opinions. Prolific and energetic, greatly gifted as an illustrator and a writer for children, producing work of high quality for fifty years, and commercially successful, he has perhaps had less critical recognition than he should have done. But his work is being continually rediscovered and it must have been satisfying to him that it was Tate Publishing that decided to reissue *Mr Benn*, *Red Knight* (2011) and *Big-Top Benn* (2010) in their original format. Perhaps more telling, though, considering McKee's own argument in *The Conquerors*, is the engraved paving slab outside No 54 Festig Street in Putney, paid for by the residents, marking where David was living in the 1960s. This was the house that, recreated in the books, was next door to Mr Benn's on Festive Street; and the paving stone is surely a sign of how firmly embedded David's books and characters are in the British cultural consciousness.

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<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/207/childrens-books/articles/authorgraph/authorgraph-number-207-david-mckee>



David McKee

Awards

1987	<i>Two Monsters</i>	Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis
1997	<i>Elmer and Wilbur</i>	International Reading Association Children’s Choice
1999	<i>Elmer Takes Off</i>	International Reading Association Children’s Choice

Honours

2006	Hans Christian Andersen Nominee IBBY UK
2020	British Book Awards Illustrator of the Year
2020	BookTrust Lifetime Achievement Award

Adaptations

1971 – 1972	Mr Benn animated television series, BBC Scripts by McKee Narrated by Ray Brooks. Music by Duncan Lamont. Production Company King Rollo Films
1980	King Rollo animated television series BBC Narrated by Ray Brooks. Music by Duncan Lamont Production Company King Rollo Films
2014	Not Now Bernard live stage show Directed by Ellen McDougall. A Unicorn Production
2018	Not Now, Bernard live stage show Created and directed by Sarah Argent. A Unicorn Production
2019	Elmer the Patchwork Elephant Show – puppet performance. Adapted for the stage by Suzanne Miller Songs by Allison Leyton-Brow Selladoor Productions

Exhibitions

2017	50 years of Mr Benn	The Illustration Cupboard
2019 - 2020	Elmer and Friends : The Colourful World of David McKee	Seven Stories
Celebrations		
Elmer Day	Started in 2016, Elmer day is a national celebration of the popular children’s character, Elmer the Patchwork Elephant.	https://www.elmer.co.uk/elmer-day/

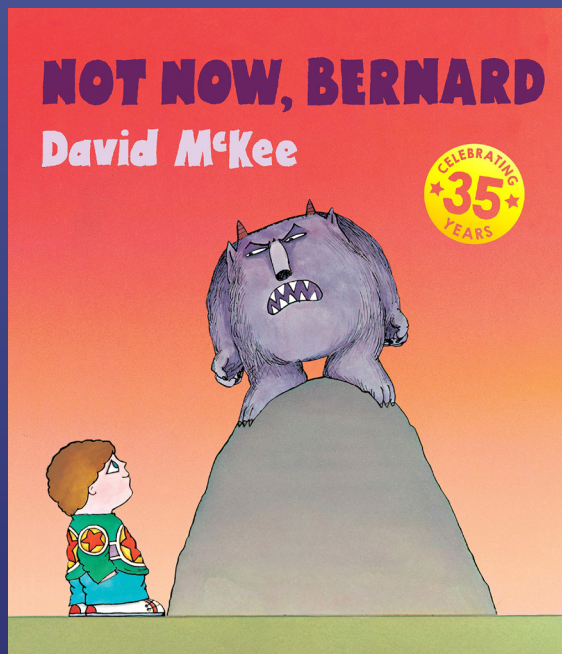
Five titles for the consideration of the Jury

<i>Not Now, Bernard</i>	Andersen Press
<i>Elmer</i>	Andersen Press
<i>Mr Benn: Red Knight</i>	Andersen Press
<i>The Conquerors</i>	Andersen Press
<i>Tusk Tusk</i>	Andersen Press

Five more titles reflecting David’s work

<i>Toucan Toucan</i>	Andersen Press
<i>I hate my teddybear</i>	Andersen Press
<i>Two Monsters</i>	Andersen Press
<i>The Snow Woman</i>	Andersen Press
<i>Denver</i>	Andersen Press





Not now, Bernard... I'm on my *Not now, Bernard...* I'm on my iPhone: classic children's text reissued for digital era

Author David McKee reveals why, 40 years on, his cautionary tale of the perils of ignoring children is still relevant

For the past 40 years it has been a warning to parents about the monstrous consequences of ignoring their children. Now new illustrations of the classic picture book *Not Now, Bernard* have been created to better reflect the daily life of families in the age of smartphones and tablets.

They show the protagonist Bernard's parents paying more attention to their digital devices than their son – even when he is eaten and replaced by a raucous purple monster from the garden.

The publishers hope the new version, which is being released on 4 June to celebrate the book's 40th anniversary, will appeal to all those parents spending the lockdown shouting "not now!" at their kids as they try to work from home.

"I know there are more reasons now – because there are more electronic things – that people say 'not now'," said the author and illustrator David McKee, 85. "It's a bit sad... But we humans continue to make the same mistakes."

He thinks listening to children is one of the most important things a parent can do – and during the lockdown, when children are isolated from their teachers and

friends, it is even more important. "If they're good parents, they've got to make sure during this time that they do listen, that they do say: 'Yes, what is it?'"

At the very least, he says parents should take the time to explain to their child why they are unavailable, if they are busy. One of the great jokes of the book is that neither Bernard nor the monster understand why their interruptions are constantly met with indifference from Bernard's parents. "At the end, the monster doesn't know how to handle the situation, because they're so insistent [on ignoring him]."

McKee, who also wrote and illustrated the childhood classics *Elmer the Patchwork Elephant* and *Mr Benn*, reveals he came up with the idea for *Not Now, Bernard* while having a bath. "The phrase went through my mind and I just lay there with my skin all wrinkling, as it does, and listened to the story being told to me, in my head."

The book also highlights how children feel when they are provided with material things, like toys and food, but not love and attention: "Picture books are the one type of book which is shared by adults and children. I've seen a few adults who didn't like it, because it made them feel guilty."

Donna Ferguson

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/10/not-now-bernard-im-on-my-iphone-classic-childrens-text-re-issued-for-digital-era>

Not Now Bernard

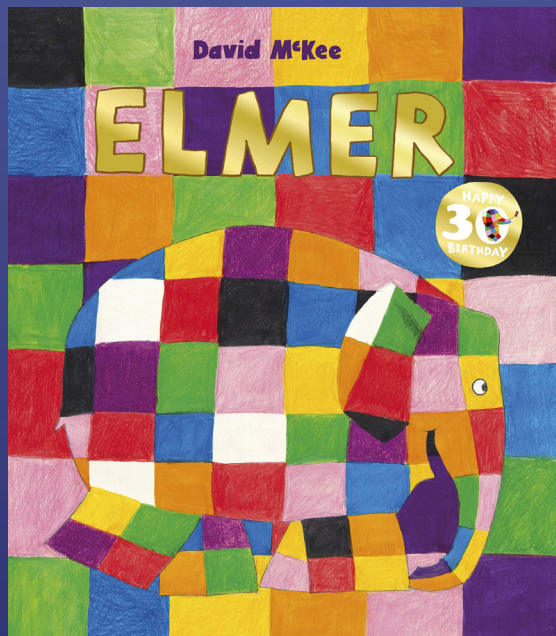
Besides the droll, deadpan humour and the bitter logic in *Not Now Bernard*, David McKee shows compassion for children who feel as bored and lonely as Bernard. He makes a little dig at self-absorbed parents and suggests that in neglecting their children, they are the real monsters.

Bernard's parents are too busy to talk to, listen to, or even look at, their son. When he tries to tell them there is a monster in the garden, their reaction is the same. After the purple monster has eaten Bernard, his mother goes through the motions of caring for the monster in his place, not noticing that her son has vanished. She puts his dinner in front of the television but does not stay to watch him eat it, she takes his milk to his bedroom without looking at him, and switches the light off without saying goodnight. When he roars at Mum and bites Dad's foot, the parents give their standard response.



Their story can be seen as a warning for parents who persistently ignore their children or never spend any time with them. Children, however, enjoy being part of a secret that adults are not privy to, and watching adults get their comeuppance. They will recognise the power balance portrayed in the book from both perspectives. Both adults and children will enjoy the images of the monster trying to fit into Bernard's world, pouring food into his mouth from a plate, and watching TV from above the set. The repeated refrain of "Not Now Bernard!" draws children into the story, and there's plenty for older readers to talk about.

Geraldine Brennan, in *1001 Children's Books You Must Read Before You Grow Up*, Ed. Julia Eccleshare, Quintessence, London 2009, p.317.



Elmer

Elmer the elephant is a colorful character. His heady optimism and unbridled sense of humor keep the entire community in a cheery mood. And Elmer's unusual multi-colored checkerboard hide is the wonder of all the other elephants, who are characteristically gray. In spite of his sunny disposition, Elmer begins to feel conspicuous. He starts to believe the others are laughing at him because of his crazy patchwork coat. When Elmer discovers a bush in the jungle with elephant-colored berries, he shakes the bush and rolls in a berry mash until he is as gray as the others. Now no one seems to notice him; for a time he enjoys his anonymity, but after a while he begins to realize just how quiet and dull things are when he's not around. Finally the practical joker in Elmer emerges, and he soon has the whole gang laughing again. McKee's gentle humor and love of irony are in full force in this celebration of individuality and laughter. Well-designed spreads are washed with stunning color and the use of textured, painted and airbrushed surfaces contributes to the powerful visual impression. Ages 4-7. (Sept.)

Reviewed on: 09/15/1989

Release date: 09/01/1989

Genre: Children's

<https://www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-688-09171-2>

Somewhere in a jungle, there is a herd of elephants. There are old elephants, young elephants, tall ones, short ones, fat ones, and thin ones. They are all happy, and they are all grey in color, except for Elmer. Elmer is a patchwork elephant whose body is covered with bright and cheerful reds, yellows, greens, oranges and other colors. Thanks to him, the rest of the elephants are happy because Elmer comes up with games and jokes to amuse them.

Unfortunately, Elmer himself is not happy. He wishes he were grey like the other elephants because he thinks that they are laughing at him. Eager to try to fix his problem, Elmer goes off into the jungle and he walks a long way until he finds a tree that is covered with grey berries. Elmer shakes the tree until the berries fall down, and then he rolls on the fruit until he is grey all over, from the tip of his trunk to the tip of his tail. Elmer is delighted that he now looks like "any other elephant." Surely, he will be happy now.

In this much loved picture book we meet an elephant who learns that being different is not a bad thing after all. He discovers that he has a lot to offer, patchwork colors and all. The story reminds readers of all ages that it is important to be true to yourself, and that real happiness may be quite closer than you think; if you open your eyes and look around you may even find it.

With wonderfully colorful illustrations and a loveable main character, this is a picture book that has been delighting children and their families since the book first came out in 1968.

Review written by Marya Jansen-Gruber

Through the Looking Glass Children's Books Reviews

<http://lookingglassreview.com/books/elmer>

Mr Benn at 50: The magic and morality of an everyman

Why are kids and adults alike still drawn to the adventures of Mr Benn?

Mr Benn popped into existence. The mild-mannered businessman with a penchant for dressing up and going on adventures first appeared in a book published in 1967 that a couple of years later was adapted into a television series, which turned him into an icon.

The image of smart, besuited Benn with his winsome smile instantly evokes an age past, or perhaps one that never existed, where Englishmen wore bowler hats.

...Although only 13 episodes were made in the early 1970s (another, where Benn becomes a Gladiator, was made in 2005) they were repeated twice a year for 21 years and he has become a cult figure among Generation X-ers, influencing the idea of Britishness.

"I find it fascinating that he's never gone away," McKee says. "In my mind, he had to represent everybody. I tried to make him as neutral as possible but respectable. I didn't want to define what he did but I hoped that anybody could associate with him."

By the late-1960s the BBC had already used a couple of McKee's books in Jackanory-style programmes and they asked if he would be interested in contributing a story for Watch with Mother.

"I had young children at that point so I knew the series, I was the mother they watched with," McKee recalls. "I showed Mr Benn to the BBC lady – she was very nice

– and she said that's great, this could be just the thing. It was all very casual.

Each episode of Mr Benn would find the businessman ambling to his local costume shop. After changing into fancy dress, be it a knight, clown, cowboy, spaceman or pirate, a door would appear that wasn't there before and walking through it transported Mr Benn into that world. His adventures generally involved bit of problem-solving and helping others.

Ray Brooks, who delivered the cosy voiceover on Mr Benn, says the secret of his success is straight-forward: "Grandmas come up to me and say their grandchildren are fed up with today's cartoons but they love the simplicity of Mr Benn, the fact that he's very moral, always sorting out people's problems – including dragons."

Like Mr Benn, David McKee thinks we can all have our own adventure. All stories offer escapism.

August 21, 2017 Big Issue

By Steven MacKenzie ©

<https://www.bigissue.com/interviews/mr-benn-50-magic-and-morality-of-everyman/>

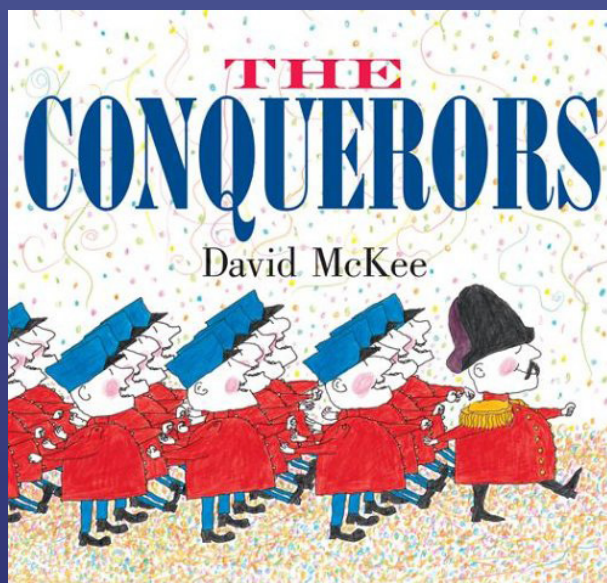
Praise for Mr Benn: Red Knight:

"The re-release of this 1967 series opener introduces an adult picture-book hero who combines a childlike disposition with a taste for costumes, a belief in the fantastic, and terrific problem-solving skills. The Brit in a bowler hat needs something unusual to wear to a fancy dress party. He finds a promising little shop that delivers in spades once he dons a red suit of knight's armor. Transported from the fitting room into a story in which a poor dragon has been ousted from the village by the appearance of a match salesman, Mr. Benn acts as an intermediary and gets the dragon a better job as the king's fire-lighter. Through another door and back in the dressing room, he decides he doesn't need to go to the party after all, but promises to come back to the shop for more adventures. McKee's iconic 1960's artwork alternates pen-and-ink line drawings with richly colored, multilayered tone-on-tone illustrations. The conversational narrative serves as a lovely counterpoint to the fantastical story; it's no surprise that the tales have been animated for British television."

School Library Journal

<https://www.booktopia.com.au/mr-benn-red-knight-david-mckee/book/9781854379900.html>

Accessed 08/01/21



The Conquerors

In a naïve but thought-provoking episode, the residents of a small country give an invading general and his armies such a warm welcome that the soldiers are all soon blending in, enjoying the local food, singing the local songs, even helping with chores. Furious, the general sends that army home, and marches in another one—and not only are the results the same, but when he at last returns home, his own previously conformist people are playing new games, singing new songs, and eating different food. So who conquered whom? Illustrated with big, simple, colorful scenes featuring plenty of smiling faces, and troops in rather Gallic uniforms, this brief tale makes a worthy new entry in the “waging peace” genre. (Picture book. 6-8)

Kirkus Review

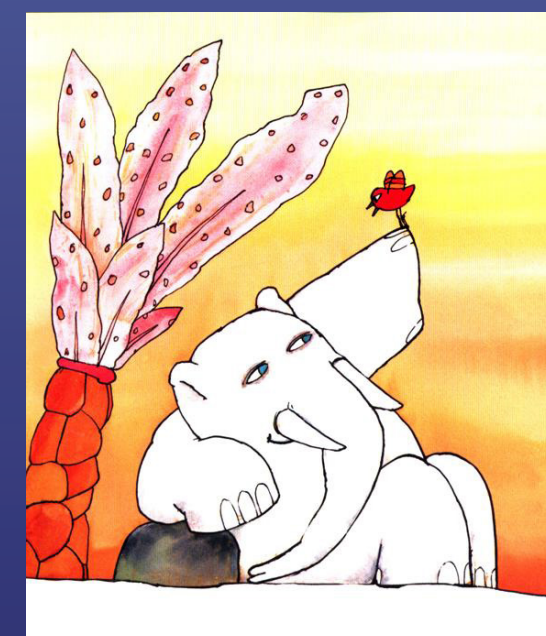
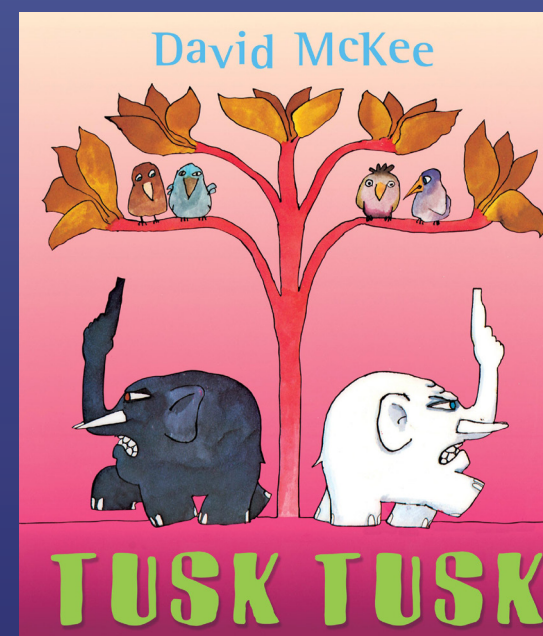
Review Posted Online: June 24, 2010

Kirkus Reviews Issue: Dec. 15, 2004

....In **The Conquerors** and **Tusk Tusk**, David McKee takes a much gentler look at man’s apparent perennial need to invade and conquer his neighbours’ territories. McKee’s approach is a more typical, less direct Anglo-Saxon one than Greder’s, using humour and irony to tackle equally serious material. **The Conquerors** is a beautifully understated book that tells the tale of a small nation that, rather than engaging in war, prefers to devote its time to culture in the form of storytelling, singing songs and quietly celebrating its heritage. Its larger and aggressively expansionist neighbour, led by the stereotypical medal-strewn general, continually invades the nation but somehow never conquers it. The invading soldiers are greeted quietly, told stories and sung to; eventually they have such a good time that, before they know it, they themselves are being conquered with culture and charm. The book sends a profound message with effortless elegance.

.....

Children’s Picturebooks: the art of visual storytelling (2nd edition) by Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles, Laurence King Publishing, 978-1786275738, £29.99pbk. pp127 - 128



Tusk Tusk

Two bands of elephants, one black and one white, “loved all creatures, but they hated each other.” Each group keeps to its own side of the jungle, until a war breaks out between them, and the peace-loving elephants from both sides take cover in the jungle. After a bitter battle, all the elephants lay dead; no elephants are seen for many years. One day the descendants of the peace-lovers emerge: “They were grey.” The book ends on an ironic note as members of the new grey breed notice that they fall into two groups once again, each with differently shaped ears. The stylized renderings of the elephants and their environs make this straightforward book about prejudice easier to digest in an allegorical sense; the story becomes both accessible and illuminating. In clear, bold illustrations that celebrate shape and color, McKee incorporates several witty touches: the elephants’ trunks become weapons, the “darkest jungle” is portrayed as a giant maze. Although the book stands on its own merit, it might also offer an excellent point of departure for discussion between parent and child. Ages 5-10. (Mar.)

Publisher’s Weekly

www.publishersweekly.com/978-0-916291-28-0

Reviewed on: 01/01/1990

Release date: 01/01/1990

Review of Tusk Tusk by David McKee

Although McKee’s **Tusk Tusk** is a small picturebook that features apparently simple, sweet, stylized elephants set against a colourful jungle background, its themes are hatred, racism, war, violence, difference and outsiders. It is designed and marketed for a young audience, but McKee offers a no-holds-barred view of some of the worst aspects of humanity. The Eden-like existence of the elephants in a land bursting with gorgeous vegetation soon ends as the black elephants hate the white elephants and vice versa. Trunks turn into guns, and war and killing ensue until the environment is laid waste and the peace-loving elephants are left no choice but to hide in the depths of the forest. Decades later, as the land once more bursts into beautiful life, grey elephants appear, the progeny of their peace-loving forebears. The reader believes McKee will provide a happy ending after all, but the final sentence in the book is: ‘But recently the little ears and the big ears have been giving each other strange looks.’ McKee is not afraid to challenge children. He is better known for the gentler elephant series Elmer, but it is worth pointing out that even here the hero is multicoloured and multicultural.

Children’s Picturebooks: the art of visual storytelling (2nd edition) by Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles, Laurence King Publishing, 978-1786275738, £29.99pbk pp 127 - 128

David McKee : Bibliography (Each section is chronological)

Picture Books (author / illustrator) In chronological order		
Two Can Toucan	Abelard-Schuman	1965
Mr Benn: Red Knight	Dobson Books Ltd	1967
123456789 Benn	Dobson Books Ltd	1970
The Magician who lost his Magic	Andersen Press	1970
(reissued in 2013 as Melric the Magician Who Lost his Magic)		
Six Men	A&C Black	1972
The Magician and the Sorcerer	Abelard-Schuman Limited	1974
(reissued in 2013 as Melric and the Sorcerer)		
The Magician and the Petnapping	Houghton Mifflin	1976
(reissued in 2014 as Melric and the Petnapping)		
Tusk Tusk	Andersen Press	1978
Big Game Benn	Dobson Books Ltd	1979
King Rollo and the New Shoes	Andersen Press	1979
King Rollo and the Birthday	Andersen Press	1979
King Rollo and the Bread	Andersen Press	1979
Big-Top Benn	Dobson Books Ltd	1980
Not Now, Bernard	Andersen Press	1980
King Rollo and King Frank	Andersen Press	1981
I Hate My Teddy Bear	Andersen Press	1982
The Hill and the Rock	Andersen Press	1984
King Rollo and the Letter	Andersen Press	1984
Two Monsters	Andersen Press	1985
Two Admirals	Andersen Press	1985
Two Can Toucan	Andersen Press	1985
The Sad Story of Veronica Who Played the Violin	Red Fox	1987
Snow Woman	Red Fox	1987
Who's a Clever Baby Then?	Red Fox	1988
Elmer	Andersen Press	1989
The Monster and the Teddy Bear	Andersen Press	1989
King Rollo and Santa's Beard	Andersen Press	1990
King Rollo's Autumn	Andersen Press	1990
King Rollo's Spring	Andersen Press	1990
King Rollo's Summer	Andersen Press	1990
Elmer Again	Andersen Press	1991

David McKee : Bibliography (Each section is chronological)

Zebra's Hiccups	Andersen Press	1991
Elmer on Stilts	Andersen Press	1993
The School Bus Comes At 8 O'clock	Red Fox	1993
Elmer and Wilbur	Andersen Press	1994
Isabel's Noisy Tummy	Andersen Press	1994
Elmer's Friends	Andersen Press	1994
Elmer's Colours	Andersen Press	1994
Elmer's Day	Andersen Press	1994
Elmer's Weather	Andersen Press	1994
Elmer in the Snow	Andersen Press	1995
Adventures of King Rollo	Andersen Press	1996
Charlotte's Piggy Bank	Andersen Press	1996
The Elmer Pop-Up Book	Andersen Press	1996
Prince Peter and the Teddy Bear	Andersen Press	1997
Elmer and the Wind	Andersen Press	1997
Elmer's Hide and Seek	Andersen Press	1998
Elmer Takes Off	Andersen Press	1998
Elmer's Weather (English – Urdu, English – Polish)	Milet Publishing	1998
Elmer's Friends (English – Urdu /Bengali / Polish / Somali / Spanish	Milet Pub	1998
Elmer's Day (English – Bengali / Somali / Polish / Spanish / Turkish)	Milet Pub	1998
Elmer's Colours (English – Bengali / Polish / Somali / Urdu)	Milet Pub	1998
Mary's Secret	Andersen Press	1999
Elmer and the Lost Teddy	Andersen Press	1999
Look! There's Elmer	Andersen Press	2000
Elmer and the Stranger	Andersen Press	2000
Elmer and the Kangaroo	Andersen Press	2000
King Rollo and the New Stockings	Andersen Press	2001
Mr Benn: Gladiator	Andersen Press	2001
Elmer's Concert	Andersen Press	2001
Elmer and Grandpa Eldo	Andersen Press	2001
Elmer and Butterfly	Andersen Press	2002
Elmer's New Friend	Andersen Press	2002
Elmer and the Hippos	Andersen Press	2003
Mystery of the Blue Arrows	Andersen Press	2003

David McKee : Bibliography (Each section is chronological)

Who is Mrs Green?	Andersen Press	2003
The Conquerors	Andersen Press	2004
Elmer and the Snake	Andersen Press	2004
Elmer and Rose	Andersen Press	2005
Three Monsters	Andersen Press	2005
Elmer and Aunt Zelda	Andersen Press	2006
Elmer and the Rainbow	Andersen Press	2007
Elmer's Opposites	Andersen Press	2007
Elmer's First Counting Book	Andersen Press	2007
Elmer and the Big Bird	Andersen Press	2008
Four Red Apples	Andersen Press	2008
Elmer's Special Day	Andersen Press	2009
Denver	Andersen Press	2010
Elmer and Papa Red	Andersen Press	2010
Elmer's Christmas	Andersen Press	2011
Elmer and Super El	Andersen Press	2011
Elmer, Rose and Super El	Andersen Press	2012
Melric the Magician Who Lost His Magic	Andersen Press	2012
Melric the Sorcerer	Andersen Press	2013
Elmer and the Whales	Andersen Press	2013
Elmer and the Monster	Andersen Press	2014
Elmer's Treasury	Andersen Press	2014
Melric and the Petnapping	Andersen Press	2014
Elmer's Band	Andersen Press	2015
Elmer's Parade	Andersen Press	2015
Elmer and the Flood	Andersen Press	2015
Melric and the Dragon	Andersen Press	2015
Elmer and the Race	Andersen Press	2016
Elmer's Little Library	Andersen Press	2016
Elmer's Touch and Feel World	Andersen Press	2016
Melric and the Crown	Andersen Press	2016
Elmer and the Tune	Andersen Press	2017
Elmer: Elephant Colours	Andersen Press	2017
Elmer: Guess Who?	Andersen Press	2017
Elmer: Hello, Animals!	Andersen Press	2017
Elmer: Hide and Seek!	Andersen Press	2017

David McKee : Bibliography (Each section is chronological)

Elmer's Walk	Andersen Press	2018
Elmer Actions (Little Library)	Andersen Press	2018
Elmer Colours (Little Library)	Andersen Press	2018
Elmer Numbers (Little Library)	Andersen Press	2018
Elmer Shapes (Little Library)	Andersen Press	2018
My First Elmer	Andersen Press	2018
Belinda Brown	Andersen Press	2018
Elmer's Birthday	Andersen Press	2019
Elmer's Doodle Book	Andersen Press	2019
Elmer Search and Find	Andersen Press	2019
Not Now, Bernard (new ed)	Andersen Press	2020
Elmer and the Lost Treasure	Andersen Press	2020
Elmer Search and Find Colours	Andersen Press	2020
Elmer and the Bedtime Story	Andersen Press	2021
Elmer's Friendship Book	Andersen Press	2021
Mr Benn 123456789	Andersen Press	2021
Mr Benn Big Top	Andersen Press	2021
Mr Benn Red Knight	Andersen Press	2021
Mr Benn's Big Game	Andersen Press	2021
My First Elmer Christmas	Andersen Press	2021
Writer		
The Adventures of Charmin the Bear, illustrated By Joanna Quinn	Andersen Press	2003
Illustrator		
Jan Falconer	Mr Benn Annual	Polystyle Publications Ltd 1972
Forrest Wilson	Super Gran	Andersen Press 1978
Hazel Townson	Disaster Bag	Andersen Press 1994
Violet McKee	Macaroni	Andersen Press 1998
Brett McKee	George's Invisible Watch	Andersen Press 2007

David McKee : Foreign Rights, Translations and Audio

ELMER	Poland	Sweden	Brazil	Talking pen	Korea
Arabic	Portugal	Taiwan	China	Turkey	Latin America (Spanish)
Azerbaijan	Romania	USA	Denmark	USA	Netherlands
Brazil	Russia		Finland		Sweden
Bulgaria	Serbia	NOT NOW BERNARD	France	TWO MONSTERS	Taiwan
Caribbean	Slovakia	Audio	Germany	Audio	USA
China	Slovenia	Brazil	Israel	China	
Croatia	South Africa	China	Korea	Denmark	
Denmark	Spain (Basque)	Denmark	Latin America (Spanish)	France	
Faroe Islands	Spain (Catalan educ)	France	Netherlands	Germany	
Finland	Spain (Galician)	Germany	Slovenia	Israel	
France (Audio)	Spain (Spanish & Cat)	Israel	Spain	Italy	
France (Play)	Spain (Spanish educ)	Italy	Sweden	Japan	
France	Spain (stage in schools)	Japan	Taiwan	Korea:	
Galician	Sweden	Korea (English)	USA	Netherlands	
Germany (Audio)	Switzerland (Romansh)	Korea	Wales	Sinhala	
Germany	Switzerland	Latin America(Spanish)		Spain	
Greece	Taiwan (Complex Chinese)	Netherlands	TUSK TUSK	Sweden	
Hungary	Thailand	Portugal	Audio	Taiwan	
Iceland	Turkey	South Africa	Australia	Tamil	
India (English):	Ukraine	Spain (Basque)	Brazil	USA	
India (Marathi)	USA	Spain (Catalan)	China		
Indonesia	Vietnam	Spain (Galician)	France	ZEBRA'S HICCUPS	
Iran (Farsi)	Wales	Spain		Audio	
Israel		Stage Play	Galician	Brazil	
Italy	THE HILL AND THE ROCK	Sweden	Italy	China	
Japan	Audio	Taiwan	Japan	Denmark	
Korea	Australia	Talking Pen	Korea	France	
Latin America (Spanish)	Brazil	Turkey	Netherlands	Germany	
Lithuania	China	Wales	South Africa	Israel	
Luxembourg	Germany		Spain	Italy	
Macedonia	Israel	PRINCE PETER AND THE TEDDY	Sweden	Japan (English)	
Netherlands	Spain	Audio	Taiwan	Japan	

Acknowledgements and Thanks

This dossier was compiled by Ferelith Hordon on behalf of IBBY UK. I would like to thank the following for their help: David McKee and his publisher Andersen Press, Nicolette Jones for the critical statement of his work; Pam Dix, Susan Bailes, Rebecca Butler, Lina Iordanaki, Ann Lazim, Carol Thompson and Sue Mansfield for their invaluable research, support and hard work.

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The dossier was designed by Andy Thomsen.